

Jonathan Maus ([00:00:00](#)):

Welcome to the Bike Portland Podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. This episode is all about the headlines. I'm sure you've all seen by now that the number of people riding bikes in Portland has fallen sharply in recent years. It's a decline that obviously started long before COVID, and it's something we've been stewing about around here for many years now. But now that we've got hard data from the City of Portland, it's time to dig in and confront this unfortunate reality. So sit back and hang out Bike Portland staff writer Taylor Griggs and I as we share our reactions to the news, break down the many reasons we think it's happening, and share what the implications might be going forward. We'll also share a few reader comments and reactions from folks Taylor bumped into over the weekend. There is a lot to talk about, so let's get right into it.

Jonathan Maus ([00:00:52](#)):

I don't even know where to start, but I am happy because I have someone else to talk about it with me today. In the shed is none other than Taylor Griggs, who has some of her own insights after going out over the weekend and talking to some Portlanders about the decline in bike riding. So Taylor, thanks for this is your first time on the pod.

Taylor Griggs ([00:01:17](#)):

It is actually, I know.

Jonathan Maus ([00:01:18](#)):

Let me back up a bit and just lay it out for folks that haven't heard the news. So City of Portland came out last week with their bicycle counts report, which is actually something that they'd done since every year for a number of years, but somehow they stopped doing it in 2014. At least they stopped publishing a report. So they just came out with the numbers last week or so, so we did a story about it. The general top line things are the numbers are not good. If you look at the US census number, we're at 2.8%, which is the lowest we've been at since 2006. We're down from a peak of 7.2% in 2014 so not great. Of course, the census number is a how you get to work numbers so that's expected and it's also reflected in lots of other big cities. And by the way, for anyone that's keeping count, Portland is still the highest bike commute mode share of any of the big cities in the census. So there's that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:02:15](#)):

But the bigger thing that really caught everybody's eye is that since 2019, the City of Portland's latest counts show a 37% drop among the locations that they count. So that's a 37% decline since 2019 in cycling citywide. That's a pretty big deal. We definitely knew, I knew personally, we here at Bike Portland if you read the site closely it shouldn't be a huge surprise that bicycling has fallen off. We've been sort of beating around the bush about it a little bit and talking about it here and there, but these counts from the city, which we can get into a little bit later, but they're not perfect counts at all. I think one of the problems is the idea of how we count bicycle riders is just sort of inherently flawed because we have no really great method to do it. But if you take the fact that they've been looking at some of these locations year over year, one of the other stats that stood out to me from the latest count report was that 2022 had the lowest recorded count at 126 locations.

Jonathan Maus ([00:03:19](#)):

And they only counted 234 total locations, so over half the locations in 2022 had the lowest count they'd ever recorded since about 2006 when they started doing these counts. So you can read more about how they do the counts on Bike Portland. Essentially it's volunteers with clipboards and they sit at a place, they go through some training, and they mark down who they see riding bikes. Whether the person looks to them to be male or female, whether they're wearing a helmet, and I think those are the only other stats they look at. So in this episode, we just wanted to chat a little bit about what some of the reasons might be, get a sense of where Taylor's perspective is on it. I certainly have a lot of stuff that I'm hoping to share, but before we get into that, we thought we would give a nod to a lot of the really amazing comments and what other people in Portland have told us about this since our story last week.

Jonathan Maus ([00:04:11](#)):

We've just gotten tons and tons of feedback, over 200 comments on the site. I've gotten a lot of really interesting emails from people. I got a voicemail and Taylor went out in the field and got some replies from some folks. So I mean, Taylor, before we get into reader comments we should probably both share what we thought when we heard the news. So what did you hear when you heard the news that biking was down?

Taylor Griggs ([00:04:33](#)):

So I wasn't really surprised. I guess it was surprising to me how much it was down. I can't really conceive of what it would look like at 40% high or back to whatever number it was before because yeah, I've only been here for about a year and a half. I've never experienced I guess the bike capital of the US Portland.

Jonathan Maus ([00:05:02](#)):

It was wonderful. Imagine being in a platoon of a couple dozen people riding up Williams. I mean at peak hour of course, right?

Taylor Griggs ([00:05:11](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([00:05:11](#)):

Or in the morning you'd get to a light where people were waiting on a red signal and you'd be like 13, 14th back in the line of people. It was so wonderful.

Taylor Griggs ([00:05:22](#)):

It sounds great, and I experienced that to some degree when I was in Europe and those cities. It was super fun to see all these people biking around. It definitely feels safer and just a completely different feeling. Yeah, it's hard for me to imagine that here. My experience biking in Portland I think has been dominated by isolation in a way. As a cyclist this is like just getting around by myself.

Jonathan Maus ([00:05:56](#)):

So you're kind of a loner, you're saying in general in terms of your biking around?

Taylor Griggs ([00:05:58](#)):

I like hanging out with people, but it doesn't completely change my habits to not have other people with me.

Jonathan Maus ([00:06:07](#)):

I see what you're saying.

Taylor Griggs ([00:06:09](#)):

It's something I would do regardless. Although it sounds great and I would love to see a lot more people biking, for me I guess I have the attitude and personality that I will just go forth anyway. And trying to encourage other people to bike more, yeah, it's hard to do. I mean, on an interpersonal level I run into difficulties with this.

Jonathan Maus ([00:06:34](#)):

And unfortunately I feel like it's going to be even harder to do now that there isn't that visual pack of people riding. I think it's a part of this that hasn't gotten enough attention, and as you know I've been kicking myself for not writing more about it, like an op-ed about how I really miss those busy bike lanes. And for the people out there who complain about busy bike lanes, which Taylor you probably don't realize, but actually was a thing every spring there would be this cadre of the old Portland retro grouch people who would be grumbling and complaining about all the new bikers in the bike lane because they would be getting in their way.

