



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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Myth of the Freeloading Bicyclist

“Should cyclists pay a road tax?”

That was printed on the side of one of Portland’s MAX light rail trains as it sailed back and forth across the region for six months in 2009.

“We already do!” I would grumble every time I saw it.

It’s true. And fair being fair, we overpay.

Say you own a car. You pay out the nose, an average of \$9,519 this year, according to the American Automobile Association. You may pay much less or much more, but still, ouch.

Part of that cost — a percentage of your gas, registration, license, and tolls — goes directly to pay for roads.

The thing is, that money only pays for freeways and highways. Or it mostly pays for them—a hefty chunk of change for these incredibly expensive, high maintenance thoroughfares still comes from the general fund.

Local roads, where you are most likely do most of your daily bicycling, are a different story. The cost of building, maintaining, and managing traffic on these local roads adds up to about 6 cents per mile for each motor vehicle. The cost contributed to these roads by the drivers of these motor vehicles through direct user fees? 0.7 cents per mile. The rest comes out of the general tax fund.

This means that anyone who owns a home, rents, purchases taxable goods, collects taxable income, or runs a business also pays for the roads. If you don’t drive a car, even for some trips, you are subsidizing those who do—by a lot. The best primer on this is economist Todd Litman’s highly readable 2004 report

BICYCLISTS SPEAK

Ely Blue

‘Whose Roads.’ A journalist recently crunched the numbers in Seattle and found the discrepancy

slower, lighter, smaller bicycles, the externalities add up to one meager cent per mile.

The average driver travels 10,000 miles in town each year and contributes \$324 in taxes and direct fees. The cost to the public, including direct costs and exter-

nalities, is a whopping \$3,360. On the opposite pole, someone who exclusively bikes may go 3,000 miles in a year, contribute \$300 annually in taxes, and costs

sort of transportation project. Portland has transformed itself into a bicycling mecca while allocating less than 1 percent of its transportation budget to bikes each year, with critics fighting tooth and nail against every penny spent. In tight economic times, when it’s hard to scrape together the cash to fill potholes, even this low level of bicycle spending is often put on hold. But what if, instead, the road tax overpaid by bicyclists were invested into making city streets safer, more comfortable, and more convenient for bicycling? New York City has been doing just that, resulting in tens of thousands of people taking to the streets on two wheels and, presumably, saving the city a whole hell of a lot of cash.

Yet the myth of bicyclists as freeloaders is gaining ground. Proposals for bicycle registration schemes crop up every few months, usually from conservative politicians looking for someone to blame, but also at times from well-meaning bicycle advocates. Never mind that no such program has ever managed to pay for its own administrative costs. Nothing is accomplished by putting up barriers to active transportation. Instead, these barriers need to be removed.

Cities—and taxpayers—can’t afford not to invest in bicycling.

Anyone who owns a home, rents, purchases taxable goods, collects taxable income, or runs a business also pays for the roads. If you don’t drive a car, even for some trips, you are subsidizing those who do—by a lot

in 2010 to be as wide as ever.

There are many reasons for cities to encourage bicycling, and the economic argument is one of

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the best. Every time somebody gets on a bicycle instead of in a car, the city saves money. The cost of road maintenance is averaged at 5.6 cents per mile per motor vehicle. Add the so-called external costs of parking (10 cents), crashes (8 cents), congestion (4 cents), and land costs and that’s another 28 cents per mile! Meanwhile, for

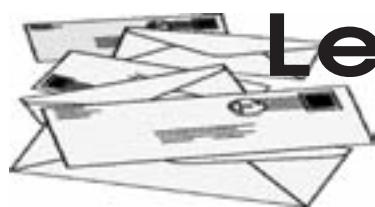
the public only \$36, making for a profit of \$264. To balance the road budget, we need 12 people commuting by bicycle for each person who commutes by car.

The numbers continue to be astonishing when you consider the cost of bicycle infrastructure. It consists mainly of paint and is dirt cheap by comparison to any other

What do you think?



post your comments on www.theskanner.com



Letters to the Editor

It’s Time to Pay Our Fair Share

Dear Editor,

Many years ago both people and bicycles used the same sidewalks to move from place to place, and at that time it was considered fair, because our taxes paid for that space to commute, but as more people began to use their bicycles to commute from place to place, both bike commuting and walking on the same sidewalks became dangerous. Many accidents occurred between bike riders and people walking on the sidewalks, so cyclist began to use public streets intended for motorized use and at that time nothing was said because the marking on the streets and the traffic signs and lights were already paid for by license fees, paid by motorized vehicle users, both two wheels and four.

Today cyclist no longer share the streets with motorized vehicles, cyclist have their own bike lanes, both on the streets (i.e. 150 miles of bicycle lanes, bicycle Boule-

wards, and off street paths,) and on the bridges (i.e., Broadway, Steel, Burnside, and the Hawthorne). Bike use on public streets in 1975 was 200 cyclists per day and by 1995 the numbers had grown to over 2000 cyclist per day and bridge use, due to the fact that lanes were set aside for bike travel in 1991 has increased from .001 to

will serve the needs of new and old cyclist living in our State. What is not part of the Key Elements or the Objectives, is a way to identify if the cyclist using public streets are aware of the rules and regulations that have been put in place to protect cyclist and other users of our public streets; to date anyone can put on a helmet, jump

that child has been trained in the use of proper turn signals or where to stop when a traffic light is blinking. I believe as a long time bike rider, it is time for us to pay our fair share of the cost to put this Master Plan into operation; I further believe that we should have a visible license plate on every bike, backed by all the requirements that having a license requires. The new revenue, received from requiring all bikes that use public streets, to have a visible license plate, will pay for all future projects that benefit old and new bike riders and will assist in making the 20 year plan a reality.

Cyclist are planning for big changes in the State of Oregon, and this responsibility should not be a burden left for someone else to bear. I end this rant! by stating that The President, believed that people making more than a million dollars a year should pay their fair share of taxes, I too believe that as a cyclist using public streets and bridges that have lanes set aside for my use, that I should also, PAY MY FAIR SHARE.

Adolfo Akil
Portland

To date anyone can put on a helmet, jump on a bike and endanger anyone he or she pleases

over 322 percent, further, cyclist have over 1,400 publicly installed bicycle racks and bicycle stations, that provide shower facilities and long term bike storage.

Cyclist all over the State of Oregon, have backed a Master Plan that will be implemented over a twenty year period; this plan has Key Elements and Objectives that

on a bike and endanger anyone he or she pleases. The Key Elements nor the Master Plan Objectives address age limits for public street use of bicycles; the Key Elements has also failed to ask the question, why are we letting kids ride their bikes in public streets without a visible way for the car driver, or the motor bike driver to know if