



Crossing Bailey Hill Road near Churchill is now safer following a fatality

## Walkability

Will Eugene prioritize humans over cars?

**E**ugene ranks as one of the best cities in the nation for bicycling, but for pedestrians the city is mediocre.

Eugene's 11 percent bike commute rank is the highest among U.S. cities with more than 100,000 people, but the city's 6.7 percent pedestrian commute rate is only about half the rate in Boston.

Walk Score, a website that ranks cities by pedestrian friendliness, places Eugene well down the list of larger cities at 76th out of 280. Eugene's score rates as "somewhat walkable," just above "car dependent."

Walkable cities have less obesity, are less polluting and have greater livability, sense of community, home values and attractiveness for job creators, the website and research have shown.

They also have fewer people run over. Eugene-Springfield recently ranked as the most dangerous metro area in the state for pedestrians with 63 human road kills in the last decade, according to a study by Transportation for America (TforA).

The city's new Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan could make the city a lot more walkable, but pedestrian advocates expressed disappointment with a draft last month.

"There's no priority list of sidewalk improvements," said Eugene Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee member Judi Horstmann. "That's a huge omission."

"It didn't come out the way I wanted it to be," responded the city's top transportation planner Rob Inerfeld. But Inerfeld didn't say whether the city would change the draft plan.

UO planner and BPAC member Fred Tepfer called for the city to prioritize walking over driving and include detailed requirements in its plan. For example, he said the city should limit the greatest allowable detour to a pedestrian crossing measured in feet.

"I think this plan has got to have teeth in it," Horstmann said.

The Ped/Bike plan calls for doubling the share of trips made by foot by 2031. But the document is vague on how to pay for and prioritize pedestrian safety projects to achieve that goal.

Much of the plan, public comments on the plan and media coverage of the plan has focused on bicycle projects. Cyclists are more organized and active in

advocating for improvements in Eugene than pedestrians. Unlike cities such as Portland, Eugene has chosen to lump together its bicycle and pedestrian planning and advisory committees.

But city staff have at times appeared resistant to walkable change. Rather than admitting that the city has a pedestrian safety problem in response to the TforA study, Inerfeld wrote an op-ed for *The Register-Guard* calling the statistics "debatable," claiming city "leadership on this issue," and declaring that when it comes to pedestrian safety, "ultimately it is the responsibility of every one of us," apparently letting city planners off the hook.

But the city's own statistics included in the Ped/Bike plan show a large number of pedestrian accidents. In Eugene, drivers have struck and injured 141 pedestrians in the last five years, killing 11 people, according to state data gathered by the city.

Despite the carnage, the Eugene police haven't prioritized pedestrian safety. Drivers routinely ignore laws requiring that they stop for pedestrians downtown, while seven new police officers hired for the area have focused on a crackdown on the homeless.

The city identified 11th, 18th and 6th avenues as the most dangerous for pedestrians. City planners have designed many urban city streets as one-way thoroughfares with a priority on vehicle speed rather than human safety. On south Willamette, pedestrians have for years complained of narrow sidewalks blocked by telephone poles.

But there are indications that the city is changing its attitude. In the past, the city resisted crosswalks or took years to build them. In one of the largest pedestrian safety projects in years, the city just completed 18 improved crosswalks serving kids trying to get to seven local elementary and middle schools. Four of the crossings include pedestrian-activated, rapid-flashing warning lights to get drivers to stop.

The city and the Eugene Safe Routes to School program won a federal grant of \$500,000 to pay for the safety improvements.

Earlier, the city installed a "stutter flash" crossing at Bailey Hill Road near Churchill High School, but that only happened after a driver ran over a child. **EW**

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