Taylor Griggs ([00:07:09](#)):

Yeah, that's funny.

Jonathan Maus ([00:07:10](#)):

Actually, it was so bad one year I actually did a story. I said, welcome new bike riders we're glad you're here just to counter that. That's how strong it was.

Taylor Griggs ([00:07:19](#)):

Yeah, good. Well, I don't want to seem like that. I definitely would be really happy to-

Jonathan Maus ([00:07:23](#)):

No, I'm going to say you are at all. I'm not saying you are at all, but you brought that thing up of I think for a lot of people, and I think like I was saying, it hasn't gotten talked about a lot in this last week or so, but the fact that those platoons of rider are not out there anymore actually is a major thing that was concerning me before the bike count report come out, and I've been thinking about a lot since then. Just what it did to basically for marketing of cycling, think of all the bus drivers and car drivers and people sitting in a sidewalk patio that would see bikers streaming by some of the popular streets for biking. It was this constant reinforcement that yes, we lived in a bike city, right?

Jonathan Maus ([00:08:01](#)):

And especially because of COVID, but the decline started before then, but when COVID hit and the work from home thing started and people stopped biking to work, man, I've just been really thinking about the impacts of not having that visual representation of cycling in our city. Like heck, if you're Mayor Ted Wheeler or Commissioner Dan Ryan or Commissioner Maps or whatever, you don't see that either. So it really kind of erodes some of the political heft of cycling to not have those big groups of people riding around. It was such a bummer.

Taylor Griggs ([00:08:30](#)):

Well, now it's kind of far away and feels like it's been winter for so long, but in the summer, I mean this was my first summer here and experiencing Petalpalooza which I went to a ton of rides. I mean, being with a big group like that and how many people were showing up and how much energy there was at almost every ride, that gave me a lot of optimism. So then experiencing this kind of switch is odd because as we're coming back up to the summer, I expect that there'll be a lot of people back out riding. I don't know where all of them go I guess, but I remember my sister came to one of the rides, the bike prom, and I told her about it and she was like, "Oh, okay, I guess I'll go."

Taylor Griggs ([00:09:20](#)):

She said she thought maybe there'll be 20 people there. It would be a high school kind of, I don't know, something. She didn't think it was going to be that big of a deal. She was very surprised to see hundreds and hundreds of people there. This was stand still bike traffic and it was great. I mean, I was just grinning the whole time. Kylie, my sister, I'm so happy you get to see this it's great. And it made me feel very excited about biking here and that kind of energy I think propelled some people, but then they kind of lose that after a while I guess.

Jonathan Maus ([00:09:55](#)):

Yeah. I'm glad you brought up Petalpalooza because there's something about this where I've read several comments from people on the site where they're saying, "Hey, you're not talking about the fact that this is a national phenomenon, and you should put this in context because a lot of other cities..." And it's true, this decline in cycling is nationwide. A lot of the other, I don't know what else to call them, social, political crises that are happening all over the country are also happening in Portland, which also contribute to our decline in biking and blah, blah, blah. The big but I have around that is that no other city in America was Portland when it came to cycling. So it hits different here I think because that was and is or say was such a big part of our legacy, always was such a big part of our brand. It still is I believe, it's just been not quite as loud in the last several years let's say.

Jonathan Maus ([00:10:46](#)):

So for me personally, when I heard the news, I mean I've just had a mix of emotions, like definitely sad. The thing that kept popping out to me was the whole that we're back to where we were in 2006. It was just this gut punch of just like, oh my gosh, we just lost all that work and we've slid all the way back so far and now we're going to have to crawl out of that hole. And as I thought about it more, it's not that bad, it's not like we've gone all the way back to 2006. Just statistically maybe, but obviously a lot of that, all of the lot of bones in the infrastructure to have a much more higher biking use are there. We just have to do some things to turn the tide, which I want to get to later. Before we get into hearing you and I talk any more, I wanted to share some of the things that we heard from readers. So I just pulled out a few comments. Did you have something?

Taylor Griggs ([00:11:39](#)):

Do you want me to read?

Jonathan Maus ([00:11:41](#)):

Yeah, we'll bounce back and forth so people don't get sick of listening to our voices. We also have some audio too which we'll get to in a sec, folks that called in on voicemail and also people that Taylor talked

to, but just to give a good sense of some of the reader comments that I think are relevant and important. Actually, you could go ahead and start Taylor. So you can read the first one here.

Taylor Griggs ([00:12:02](#)):

Okay. "I came from a car dependent place. I purposefully moved to Portland because of the bike scene and so I could live car free. Only recently have I started to consider buying a car again because of how dangerous it has gotten out there."

Jonathan Maus ([00:12:15](#)):

It just kills me though, and I think that's really common, the whole thing that people moved here because it was a great biking city and I've heard that more and more in recent years that upon arriving they realized that it really wasn't as amazing as they would hope. Okay, so I'll read another one. "My wife and I moved here in 2001 because of the great commuting. We have had a family car, but we were car free for seven years with a kid in tow. But after the last few years of daily commuting and seeing the increase in aggressive driving and all that goes with that, I have now completely stopped." Oh my gosh. I hate hearing that. "I will not buy a car." That's good. "So I will walk and I will take the bus, but it's a real shame. I love cycling. I just can't do it anymore." Okay, Taylor, your turn.

Taylor Griggs ([00:13:01](#)):

"I'm disgusted and angry about the bike lanes downtown. They're almost empty and have been since before the pandemic. Now, we learn that PBOT has known all along the bike ridership has been decreasing for years and yet continues to hope, expect, wish that ridership will increase because if they build it, they will come even as people refuse to work downtown. How does the city justify this madness? We have great low cost public transportation and a highly walkable downtown, and yet we've spent millions on a losing proposition that inconveniences many and isn't meeting expectations enough."

Jonathan Maus ([00:13:32](#)):

So that was an anti-bike one. I forgot to preface that by saying that.

