

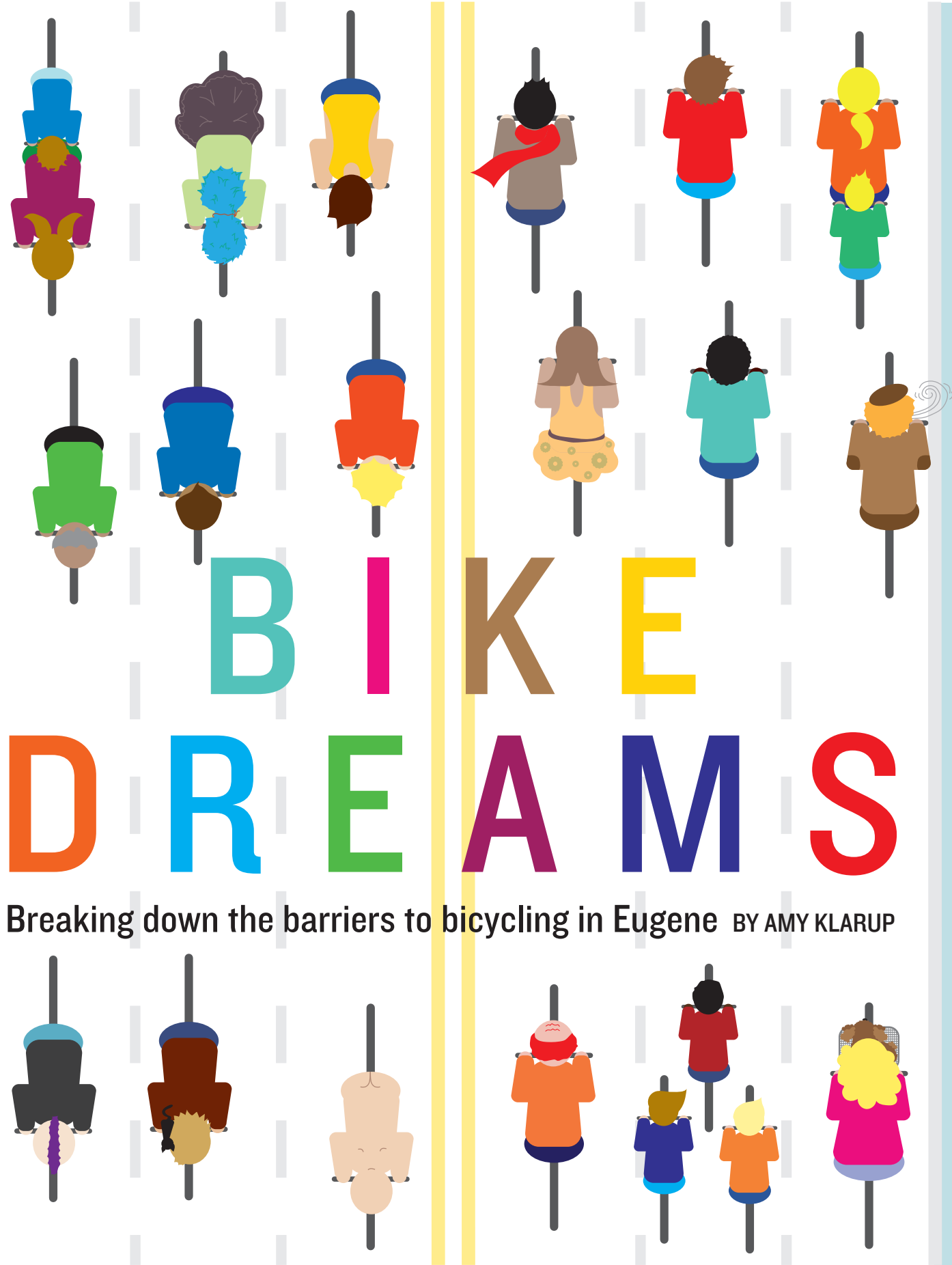


ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH DECKER

Breaking down the barriers to bicycling in Eugene BY AMY KLARUP

Every other year, University of Oregon professor Marc Schlossberg takes his students to the Netherlands or Denmark — Copenhagen is a bicycling utopia, where 45 percent of people commute by bike. It's a cyclist's dream come true.

Students from Eugene explore the European streets by bike, opening their eyes to a world where people take cycling seriously.

"My mind was blown

by the things I saw in Copenhagen," writes student Holly Hixon in a 2015 compilation of the students' reflections on the class. "The cycle track system is so complete, comfortable, heavily used by every type of person you can imagine and is ingrained in their way of life as a major form of transportation."

They marvel over the well-connected web of bike paths, and they ride with less fear of cars squashing them.

In Denmark and the Netherlands, "it's like a completely happy, joyful, stress-free, everlasting-smile-on-your-face kind of experience, and I'm totally serious about that," Schlossberg describes. "The infrastructure is there, and it's set up for you. It's liberating in a way that's hard to imagine unless you experience it."

When students come back to the U.S., they note the

marked difference, particularly in terms of infrastructure and connectivity.

Eugene has a reputation for bike friendliness, and for an American city, it does well. Pretty much everyone loves the Ruth Bascom river path system, and Eugene has more bicycle and pedestrian bridges across the Willamette River than it has bridges for cars. Census Bureau data says that among medium-sized cities in the U.S., Eugene ranks 12th for rates of biking to work, and technically, you can bike anywhere in the city.

But while Eugene ranks well nationally, census data also shows only 6.8 percent of Eugeneans bike to work. Compare that to 65 percent who commute by driving alone in their personal vehicle.

So what gives? Why aren't more people biking?