

of the road debris to collect in the bike lanes, and it puts car wheels closer to cyclists' heads.

How about those buffered bike lanes the city has been putting in these past few years? Unfortunately, these have mostly gone in by stealing space from the bike lanes, so there's really no net benefit to cyclist safety and, because the white stripes are slippery when wet, it forces cyclists down into the lowest part of the crown.

More on why these aren't all that good an idea later.

So-called cycle-tracks, a category of bike infrastructure favored by our current crop of traffic planners, which include the two-way creation on Alder near the University of Oregon, have some real flaws. The most serious of these flaws becomes apparent if you consider where you look when you drive.

Motorists are trained to scan a very narrow cone in front of them. Cycle-tracks and side-paths are outside that cone at intersections. As a result, the current movement toward so-called separated infrastructure, which isn't separated at intersections and driveways, actually increases the danger of riding a bike.

Buffered bike lanes have this same issue. This is where those stories of "the cyclist came out of nowhere" come from. The cyclist (or skateboarder or runner) was there all along, but was not where motorists were looking.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

So why do Northern European countries in which cycling is quite popular have so many cycle-tracks and side-paths? The reason these physical infrastructure creations work there and not here (though even European cities no longer build two-way cycle-tracks) is because of their higher level of social infrastructure.

Licenses to drive in Europe are expensive and difficult to get but easy to lose, while the opposite applies here. They employ a concept known as strict liability, which means motorists are responsible for collisions with cyclists even when the cyclist broke the law.

Traffic law enforcement is generally automated and abundant in Europe, unlike our near-complete lack of enforcement stateside. European societies also have social safety-net features like universal health care, free higher education and universal housing, all of which creates a stronger sense of being one's brother's keeper — making aggressive, entitled or inat-

tentive anti-social driving much less of a problem across the Atlantic.

With Eugene's recent hiring of a new police chief, I feel compelled to comment on the Eugene Police Department's role in our historic decline in cycling.

Seven years ago, near the onset of our biking decline, EPD officer Chris Kilcullen was tragically murdered during a traffic stop on his way home. He was a beloved and dedicated traffic enforcement officer. As a result of both his murder and budget decisions by the city, EPD effectively gave up on traffic law enforcement.

When no one ever gets a citation for even the most egregiously bad driving, motorists quickly develop some pretty bad habits. I'm not saying we ever had great enforcement; I remember EPD Sgt. Derel Schultz telling me he wouldn't cite anyone just for driving in the bike lane unless they crossed it entirely and were driving in the adjacent parking lane.

It is pretty tough to get people onto bikes when they look out at a collection of speeding, redlight-running and otherwise crazy driving.

That loss of police services has also impacted our bike paths. It's difficult to get people to ride when the one part of their ride that should be stress-free feels like running a gauntlet.

Almost every underpass on our bike paths has people living in it. Often the entire bike path is blocked, and at times they have set up structures. Almost every person I know who has ridden frequently on our bike paths has been attacked.

The person who attacked my wife and me on the bike path is now serving seven years in prison for other crimes. I know too many people who have given up on using these paths because of this problem, sometimes going so far as to move away — taking their business and taxes with them.

(POTENTIAL) BIKE CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Yes, Eugene has that potential, and I say that as a former resident of Davis, California, which had the honor of being exactly that 30 years ago.

I believe Eugeneans who aren't riding bikes are making a huge mistake. Seriously, no one can beat our surroundings for quality cycling. One can take a quick pre-breakfast, lunch or after-work ride over Fox Hollow, with a view of Fern Ridge on one side and the snow-capped Sisters on the other, or venture

out into the unparalleled forestlands, public and private, in the coastal range for an all-day excursion along creeks and rivers.

And if you haven't ridden along Upper Smith River Road or explored Gunter-Alma Road, you're missing out. There's simply too much great cycling to be had locally — more than I could possibly cover here.

For those who think they can't ride because they have too many hills between home and work/shopping, the solution has arrived in the form of e-bikes. If you haven't tried one, go find a shop that sells them and take a test ride. It's like having superpowers.

We have a lot going for us, as those 6 percent who ride can attest. We have the best weather. Our new police chief will likely be given funds to improve enforcement. The city is finally looking at funding a homeless shelter.

Our problems in Eugene are looking solvable at last. I've pointed out a lot of problems, but in spite of those issues we still have 5,000 people on bikes. Once we deal with our defects, I can't see why we can't increase that number by a factor of 10.

I even dare to hope that the city and Lane County will start working together to solve what I often refer to as the doughnut problem.

Inside the city — the "doughnut hole" — it's pretty easy to get around by bike. A bit afield, outside the doughnut, there's great cycling. However, the borders of the city, the dough of the doughnut, have issues.

Examples include Lorane Highway from Crest to McBeth (the only part of that road without a shoulder other than the residential part inside the city); Fox Hollow (issues just inside the city limits and, again, just above the top of South Willamette); and Coburg Road entering the city (dangerously disappearing bike lane).

All of these problems can be rectified with minimal spending.

So how will we know we're back on the right track? We'll know when the majority of our elected officials and upper city management are riding bikes as part of their daily lives.

Currently, no member of the city council has ever even sent a virtue signal by riding a bike to a meeting, so we've got some work to do here. Leaders lead. ■

Brad Foster is a local person on a bike with a keen interest in transportation, climate change and seeing more people on bikes. He is also a retired biochemist and former commercial truck driver.

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

Advocates for separated infrastructure — physically separating bike and car lanes — have been singing this song for decades, but that only works in the movies. Back in 1980, Davis, California, was the celebrated "Bicycling Capital of the World." One could look down a random street in that city at "rush hour" and see hundreds or even a thousand people on bikes, with no cars in sight. It was truly beautiful.

Interestingly, Davis had almost no separated infrastructure.

During the latter part of the 1980s and continuing today, Davis added extensive separated cycling infrastructure. Did this cause even more people to get onto bikes? Sadly, no.

Instead, Davis experienced a large decline in cycling. It seems the more separated infrastructure the city added, the fewer people rode. This pattern has continued to this day, as Davis has seen a decline in cycling modal share of 32

percent since 2013. It's more a case of build it and they will leave.

Why is this so?

One word: enforcement.

Back in the Bike Capital days, Davis police enforced traffic laws with zero tolerance. Starting in the mid-'80s, they stopped doing traffic law enforcement. This changed people's perception of the safety of the roads and made driving faster relative to alternatives, which combined to encourage car use over cycling.

Spending huge sums to separate cyclists from traffic will thus be unlikely to get us to our official target of 30 percent cycling mode share by 2035 and may even set us back as people interpret separate infrastructure to mean that the only place bikes should be is on those small unconnected sections set aside for them. — Brad Foster





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