Taylor Griggs ([00:13:36](#)):

That's interesting because walking in the public transportation would be worse if there were more cars.

Jonathan Maus ([00:13:44](#)):

Well, yeah, I wanted to include that one because it gets at something which I think is going to be a big problem for PBOT politically and for anybody who's trying to promote biking and get more biking. Is that this report and the fact that the numbers are declining really is fuel for the haters that this is a silly thing to spend money on, which as everybody listening to this knows already there were already people that thought that spending money on bike lanes was silly to begin with. And now we have this headline that says basically no one's using them or very few people are using them, that's a problem politically for the City of Portland. So I think this person's comment really gets at that. Obviously this is an anti-bike person in general. The fact that she says we've spent millions on a losing proposition that inconveniences many, I don't know, if I'm a politician that's certainly something that is going to stick into my head.

Jonathan Maus ([00:14:34](#)):

Okay. Let's see. Oh, I like this comment. Okay. This is another comment that we got on the site. This person said, "The safest infrastructure in the world won't make any difference if perceptions developed over the past few years aren't also changed." Really good point. In terms of PR, the headlines we've had the last few years are really tough when you start thinking about jumping on a bike and getting out there. This person also made the connection, they said, "There is a noticeable decline in the enthusiastic use of public space since 2020," which I would definitely concur with. "This isn't just about bikes or transit, but about how we as a city view all of our public spaces, including the privately owned ones like office buildings or shopping malls. All that was in decline pre 2020, but then it just fell off a cliff." Let's see.

Taylor Griggs ([00:15:21](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([00:15:22](#)):

Oh, go ahead. Did you have something to say to that?

Taylor Griggs ([00:15:24](#)):

Well, it's interesting because all these talk of the pandemic and it definitely had a big impact, but I think people have become more isolated and introverted I guess, and are a lot more wary about interacting with people at all.

Jonathan Maus ([00:15:42](#)):

But draw a line from that to biking less.

Taylor Griggs ([00:15:45](#)):

Well, I mean, I guess when you're in a car you have to interact with people even less than you do when you're biking. You definitely could bike without talking to anybody, but you're out there and you can.

Jonathan Maus ([00:15:59](#)):

You're out there, yeah.

Taylor Griggs ([00:16:01](#)):

I see people I know and I'll wave to them. If you really didn't want to do that, yeah, being in a car you're really isolated.

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:08](#)):

Yeah, it's harder to be anonymous for sure on a bike. You're putting yourself out there and I think-

Taylor Griggs ([00:16:13](#)):

Yeah, I think that there are some times where there's a bit of social anxiety that comes up in some way. I think first of all-

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:21](#)):

More so than driving for sure. Yeah, I agree.

Taylor Griggs ([00:16:23](#)):

Oh yeah, for sure definitely because you-

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:24](#)):

Yeah, I agree. I think that plays into it.

Taylor Griggs ([00:16:25](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:27](#)):

Okay, a couple more comments. This one's one's a bummer when I hear this one and I recognize this person's commenter name on Bike Portland and they used to comment a lot and I never hear from them, but they piped in for this one. This person said, "I used to be the stereotypical Portland bike rider and rode everywhere, now not so much. I've had way too many close calls in recent years. Drunk drivers, drivers on their phone, people running stop signs. It just doesn't feel safe anymore. It just isn't worth my safety. I threw in the towel and gave up." Oh, that was so sad. Okay, this is the last one I want to read, but this one brought up a really important topic. This person said, "I'm one of the people who switched and now regularly drive to work instead of bike. I can say for me it was pandemic changes in work policy that made the difference. I've become lazy and out of shape as a result of this."

Jonathan Maus ([00:17:16](#)):

And he says, "I've been thinking about asking my employer to change the policy." Essentially this person said that their employer to entice people to go back to the office has started giving away free parking to everyone, which wasn't the case prior. The person goes on to say, "But the problem is I really like driving. It's my new very bad habit. I like the 'free parking.' It's a drug I can't resist. Every day I say I'm going to start riding my bike again soon, but I keep not doing it. The sum total has been lots of driving and almost no biking." Boy, that's just a bummer to hear people talking about that. Also, let's share some of the audio that you got. How did you get this? Where did you go to find these people that we're going to play some clips from?

Taylor Griggs ([00:18:02](#)):

I went to the farmer's market ride and I talked to some members of Bike Loud. I went to the coffee outside meet up this weekend and talked to some people there. And then I also went to Mocks Crest Park on Saturday evening, which it was really nice this weekend so I thought it was a good time to try to catch people.

Speaker 3 ([00:18:28](#)):

Portland's a great city to bike in. In my experience here in the past year and a half, the potential infrastructure that's available has always been exciting to me, but it's not kept well. I have a pretty long commute to work and the infrastructure available to me there is just filled with gravel and construction materials, and cars just seem to be going faster and faster.

Speaker 4 ([00:18:51](#)):

It's too easy for people to drive. That's part of the reason why the bike numbers are down because people can just get in their cars and drive cheap, they can park. We've got all this subsidized acres of

pavement all over the city where people can park their cars for free, and it's just more convenient to drive than to ride your bike.

Speaker 5 ([00:19:10](#)):

And I read just to recent article regarding the census on the bicycling and noticing that it's dropped down on the east side. I do want to note probably one of the main reasons of that drop that doesn't seem to be stated there is all the homeless tents and they're unsafe. I used to videotape over through there. It's extremely, extremely unsafe since everything's neglected on the outer east side. Those areas, if you were to bike around there, there's over 200 and so tents and that's why I know a lot of people don't feel safe. I was chased with a hatchet one time with a police officer. There's tons of needles, tons of tents, just extremely, extremely unsafe to even bike there. Not just the homeless, but the homeless that are aggressive and the drug using and the unsafe homeless, not the homeless that are trying to find housing but the other side of that.

