

Bike and Walk

New plan could transform city

A proposed new pedestrian and bike plan for Eugene could transform the city into a healthy, green, livable, vibrant community with more than a third of people commuting by bicycle or walking — or not.

The plan calls for doubling cycling and walking rates in the next two decades and prioritizes long-sought projects like bike lanes on south Willamette Street, a separated cycleway on High Street and a car-free bridge over Beltline in Santa Clara. But the draft document headed to the City Council this fall is vague on funding and gives priority to only 9 percent of the improvements it recommends.

The plan proposes 172 miles of new sidewalks and bike facilities over the next 20 years, but prioritizes only 16 miles. In past plans, many of the transportation projects that the city has not given “priority” status have never been built.

The plan does not give priority status to any of the 40 miles of sidewalk improvements it lists as recommended. Of the 132 miles of bike improvements, only 16 miles are prioritized.

Almost three-quarters of the proposed miles of priority bike improvements are vaguely labeled “bicycle boulevards.” A prioritized bike boulevard on 15th could boost biking with a safe route to the UO.

But it’s unclear from the plan what, if any, actual improvements the city would make on these existing low traffic streets to improve safety and encourage more biking. For example, the plan does not say that bikes will be prioritized above cars on these boulevards and their crossings, as other cities have done.

“One of this plan’s primary goals is to create a robust bicycle boulevard network,” the plans states. But it adds, “bicycle boulevards can vary greatly” and states they were emphasized in the plan in order to be “cost effective.”

Cycletracks have dramatically increased biking in Europe and other cities by safely separating bikes from cars with physical barriers, but only 3 percent of the plan’s priority bike miles are cycletracks. It’s also unclear how the city defines a cycletrack. Some projects the city has called a cycletrack in the past lack physical separation from cars and are more like wider bike lanes.

The plan prioritizes bike lanes on dangerous south Willamette from 17th to 32nd avenues. The safety improvement has been a top goal of local bike advocates for decades. But other bike lanes, such as a safe Beaver/Hunsaker bypass of River Road near where a cyclist died last month, are apparently left off the priority list.

Also left off the priority lists are key safety improvements including: bike lanes on Franklin Boulevard, bike lanes on West 13th, bike lanes on Broadway, Olive and Willamette downtown, a 12th Avenue bike boulevard, a 13th Avenue cycletrack, bike lanes in the redeveloped EWEB riverfront land, completion of gaps in the south bank trail and a railway bike crossing in the River Road neighborhood.

The plan identifies 42 intersections in

need of bike/ped safety improvements, including many with high numbers of crashes. But the plan does not prioritize improvements at any of them. There’s also no mention of bike-only traffic lights used in other cities to increase safety.

The plan said it chose priority projects on the basis of whether they would be “particularly effective” and “can be implemented in the near- to mid-term.” When the projects will be constructed “will depend on many factors, including budget and grant availability, community support and city policies.”

Although funding is key to whether the plan will succeed with its goal to double biking and walking, the plan deleted a funding performance measure included in an earlier draft.

Currently, only about 2 percent of local transportation funding goes to cyclists and pedestrians, although they make up about 18 percent of local transportation. The city now has a policy prioritizing money for smooth streets for cars over cyclist and pedestrian safety projects.

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The new draft did include some new teeth after criticism of a largely toothless earlier draft. The plan now includes the policy: “make bicycling and walking more attractive than driving for trips of two miles or less.” However, there’s no policy prioritizing bike lanes or sidewalks for human safety over convenient private car storage in the public right of way.

Nor is there any policy prioritizing new pedestrian crosswalks to save lives. The city has resisted painted crosswalks in the past, arguing that drivers will ignore them.

There’s also no new policy or performance measure prioritizing police enforcement to protect highly vulnerable cyclists and pedestrians from being maimed or killed. Other cities are using crosswalk stings, for example.

Also missing is prioritizing police action to reduce bike theft. Eugene has topped lists of cities for the crime.

To gather input on the draft bike/ped plan, the city plans an open house from 5 to 7 pm Monday, Sept. 26, at the downtown library Bascom/Tykeson room. Comments can also be sent through an online survey at <http://svy.mk/odVdVv> or to rob.inerfeld@ci.eugene.or.us by email. The city plans to present the plan to the City Council on Oct. 12. **EW**

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