

just revisit the fury and ire over restriping South Willamette Street. With the pilot project in full swing, South Willamette currently has two lanes of traffic, one southbound and one northbound, with a center turn lane and bicycle lanes.

Previously, it had two lanes of traffic going each way, but options were limited for bike travel. People on bikes could either ride on the sidewalk, ride on the road with traffic or take side streets to get from downtown to south Eugene.

Before the restriping, business owners along the corridor worried that the reduction in car lanes and slowing of traffic would discourage people from visiting South Willamette entirely; some threatened to move their business elsewhere. In a compromise, the city agreed to test the configuration for a year, study the restriping and make a decision based on the data it collects.

Hughes and Hecker of GEARs say the restriping seems to be going well and allows better access for cyclists to shop and travel. It's unclear if the new striping slows traffic, but Hughes says he's observed an overall increase in the feeling of safety.

As the city plans to install more bike-friendly infrastructure in the future, it's likely to face more opposition.

"We have all these goals that most people are on board with, but when it comes down to an actual project in an actual place, it's a different story," says Bob Passaro, a member of the Active Transportation Committee, which advises Eugene's Transportation Planning staff on biking and walking.

Last summer, he says, businesses complained about removal of parking and thwarted the city's plans to install a bike lane on Lincoln Street between 11th and 13th avenues. (Full disclosure: *EW*'s office resides on this street, and the paper was in favor of adding a bike lane.)

"It wasn't a really high priority for the city, so they didn't want to spend political capital on it," Passaro explains. "I think for larger projects, they'll be willing to fight harder for them."

After all, the city didn't back down on South Willamette, Passaro points out. When the time comes to redesign 13th Avenue, the city may have to make a similar stand, as the plan calls for a reduction in off-street parking.

"Hopefully [South Willamette] will be an experience we can point to and say, 'Look, everyone predicted the end of the world, and it didn't happen,'" Passaro says.

LOCK IT UP

This wouldn't be a story about biking in Eugene without going down the rabbit hole of bike theft. According to the Eugene Police Department (EPD), thieves snatched more than 1,000 bicycles in 2015, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars lost.

"I've had two bikes stolen," shares Kevin Gilbride, president of LiveMove, a UO student group that promotes active transportation.

While theft hasn't stopped him from biking in Eugene, he acknowledges that for some people it's a significant barrier. "You've seen the carcasses around Eugene," he laughs, referring to the mangled bike fragments left behind after a thief snags all the pieces that pop off easily.

Local bike advocates don't have any easy answers to bike theft, and many of them say they've had their bikes or parts of their bikes stolen at some point. Portland has a Bike Theft Task Force, and Farthing of Eugene Sunday Streets says EPD Officer Jeff Blonde has spent the past year looking at how to better prevent thefts.

Over and over again, bike experts extol the value of investing in a U-lock instead of using a cheap cable.

"We don't want to victim blame and say you shouldn't have used a cable," Dunbar explains, "but part of our role is to educate and say how easy it is to defeat a cable."

Even with a solid metal U-lock, thieves can steal tires or accessories like lights and panniers. Dunbar recommends taking removable parts off the bike when it's left outside and using a cable lock to secure wheels to the frame of the bike. It's not foolproof, but it decreases the odds of theft.

Bike-friendly policies at workplaces and schools can help — it's nice having the option to bring a bike inside, where it's secure. Biking advocates recommend registering bikes through the UO or the city of Eugene, since registered bikes stand a greater chance of being recovered in the event of a theft.

Hecker with GEARs tells the story of an Oregon State

University student who wasn't allowed to bring his bike into his dorm, so he implemented an elaborate security system that cost \$200 and required a unique wrench for each part of the bike. "Not everyone can do that," Hecker acknowledges.

He's heard from GEARs members with experience in other cities where citizens worked together with police to conduct a series of stings and stakeouts.

"I tell people not to leave their good bike anywhere, for any time, locked or unlocked," Hecker says. "I hate to have to say this, but until a large enough group of citizens are willing to spend the time it takes to have a concerted effort, and until the police make it a big priority, I don't know how it's going to change."