Speaker 6 ([00:20:00](#)):

I grew up biking around here a lot. This is the neighborhood I grew up in. I probably just like the general safety of the city I feel like.

Speaker 7 ([00:20:06](#)):

From my experience right now I commute to work or to classes by my bike, and I remember in the fall there would just be a bunch of leaves and they'd be all wet in the bike lanes. So that's like, why isn't this being maintained if there's people who bike in Portland?

Speaker 8 ([00:20:22](#)):

The real answer is probably because I like to wear cute little outfits and they're not always very bikeable. You don't want to be caught wearing flared trousers on a bike.

Speaker 9 ([00:20:34](#)):

I mean, I'm in the bike business, I sell electric bikes, we build them here in Portland and I just get the feedback. It's like people don't want to ride on the street. It's unsafe. You can cross the street with have a light and someone will just go... Today, 40 miles an hour through a red light. Danger is not something people really want to engage in when they go out on a Sunday. You don't really want to worry about getting killed or maimed. I think that's probably what it is because there's no enforcement of the traffic laws. I mean, there just isn't. This is why people don't want to cycle anymore because every day there's someone going through a red light or just going a foot away from you. That happened to me today and then yelling at me. I'm like, give me some space.

Speaker 9 ([00:21:29](#)):

And they start yelling at me and it's like, how about you be on a bike and have a car go one foot away from you? There's not a lot of trust on the road any more between the drivers and the bikes. And I think Portland was really good because we're from the East Coast and we moved here in 2013 right around the same timeframe you were talking about, and I think the difference between Providence where we lived and here was pretty big. The drivers are a lot more respectful here. They slow down for you, they let you cross. I just felt they were a lot less aggressive here. And then since the pandemic, I felt like that there's just... I mean, people are still really polite, I don't think Portland's become a horrible city or

anything, but I do think there's a group of scoff laws that are just so outside of the norm of safe driving that they're just ruining it for not only the cyclists but pedestrians, other drivers.

Speaker 10 ([00:22:29](#)):

It's a bummer because it makes me feel like we're going to lose momentum on bicycle infrastructure, which it feels like the infrastructure's getting exponentially better. So it really feels like a cool moment if we were to be getting on bikes that we could have that rallying feel that we had in like maybe the early 2010s where it felt like we were excited about it, excited about change. Well, it seems like the average person looks at it from a convenience perspective, and right now it's not the most convenient because the routes are circuitous. They're not on the main roads. You can't bike down Alberta, you got to take this cyc back out throughout path that joggles over and over and over and over again and it's easy to get lost. And so I want to go to the movie theater, it's like I got to take 25 streets and even as somebody who bikes every day, all day, I got lost on the way here.

Speaker 10 ([00:23:18](#)):

It's for the gazillion at the time I live in Northeast and I still got lost. It's just endless the [inaudible 00:23:23] jogglers and so that's kind of a bummer. I think there's another part too that has been brought up a lot, but people don't realize there's such things as greenways. And so it's just like there needs to be an intense change to the greenway aesthetic. Right now it's some humps and a shera, and maybe the occasional orange thing on top of a sign and occasionally the green thing underneath that speed limit sign. But there's not an intense green stripe down the center of it. There's not a change in the trees. It looks like another road. And I think that if it were this more of a festival atmosphere of less cars on it, more trees, you could tell you were on it and it was a cool place to be like a nice place like a linear park, I think people would show up.

Jenna Phillips ([00:24:07](#)):

I encountered two groups of people. One group are people that had really good biking habits before 2020 and now probably work from home and don't have those habits and their habits are broken. And so I think you have to encourage those people to bring back their habits. I think there's a second group of people that have all moved here in the last two years. A lot of younger folks who did not see the bike boom in the early 2010s that everyone's pointing back to. And I think those are the people that you can really change and excite and that's what I try to do.

Jonathan Maus ([00:24:45](#)):

Okay. So hearing those clips Taylor from folks you talked to, was there something that stood out from those conversations to you?

Taylor Griggs ([00:24:51](#)):

I think my big takeaway from this is that everybody has a different opinion. There's really no consensus which will make it difficult for anybody trying to figure out what to do. And I mean, you can look at the city and the infrastructure and you can look at cultural factors. I think I was really interested in what one person said about navigating and making the greenways more noticeable and prominent to people, and having it so that you can bike on busier or more prominent streets like Alberta, he mentioned.

Jonathan Maus ([00:25:34](#)):

Yes.

Taylor Griggs ([00:25:35](#)):

This is something we've talked about a lot and I think it's really important to get to. And at first when I heard about this idea of the importance of bike lanes on more prominent streets, I didn't really know if it was that important. But over time I've realized that yeah, first of all it makes you visible and it's just easier so you can park your bike right outside the place you're going. You don't have to go way off the street in order to find places. You find out about new places, it's way more convenient.

Jonathan Maus ([00:26:09](#)):

Yeah, I'm really glad that someone mentioned that to you in those interviews because it touches on a point that actually the bicycle coordinator for the City of Portland, Roger Geller pretty much thinks it is one of the biggest things. It's been interesting to me to see how PBOT framed this latest bike count report because they specifically said in the report they don't have the ability to say any reasons or rationale for the decline and that they're working on it. I found that interesting because their staff has already shared pretty detailed reasons for why they think this might be happening. And I mentioned it now because what that person in the audio clip said about not everybody knows where neighborhood greenways are, like that's very astute because that was like Roger Geller's main reason for saying why he thinks a lot of people aren't biking.

Jonathan Maus ([00:26:54](#)):

So the idea is that, in Geller's term, was that the greenways are hidden he thinks, and I kind of agree. The greenway network is arguably one of the most important things we've done for the bike network, and unless they're there you don't really know. They're basically hidden, right? So that's so important about bike lanes on main streets, besides the utility that they have for people and the respect of access they give for people in terms of equal access to spaces whether you're driving your biking. They also send a signal to people, they say this is a place you can bike. It's a marketing thing, right? And so there are lots and lots and lots of Portlanders who may be interested in biking but have no idea what a neighborhood greenway is or that it exists or anything. So that is an interesting and important thing to keep in mind.

