

**EUGENE BIKE GRID**

Both the *R-G* and *EW* have discussed the role of bikes in Eugene — the safety issues and the environmental benefits.

The *R-G* reports a 53-page report from the city proposing to spend \$60 million on a variety of projects over the next 20 years. The *EW* letter, from a bike rider, simply asked for “some bicycle-only streets in this city, and every city.”

It is encouraging to think of \$60 million in long-term planning. But good things do not need to cost an arm and a leg, literally and economically. We could use some nice improvements right now, this year, now.

This is the bike grid. It is not some European idea we are slow to adopt. As far as I can tell it started right here in Eugene: the call for a half dozen “bike friendly” streets, all day, every day, to make Eugene better.

A half dozen designated slow minor streets — half east-west, and half north-south, would allow many bikers to wend their way through the city in relative safety. Just a bold colored line and a few

signs would transform these streets to quiet bike paths.

Most residents would want their street chosen.

Motorists, already favored, would always only be a few hundred yards from their motor speedway grid, so they should not complain. They will not miss the bikers.

So \$60 million, yes, let’s do it. But also, right now, let’s get that idea to the experts in street planning and paint the streets — and ride, ride, ride.

*Michael Lee  
Eugene*

**TRUSTED PROVIDER**

It is with joy and anticipation that I write to support the building of the new Planned Parenthood Regional Health & Education Center.

The demand and need for its services long ago outgrew its current facility, and the state Department of Human Services tells us that the number of women in Lane County who cannot afford reproductive

health services jumped from 28,000 in 2008 to 41,000 in 2010. Planned Parenthood has long been a trusted provider of factual sex education and women’s health care services such as Pap smears, breast cancer screenings and menopause information. It meets a continuing need from low-income patients of all ages who cannot afford health insurance. Many women look back with gratitude to Planned Parenthood for the health services it provided when they were in college or just starting their careers.

The new center in Glenwood will be centrally located for easy access along an EmX line, and it will be a huge boost to the local economy. I urge you to support this project. More than 27,000 patients each year will thank you.

*Margaret Hazel  
Eugene*

**DON'T BE SO NICE**

Dear drivers: When I’m riding my bike down the street and I come to a stop sign, I do what I’m supposed to do — stop. Please,

as fellow road-sharers, do what you are supposed to do. If you are coming down the cross street and you do not have a stop sign, do *not* stop and wave me across the street!

I know you think you are being super-nice, and I appreciate your thoughtfulness; however, it’s incredibly dangerous. You have no idea if the cars behind you are going to stop or pull around you (as so many people do), and you are not really paying attention to the traffic coming in the other direction as you wave me across the intersection.

I shake my head at you and end up frustrated, because if you would have just kept driving, I would have been able to cross the street when it was safe to my standards. Instead I wave at you to keep going, you wave at me to go ahead, you stop traffic when there’s no need to stop traffic, and you put people at risk (me, other drivers, yourself). Please consider this safety issue next time you think you are being nice to a bicyclist.

*Misty McLean-Schurbon  
Eugene*

**Viewpoint** BY ROGER GRAY

**EWEB Smart Meters**

Devices safe, goal to not increase rates

One of my favorite classes while attending UC-Berkeley covered the history and ethics of science and technology. One of the case studies in that class explored opposition to railroads in the early industrial revolution. The anti-railroad people raised the safety issue about locomotives moving at the “break-neck” speed of 7 mph and how dangerous this would be. Some even claimed railroads were a “device of the devil” and could cause a “concussion of the brain.”

Well, society ultimately decided that railroads are an acceptable risk, compared to the benefits they offer in moving people and materials at low cost. We were able to separate the hysteria from concerns about railroad safety.

Which brings me to some recent articles in *EW* about the Eugene Water & Electric Board’s plans to install digital meters sometime in late 2012 or 2013 (I say digital because that’s really what they are: They replace the old, spinning-dial mechanical meter). Skepticism is good, because asking good questions brings about good decision making.

But it doesn’t help the community conversation when one of *EW*’s staff writers (*EW* 9/15) and a guest writer (*EW* 9/22) use fear-mongering terms like “bursts” and “radiation” and “microwaves” when what we’re talking about are meters that simply turn on to transmit data — using very low-strength radio frequencies (similar to FM radios or your home wireless network) — and then turn off a few milliseconds later. There’s no “burst” or “pulse,” but I guess that sounds a lot more scary. Likewise, inaccurate reports that claim everyone will pay \$500 for their meter are simply false. No one will see that charge on their bill.

We also have seen some wild claims via email and the internet. One email received by EWEB staff claimed that smart meters were more dangerous to your health than smoking cigarettes. I’ve seen no

evidence that digital meters are responsible for killing 300,000 Americans a year (let alone a single person).

Can we just take a deep breath and settle down? Can we step back from the scary talk?

**As EWEB moves** into its second century of operations, we see big changes on the horizon. One of these changes is what’s commonly called the “smart grid,” which holds enormous promise for doing things like integrating wind and solar power with traditional energy sources, and giving customers the technological tools to manage their own energy consumption. In fact, we may not be able to adequately provide electricity in the future without the smart grid (and meters), because like everything else, the utility industry is moving from an analog model to a digital one.

The digital meters would record consumption usage hourly, sending a wireless signal back to EWEB. You’d get a bill at the end of the month, just like you do now.

A handful of critics have raised concerns over exposure to radio frequencies (RFs), the cost of a system and how EWEB would use the data it collects.

First, EWEB already collects your consumption data. It’s called “reading your meter” once a month and then sending you a bill. EWEB has never shared customer data with anyone without the customer’s permission or without a court order. And we never will.

Then why collect the data? Well, that’s where you come in. In the months and years after the meters are installed, EWEB expects to roll out programs designed to help you use that data to manage your energy use. All of these programs will be voluntary. You decide when to run your dishwasher or heat your water.

It is true that the meters will transmit data using radio frequencies. And it is true that there have



been concerns that RFs in high doses may pose a health risk. Cell phones have been studied for many years, for example.

But RF exposure from smart meters is very low — about 1 percent of what a person receives from a cell phone. That drops considerably as you move away from the meter. They also will be transmitting only a fraction of the day. Finally, they use only one-quarter of a watt of power.

The World Health Organization — perhaps the most credible and independent entity around — has reviewed more than 25,000 studies and reports on RF exposure. While WHO says high-intensity cell phone exposure should still be studied, WHO came to the conclusion that “current evidence does not confirm the existence of any health consequences from exposure to low level electromagnetic fields.”

**The current estimate** for installing a smart meter system is \$27 million to \$33 million. But how would we pay for it? EWEB’s elected board has not made a final decision to deploy a system, or exactly how to pay for it. Management’s current thinking is to purchase and install the meters with a goal of no impact on your rates. This likely would involve using cash reserves and bonds. The bond payment costs would be offset by about \$2 million per year in operational savings, mostly in the form of reducing our work force (meter readers).

I would urge *EW* readers to go to our website [www.eweb.org/smpilot](http://www.eweb.org/smpilot) and read the very exhaustive, independent California Council on Science and Technology report commissioned by California’s state Legislature, or check out what the Environmental Defense Fund says about the benefits of smart meters (also posted on our website).

Ultimately, it is up to our community and your elected representatives on the utility board to decide. If the community doesn’t see the value and benefits, and does not support their deployment, then we’ll stick with the old meters and our 20th century business model. That’s the beauty and benefit of having a local, citizen-owned utility.

*Roger Gray is the Eugene Water & Electric Board’s general manager.*