TRAFFIC GAFFES

Bike theft is a problem, but so is behavior. Scads of resources exist to educate cyclists in Eugene, but spend five minutes on a busy street corner watching bike traffic and it's easy to see those resources either aren't being used or they're being willfully ignored.

Rampant bad bike behavior gives cyclists a poor reputation and fuels the fire of animosity between people who drive and people who bike. It's more than just rolling through a stop sign — people riding bikes in Eugene whiz through red lights, ride the wrong way on sidewalks, blow

past pedestrians on the bike path without warning and weave through traffic.

"Thank God motorists don't behave like bicyclists," Hecker laughs. "I've said that to people and they get so upset with me, but it's true."

That's not to say drivers are paragons of traffic safety — read the "Letters to the Editor" section of any local newspaper and find tales of texting motorists, flippant pedestrians and asshole cyclists. Everyone sucks.

For cyclists and pedestrians, though, law-breaking bears a higher risk. Dunbar says that people riding bicycles the wrong way down the street are 70 percent more likely to get hit.

Speed also plays a role in risk: According to data from the U.S. Department of Transportation, 5 percent of pedestrians die when hit by vehicles traveling at 20 mph, but the death rate shoots up to 80 percent with vehicles going 40 mph.

No wonder bicycling seems scary.

GEARs participates in a diversion program that offers cycling classes to bicyclists who get ticketed. Instead of paying a fine, wayward bikers can choose to take the class and, at the very least, become aware of the rules of the road.

But not many bicyclists get ticketed by EPD, Hughes says, leading to low turnout in the diversion classes.

EW requested that EPD provide the number of cyclists ticketed yearly in Eugene, but the department was unable to fulfill the request due to changes in the way "traffic violations related to cyclists" are issued and catalogued.

"Whatever the priorities of the EPD, traffic does not seem to be one of them," Hughes says. "They're not writing tickets to cyclists, so there went our program."

GEARs continues to offer confident cycling courses for interested parties, but bike advocates say mandatory bike classes don't work. Sometimes the only option involves modeling good behavior.

"I'll talk to other cyclists who I see are about to run a red light or dart through traffic and say, 'This is really bad for all of us when you do this,'" Hecker explains. "It's hard to do that. But we're constantly in the situation of figuring out how to follow the rules and trying to get others to follow them."

CULTURE CHANGE

That's why Shane MacRhodes' Safe Routes to Schools program thrums with hope for the future. Sixth graders learn bicycling and traffic skills before they learn how to drive, setting them up for a lifetime of bicycle savviness.

The bicycle revolution will inevitably dawn, local bike advocates say, as it moves achingly slow but steadily in the direction of progress.

MacRhodes envisions a Eugene where bikes entwine intimately with peoples' lives, from birth to adulthood, parenthood to old age.

"When I started this work 20 years ago, I saw a culture change that was needed," MacRhodes says. "At the time, I thought it was the infrastructure piece and how we change our cities. But now I realize it's also letting children reclaim their childhood and building skills in them that will help them and you."

Maybe that looks like parents biking their kids around in trailers, forgoing the manic minivan stereotype that dominates parenting culture. Or kids biking and walking themselves to school, as they once did years ago before "stranger danger" took hold.

It takes communities that embrace the changing face of transportation needs instead of fighting tooth and nail for every lost parking spot.

And as Eugene adds each new piece of the infrastructure puzzle to its framework of bike paths, it inches ever closer to reaching that bicycle utopia.

"The systems in Denmark and the Netherlands are 40 to 45 years in the making," Schlossberg explains. "It's important to understand that this is not an overnight shift, but over time, as we gradually chip away at shifting infrastructure and shifting attitudes along the way, I think Eugene could easily be one of the top biking cities in the country."

Eugene overflows with bike resources. A few gems: For bike classes and group rides, contact GEARs at eugenegears.org. For workshops and bike-related activities, go to the Center for Appropriate Transport, 455 W. 1st Avenue or catoregon.org. For commuter bike gear, check out Arriving by Bike, 2705 Willamette Street or arrivingbybike.com.

Disclosure: The writer served as a judge for Eugene's Beautiful Bikes Pageant.



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

'To actually increase the number of people who ride bikes, we're going to have to move beyond bike lanes.'

**— Reed Dunbar,
BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNER
FOR THE CITY OF EUGENE**