Jonathan Maus ([00:27:40](#)):

I mean the city's already responded to that in a way and they have this yard side program, they're trying to get these yard signs up that say, I love my neighborhood greenway or whatever. And that's a pretty cool program, I actually stuff like that, but for years, me and other people have been trying to tell PBOT, please do more to market the greenways. Give them cool names like Ann Vancouver. You don't know them by the street name, there's one called the Mosaic because all the medians have really cool little mosaic tile art in them. Give them cool names, put bigger signs up on the cross streets that let people know what the greenways are. Start to market them so people actually know about them so they're not hidden. So I'm glad that person brought that up.

Taylor Griggs ([00:28:22](#)):

And that goes into another thing, a lot of these greenways are not really maintained very well any better than any other street, which makes it uncomfortable to bike on. And a few people brought up maintenance issues. This is another thing we talk about a lot and write about a lot on Bike Portland, but it definitely is important when, for instance, it was snowing, it snowed a lot a few weeks ago and it took

a week for some of the bike lanes to be cleared up and then still there's gravel in some of them that is a result of that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:29:01](#)):

So let's get right into some reasons, we got to touch on these.

Taylor Griggs ([00:29:04](#)):

Well, yeah. These are also responding to the comments here, but yeah, I don't know if there's anything else to add.

Jonathan Maus ([00:29:10](#)):

It was good because I think from the reader comments we pulled out and then the clips, I think people touched on almost all of the things that we've been... I think they might've mentioned bike theft in there. I think I heard that.

Taylor Griggs ([00:29:20](#)):

Bike theft, I think that also could definitely play into it especially if you get your bike stolen.

Jonathan Maus ([00:29:28](#)):

Oh, without a doubt.

Taylor Griggs ([00:29:30](#)):

Because you just don't want to leave it anywhere that you actually have to go.

Jonathan Maus ([00:29:35](#)):

Oh, for sure. And a lot of these things... Okay, we're going to go down a list here so we can try to touch on at least all the things we think are adding to this because it's been frustrating to me that people are commenting and trying to give us reasons why it's happening. And I feel like the implied thing is that somehow Bike Portland isn't talking about these things so then we don't think they're real, which is really weird, but whatever. Because in the story that I wrote, I didn't really go down a laundry list of reasons, so whatever. But yes, I mean bike theft is a huge one. I mean, people don't think that they're going to have their bike if they park it outside. That's a very common prevalent opinion that people have. They're basically going their bike's going to get stolen. Why do they think that? Well, everybody in Portland knows someone who just had their bike stolen. It's kind of a rite of passage.

Jonathan Maus ([00:30:17](#)):

There hasn't been a huge response necessarily, at least anymore, since the Bike Theft Task Force is gone. We did a huge amount of work on that for years trying to build that up. Bike theft is a huge thing, it hasn't gone away, it's still a problem. We need to do more to combat it, but it's complicated and we can talk about that later but I wanted to mention that. I mean another big thing is people's basic public safety fears was the other hugest thing that I think is driving this. And I'm not going to debate the stats of what's going on out there crime wise, but the reality is that people perceive it being bad and it is also bad. There are a lot of safety concerns. There's a ton of people doing things that make people uncomfortable. And you kind of mentioned before, Taylor, when you're biking, you're really putting yourself out there in a way you're not when you're driving. And so those stories about someone on

drugs scaring someone or doing something or assaulting someone, those things really travel far and people remember those.

Jonathan Maus ([00:31:17](#)):

And the idea that you're going to get on your bike, especially, gosh forbid if you're going to be on your bike in the dark or coming home late, that's not going to happen. People aren't going to do it. And I think the homelessness issue is related to this. I was looking today, starting in 2016 so seven years we've had this issue percolating and reaching. It started with a simmer when there was a massive, massive encampment on the Springwater Corridor. That's when I first started really hearing about it from bike riders specifically. Obviously the Springwater Corridor being a multi-use path, it was a bike issue at that point. And although it's a whole separate issue to talk about homelessness in the sense of people have a right to live outside, it's a complicated issue. We did a story where we went out and talked to people that lived out there about what it was like to get swept or to have these assumptions made about them, about safety and all this stuff.

Jonathan Maus ([00:32:11](#)):

And it's a very, very complicated issue in terms of how we perceive these threats, but there's no denying that people feel more vulnerable when the paths are lined with tents and there are people living there. And the amount of stories and stuff coming out of there is a legitimate thing that we have to take into account. So seven years of that issue building up, it still hasn't gone away and it's not just from COVID. In 2019, I did a story that I got a ton of flack for on Bike Portland where I just said conditions on I-205 path are totally unacceptable and I shared a video of what's going on out there. So that is another reason why, and it's another reason that we've heard a lot about is that not just people living on the paths, but literally people living with their stuff blocking some of these paths is a big problem that I think we have not done a good enough job addressing or talking about. We just kind of let it sit there.

Taylor Griggs ([00:33:03](#)):

And I don't know what to do about it exactly. I think we're going to let it sit there still.

Jonathan Maus ([00:33:12](#)):

Well, I mean it's a hard thing to talk about in Portland because there's so many sensitivities around it. I think in general we haven't done a good enough job about putting boundaries on some of this stuff. And years and years ago, I remember when Mayor Wheeler started talking about homelessness, when he started getting a lot of complaints about it, there was this talk about we're going to root out the criminal elements. We're going to root out people that are doing things that are really bad just like you would in a neighborhood. I just think of people living on the street just other people in my neighborhood, it is what it is. That's where people live, that's fine. But just people in my neighborhood or on the street or whatever that are doing something blatantly bad and against the law and unsafe, I would expect them to be dealt with. Just because someone's living in a tent camp I don't think there should be just a free for all thing, right?

