

Plan for Health

PUBLIC POLICY CHANGES CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT

One saying goes like this, “When you have your health, you have everything!” That is a wonderful sentiment, but I think I could add that having a loving family, a challenging job and enough money to live comfortably — all of those things are part of my idea of “everything.”

That said, you should wash your hands and quit smoking. These two things could make a huge impact in our community’s public health. Beyond that, public health could be enhanced by thinking of transportation as a part of public health policy solution.

Public policy changes are needed to encourage more people to walk, bike and use the bus. We need to support EmX (the faster speed bus system that LTD is pursuing), we need more sidewalks, more bike lanes and pure bike paths to increase the ease of riding bikes.

In transportation planning, I’d like to see a health impact statement required for all federal, state or locally funded transportation projects. Right now, public health is completely uninvolved in transportation planning. Increasing density and maintaining our urban growth boundaries will also make it more likely to increase walking, biking and using the bus.

It’s crucial that we get serious about tying transportation planning and land use planning with public health. I urge policy makers and the public at large to make it easier for commuters to get to and from work via walking, bicycling and walking/transit.

Our health depends on it.

About 1,000 of your fellow Lane County residents die each year of heart disease. Another nearly 1,000 in Lane County die from tobacco use. Obesity contributes to the death of about 1,400 Oregonians each year.



Your doctor will tell you that you need to eat better and exercise more. How can we build in more time in an already busy schedule? According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the average American is working about 7.5 hours a day but is watching TV about 2.6 hours per day. Some of that time could be used to eat better and exercise more.

The most aggressive way to lose weight with exercise is to bike to work. Eugene has about 3.8 percent of people riding their bikes to work most of the time. The average American weighs 176 pounds. This average American will burn about 49 calories per mile, so a two-mile roundtrip each day they would burn about 200 calories.

Walking a mile burns a little over 100 calories at a speed of 3 mph. If you commuted two miles a day, you’d lose weight. If you just added two days a week to your commuting you could lose 422.4 calories.

To lose one pound you need to burn 3,500 calories or a 500-calorie deficit per day over a week. Unless you’re a marathon runner you probably can’t exercise your way out of being obese — you must reduce the number of calories you eat. The best way to lose some weight

and stay healthy is to focus on eating more minimally processed foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and drink water instead of liquid sugar; and do some physical activity, at least 30 minutes every day. The easiest and cheapest way to get more active, lose weight and become healthier is to walk. Walking can reduce Type 2 diabetes, the risk of some cancers, heart disease, asthma and stroke.

What about the bus? When you “ride” a bus, you don’t just ride, you also have to walk to the stop and walk at the transfer station. This allows you to reach your goals more easily. Taking the bus instead of the car helps you to stay healthy and also save money. If more people rode the bus instead of car sit would improve the public health and achieve public health objectives.

There are, of course, many other reasons to change the way you get to and from work and how you get around. Other reasons include money and your contributions to climate change.

Can’t do all of that? Neither can I, because like most people I have to go a lot of places besides work. That’s the reason I’d ask you to consider finding alternatives to the radical approach. That alternative is trying to do it incrementally, like maybe commuting two days a week via bus, bike or walking.

Pete Sorenson of Eugene is Lane County commissioner, three times elected chair of the Board of Commissioners and a former state senator. These views are his own.

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