

COUNCILOR REX BURKHOLDER

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November 19, 2008

Sam Adams, Commissioner
City of Portland
1120 SW 4th
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Adams,

The other day I was describing to you a bit about the trip that the Blue Ribbon Committee on Trails took to Copenhagen and Amsterdam. You asked what I thought we might do here in Portland to advance cycling as part of everyday life, like we saw over there. I've been mulling this over and here are some thoughts on what I think we should do.

Time for bold action, not retrenchment

We are facing some pretty daunting times—climate change, energy and economic insecurity, etc.—as well as some real opportunities—change in DC, public clamor for investment in non-car mobility, etc. I believe it is NOT the time to go back to 1980s bike planning which sought to keep cyclists off of Main Streets and on side streets. Our resounding success has come from making Main Streets accessible and more comfortable for cyclists. We can, and need to, do more, not fewer improvements on main streets. This is the lesson we learned in Europe.

Cycletracks

You know what these are, wide (8') "sidewalks" for cyclists, with physical separation, equal treatment at intersections (eg, cycle signals), safer and more attractive because they are adjacent to the sidewalks, not between the car parking and travel lanes. (On big arterials (up to 6 lanes) the planting strip would be located between the cycletrack and car lanes for even more positive separation.)

The time is ripe for these innovations in Portland: Current bike lanes are just too narrow for the amount of bike traffic on many feeders into downtown (LOS F at peak!) so that we get congestion and conflict among cyclists. I think they have tremendous potential to help more people feel safe riding, are relatively easy and inexpensive to install and can increase the capacity of our main line cycle routes.

Where would I start?

Burnside from E 12th or so to SW Broadway. Use of the Burnside bridge dropped dramatically when the Steel Bridge connector opened and it is easy to see why. But now that route is congested and unpleasant, especially for the commuting cyclist. The Hawthorne Bridge is also congested and both would be very difficult and expensive to expand. The Burnside Bridge is a great route into town but difficult to access from both sides and uncomfortable with 45-55mph traffic screaming by. Cycle tracks would improve safety and help funnel eastside riders onto a direct route into town, taking pressure off of the Hawthorne and Steel bridge bike facilities.

The Eastside Streetcar route: What a great time to make the Broadway-Weidler and MLK-Grand couplets much more usable and attractive to cyclists! Cycletracks would have the added benefit of traffic calming these streets that become speedways at off peak hours when they are mostly empty. Taming the traffic in the east half of the CBD (Lloyd District) would have the same benefits of the slower speeds in downtown—greater pedestrian activity which leads to greater economic activity. As it is, it is almost impossible to cross these streets except at signals which are very far apart for a person on foot. I would recommend extending the Broadway cycletrack all the way to PSU, helping make SW Broadway into the great street it has the potential to be, with all the retail, restaurants and attractions along it that are now overwhelmed by the traffic.

NE Broadway/Weidler to ne 24th simply extend the above project East as there is the right of way and community support.

SE Hawthorne east to se 12th, a street with way too much pavement, too high of speeds and high bicycle counts.

This is a short list drawn mostly from my everyday experience. There are probably others but these would be great pilot projects to figure out intersection treatments, construction details and, since they already have so many riders, would be instant successes.

Greenwaves

This is a very simple idea—set traffic signal timing to minimize the stop and go of cyclists. It is very energy intensive not to mention frustrating to always catch red lights, which happens when signals are set to auto convenience. Downtown Portland's 13mph signal timing makes cycling so much easier—why not replicate this elsewhere?

In Copenhagen and Amsterdam, the traffic engineers see Greenwave treatment as a means to increase the distance people will cycle by reducing delays and decreasing the energy it takes to ride by trying to eliminate stop and go. They estimate that people will ride about 4 miles with stop and go and 6 miles with Greenwave. That would capture over half of all trips in Portland!

While I'd like every street to be managed this way, for a pilot project I would first combine with the cycletracks above, and institute on N. Vancouver-Williams couplet (southbound could be set for faster speed as it is downhill). Target speed in Europe for a Greenwave is 20kph or about 13mph.

Other stuff

There were a lot of great ideas that Rob Burchfield could share with you such as plentiful bicycle parking, especially at light rail/subway stops, banning right turn on red (who does that benefit, anyway?), prioritizing walkers and cyclists on all local access streets, limiting mid-block accesses, etc. All would be good to try out and implement in Portland.

Still, the two techniques I've detailed above were the key to getting bicycling into the 35%+ range in these cities. Let's do it!

Sincerely,

Rex Burkholder