Jonathan Maus ([00:34:00](#)):

So when there are elements like that I think that we live in a city with a government, with a budget. You had a mayor saying something like that, but there was never follow through with that. It was just kind of like let it stay there, let it get worse and worse. And things started happening, people felt less and less safe. And I think the issue really got away from city hall to the point where it impacted a lot of things not

just bike biking, but I think of all the issues that's the one I've heard about the most. And don't get me wrong folks, just because I hear about something a lot doesn't necessarily mean it's true. But I think the idea that people can live on the bike paths, take over sections of these paths is just really not a sustainable policy choice and I think we could do a better job of trying to figure out what to do there.

Jonathan Maus ([00:34:50](#)):

Even if we were to go out and have PBOT staff talk to folks that are doing that and just saying there's a place that you can be here, but you can't be here. Let's create a buffer or a border or something so that you can't be on a transportation facility. That's just not cool. So let's see. Okay, we got to go down some other reasons so we can get through some of this stuff. We talked about the spiral of the safety in numbers. So once we stopped having the big groups, that's not a great thing. I think for a lot of Portlanders cycling isn't even considered an option because they don't see themselves as cyclists. I think it gets to this idea that there are huge parts of Portland that frankly don't really care about cycling and it doesn't come up. It's not in the culture, it not a thing. They don't see it. They don't necessarily talk about it. East Portland, maybe parts of up St. John's, northern parts of the Peninsula.

Jonathan Maus ([00:35:44](#)):

And that's a problem and that's something that I think bike advocates have acknowledged and tried to do more on in terms of creating a bigger tent where more people and more Portlanders that don't look like you and I basically feel like they see themselves in what cycling is. And by not embracing or not doing enough to bring in those folks, we're missing out on a lot of potential bikers. And it also dovetails into one of my big rants, which is like we got to get more BIKETOWN bikes out in East Portland and everywhere really. So I feel like if we dropped 1,000 more BIKETOWN bikes out there on these bike lanes we'd get a lot more people using them for sure. Vehicle size is another big thing. And that's an obvious thing, it's not even an opinion, it's become a mainstream idea that the size of trucks has gotten so just insanely big that it's a big problem. And one of the specific things in Portland that a lot of people don't tie it to a lot is that we rely so much on our neighborhood greenway network, and you can literally feel the constriction of these streets.

Jonathan Maus ([00:36:45](#)):

Some of these streets are pretty narrow, and when you're feeling like it's pretty narrow and a driver can't get around you which adds stress, right? Or you feel like if a car's coming the other direction, there's that game of chicken. If you stop and think for a second how much bigger the cars are that are parked on both sides the entire way, that's a thing. That's the difference between having to play chicken or not. But actually on that note of the vehicles getting bigger, the PBOT has actually been recognizing that and I've seen the term people friendly vehicles popping up in some of their work around Vision Zero and stuff. So it's on their radar screen, which is good to know. Enforcement is another big one, the lack thereof. That's a huge one. Another thing that comes with the general national trends about some of these crises is the police thing and related to traffic enforcement.

Jonathan Maus ([00:37:35](#)):

Specifically, I've been really upset that the Portland Police Bureau has I feel like been playing politics with the enforcement thing just to settle scores. They've been basically broadcasting to the City of Portland that there's no one to enforce traffic laws. I'm not just saying that, that's just not some theory. In 2021 at a press conference that was ostensibly supposed to be about traffic deaths that the Portland Police Bureau called, they had their traffic division guys stand up in front of the cameras and detailed

how little presence they actually had on the streets. How few cops that were enforcing laws. I mean, am I crazy Taylor for thinking that? How is that a good public safety strategy to tell everybody there's no cops on the streets?

Taylor Griggs ([00:38:16](#)):

Yeah, there's nobody. You can pretty much do whatever you want. Yeah, no, but it's true.

Jonathan Maus ([00:38:18](#)):

And that's what people have done. They've done whatever they want.

Taylor Griggs ([00:38:20](#)):

Yeah, definitely. And that is something you can feel. I mean, I don't know what it was like before.

Jonathan Maus ([00:38:27](#)):

Yeah. So for sure.

Taylor Griggs ([00:38:27](#)):

And it also adds to this cycle because the fewer people then the less the drivers will have this idea that they need to be respectful and then it'll keep getting worse and worse.

Jonathan Maus ([00:38:38](#)):

Yeah, it's the erosion of respectful behavior on the road is a huge factor in what's going on because you're right, you can feel it. And the amount of anecdotes and stuff that I hear from people is just like wild. And yeah, just the general sense of lawlessness that people are driving with is huge. And not even to mention all the distracted driving that happens, which has only gotten worse as these infotainment screens in cars have gotten bigger and all that stuff. So that's a huge thing. Another big issue that I think is even more so with bike riders is obviously the work from home phenomenon. So the fact that people during COVID are not going downtown as much. I think given that the demographic of bike riders kind of related to what I was saying earlier which is unfortunate, tends to be more privileged, wealthier people to some degree or at least that's the kind of typical Portland bike rider I think.

Jonathan Maus ([00:39:30](#)):

And those are people that I think are more likely to have control of their schedule now that the work from home thing has changed. So I think that has hit very, very hard in terms of percentage of people biking. And I think like we read in one of our reader comments, it just changes your habit. So it's not that you're just not biking to work, it just kind of takes bikes out of your life, that commute trip because that commute trip was for some people really their main deal.

Taylor Griggs ([00:39:56](#)):

And you commute to work and then you go home and maybe you get groceries on the way or something.

Jonathan Maus ([00:40:00](#)):

Right.

Taylor Griggs ([00:40:00](#)):

Now you go in your car and go to the grocery store and do all this other stuff.

Jonathan Maus ([00:40:06](#)):

Okay. Another one, we're just going down a list here. Bike lane maintenance, I think you mentioned before, that's a really big one. And I often think that people respond to all the complaints I've done over the years on Bike Portland about how there's gravel in the bike lanes, there's leaves in the bike lanes, there's snow in the bike lanes, there's puddles in the bike lanes. Literally every season except summer there's some crap in the bike lanes, tight? That starts to erode people's like confidence. It doesn't show that you respect cycling. So I think over time, especially since it doesn't really feel like there's been a good response from the city on that. It's one thing that there was a problem and it was annoying and obviously having a bunch of debris in the bike lane is a real issue and people are getting more flats and all this stuff.

Jonathan Maus ([00:40:50](#)):

It would be one thing if it happened and then it's like let's try to figure out how to deal with it. But the sense that the city knows it's there and they're still really hasn't been a huge material difference in it, is just kind of demoralizing. So we've got to get better at keeping bike lanes clean, especially as we build protected ones. And unfortunately the City of Portland has not shown that they can really address that and do a great job keeping bike lanes clean. We have to get better at that. I don't know, there are a lot of other reasons. There's that other idea that because of housing prices went up, the people that were most likely to bike who used to live closer in and had shorter trips now have longer trips because they got to home buying age or whatever you want to call it.

Jonathan Maus ([00:41:31](#)):

Or they got to that moment in their life when they got older, maybe they had kids, they wanted a bigger house, move out of their apartment in inner Southeast, and then their trips became longer. And so bike bicycling wasn't as competitive of a trip so they drove more or they just stopped biking as much. Speaking of competitive trips, I always say that the choices we make in transportation are all about competition. I think a huge thing is that, the flip side of all this stuff is that it's just way too easy to drive. I mean, would you agree with that? I mean, you don't have a car, right?

Taylor Griggs ([00:42:03](#)):

But when I did, I know how easy it was to drive. Yeah, you can find parking now that there's not as many people driving. Two, if this is the case to work and et cetera, people aren't going out as much, there's more space for you to drive and there's less traffic probably.

Jonathan Maus ([00:42:21](#)):

Yeah, for sure. I think the COVID thing made it even easier to drive. You don't even have peak congestion anymore. I mean, personally I often think it's way too easy to drive. I live right on the freeway, it's like right here on the next block over from where we're recording this is wonderful the I-5 humming in the background. I mean, there's no traffic. We could literally be at Forest Park trailhead in five or six minutes in our car. That's wild. From North Portland to Forest Park trailhead in single digit minutes, that's really hard to compete with.

Taylor Griggs ([00:42:55](#)):

Yeah. It requires effort to convince yourself to bike in different conditions if it's raining, especially which people brought up but that's something that's always been a part of this city. So I don't really feel like it's, I don't know, a big contributor to a decline. But you have to wake up earlier if you're going to get to work on your bike, you have to do this and this. And I think that, yeah, it's too easy when there's not really a reason that you wouldn't drive. Even if you feel a little bit bad about it or you want to bike, you say, okay, well I woke up late this morning, I'll do it tomorrow. I'll start biking every day starting tomorrow. But if it was more difficult to drive in whatever way, maybe you had to pay a toll or a congestion pricing or pay for parking.

Jonathan Maus ([00:43:47](#)):

Yes, pay for parking.

Taylor Griggs ([00:43:47](#)):

That would definitely be an incentive to get people to just put in the little bit more effort to bike.

Jonathan Maus ([00:43:53](#)):

I mean, I agree. A lot of these things are just about little things, a little bit more effort to drive could change a certain percentage of trips to bike, right? And that's the other thing that gets lost in this I think is as you can tell from this episode, there's no one reason why biking is going down. There are tons and tons of reasons. It's really death by a thousand cuts in a way it's how I think about it. It's like there's that one last straw where people are like, you know what? Forget it. That's how I look at it. People say, oh, no one wants to ride in the rain. The reality is the rain is just the last straw for people, that discomfort. They're also uncomfortable that they have to ride through a puddle, ride through a bunch of leaves or get someone to turn right right in front of them or they don't have any place to park their bike when they get to their destination X, Y, Z, right?

Jonathan Maus ([00:44:37](#)):

So there's so many things that come into it, it's not just that one thing. That one thing at the end is what makes you make that choice, but there is a lot of stuff leading up to that that we have to get better at. Okay, we've talked I think plenty about the reasons, right Taylor? Unless I'm forgetting something. I mean, yeah, I don't know.

Taylor Griggs ([00:44:56](#)):

Yeah, it seems like that's it.

Jonathan Maus ([00:44:57](#)):

I think we hit on the big things.

Taylor Griggs ([00:44:58](#)):

I mean I know you are hesitant to discuss this, but people coming in. I mean the fact that there's a lot of new people in Portland.

Jonathan Maus ([00:45:08](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Taylor Griggs ([00:45:08](#)):

And people who've lived here in the past have left so it's really difficult to determine exactly how much this plays into it, but as people come in from different places around the country that haven't been as focused on biking they bring their cars with them and just continue to use them. But that really goes with it just being too easy to drive.

Jonathan Maus ([00:45:35](#)):

Yeah, it's related for sure.

Taylor Griggs ([00:45:37](#)):

And I don't want to shame people for moving here or act like I don't want more people here because I definitely do, but I think that, yeah, it has to do with the marketing of bicycling in Portland. You can move here, not even know it's really that big of a deal and I guess in the past that wasn't the case.

Jonathan Maus ([00:45:55](#)):

Yeah, not so much. I mean, that's a good segue because I wanted to shift more into the political side of this. And when I think of marketing, I think of it there's hard and soft marketing. The hard marketing, and I was yelling from the rooftops in like 2014, '15, '16 when the boom started of people moving here. I mean it's just earlier than that, but I remember telling people, I was like there are so many people moving here now is our chance to really make sure that they start biking when they move here. I literally had that conversation with people. I'm like, we had this opportunity, it was like when Portland was the city and everybody was coming here, all the condos, all the apartments started going up, division starts flipping over. I remember telling people, this is our moment. We've got to educate, inculcate these folks that come here and let them know and send a strong signal that what we do here is bike and you're not going to come here and drive.

Jonathan Maus ([00:46:44](#)):

But we didn't do that. We just didn't do that. We took way too long to have protected bike lanes. We took way too long to do dedicated bus lanes. We just totally were okay with these little incremental improvements. And we were too worried about off drivers and all that stuff and we didn't do it. PBOT didn't do it. ODOT certainly didn't do it. It just didn't happen. And I think we're basically laying down in that bed that we made now of not really taking advantage of that moment. And yeah, a lot of people moved here with their car-centric values and way of life and they weren't convinced to change otherwise and I don't really blame them in a lot of ways. But related to that, if you look at when the decline and the fall really started happening in terms of like 2014, 2015, there is definitely a big political aspect to this.

Jonathan Maus ([00:47:32](#)):

I won't fully into it 'cause I think it's a whole nother episode, but it is related to what you just said about marketing and our brand and when people come here, what do they hear about bicycling? And as of 2013, I think it really started when Portland generally elected officials, the local media, some advocates also, even bike advocates, people started walking away from bicycling. Bicycling became a dirty word. I used to say bike became a four letter word. I really do believe that, and I think that has a lot to do with

the fact that we lost it when it comes to having that be a part of our brand. And I mean, I don't want to initially overstate the power of the brand, but this is literally America where branding reigns supreme and people are very impressionable to what they're expected to do or what they feel like they're supposed to do to fit in. And before 2013, 2014, when you got to Portland you were expected to ride a bike. This was a biking town.

Jonathan Maus ([00:48:32](#)):

Don't get me wrong, we had done nothing around thinking broader about who's biking and where they're biking and all that stuff, but the brand was so strong. It's hard to communicate how part and parcel of Portland biking was, but I think it all started well in a way like 2013. So we had a very pro biking mayor who left office in 2012, it was Sam Adams, and the interesting thing was because Sam Adams was so controversial for the scandal he was involved in and stuff, and he just lost a lot of power in his last couple years. I mean, he almost got basically not impeached, but he basically almost left office. People were telling him to resign and it was a really ugly time in Portland. So the guy that came in after him, Charlie Hales in a way ran as an anti Sam Adams. And it was a really a sort of dog whistle to say it's anti-bike because Sam Adams was so pro bike that I feel like a lot of the people that were against him used biking and used that kind of language of going after biking.

Jonathan Maus ([00:49:32](#)):

'Cause I remember when Hales came in and there was talk about the budget, he was saying, "We're going to start focusing on maintenance and basic basics." When you talk about PBOT and you use that terminology, you're basically saying, "Hey, the bicycling stuff's over. Your guy is gone. We're not doing that anymore." And that's literally how Charlie Hales ran. And so to live up to what he promised his constituents, he could not be pro bicycling because that's what the person he just beat was. So that was not great, and obviously it went from there. I'm going to put a link in the show notes to a story that Michael Anderson did for Bike Portland in 2014, which that's when POBT says the decline happened and I kind of agree.

Jonathan Maus ([00:50:14](#)):

That was when we had our peak and the commute number that was 7.2. Now it's 2.8. Michael's story called Something Has Gone Wrong in Portland really lays out the shift in just this why we stopped being a biking town. And we really put some great words to it in that story. So basically since then, the whole political environment around biking shifted and never really has recovered. And I think that's a huge part of it that we're going to continue to explore as we think about this and try to turn the tide. So speaking of which, how the heck are we going to get out of this pickle and turn things around? What do you think Taylor? What's the solution?

Taylor Griggs ([00:50:55](#)):

I also wanted to mention something regarding the kind of moving away from biking, especially with an advocacy group. I am fine with people walking, taking public transit, riding electric scooters. All of that to me is also pro biking. I mean, really the only thing I have a problem with are I guess people in mass deciding to drive separately in their own cars everywhere. But I do think that keeping it simple is better for marketing. So moving away and talking about rolling, using all this different kinds of public transportation or non-car transportation, it's harder to market. It's not as-

Jonathan Maus ([00:51:42](#)):

Yeah, I think what you're saying is the bike is a four letter word thing.

Taylor Griggs ([00:51:46](#)):

Yeah, exactly.

Jonathan Maus ([00:51:47](#)):

I mean it's also worth noting folks. Let's see. So we had a group, a nonprofit called the Bicycle Transportation Alliance. They took the word bicycle out of their name, I think that was like 2016. So that was another big part of the cultural piece, you had even advocates started to get worried. This was also around the time when bicycling was being tied to gentrification and racism. I mean we're sitting right here, there's a book on the bookshelf called Bike Lanes Are White Lanes that comes from this thing what happened with the Williams Project, which was around 2012, 2013. It started construction in 2014, that project is infamous for being a project... I mean it was even in the New York Times, they profiled the Williams Avenue Project in Portland. It connected to this idea that somehow the presence of the bike lanes were about racial injustice and weren't fair to people that lived there. And there was this whole thing and that the bike lane was the source of gentrification and all this stuff.

Jonathan Maus ([00:52:42](#)):

So that was all in the water, so it was really easy to see how politicians and policy makers and influencers and advocates started to get a little bit nervous about putting bicycling front and center. And I think that is part of the thing. I mean if you hide the bike lanes in neighborhood greenways, which Roger Geller at PBOT himself said they were hidden and that was a negative thing in terms of promoting biking. So nobody knows where the bike lanes are. Nobody wants to talk about bicycling. I mean, even in 2020 the City of Portland has made some conscious decisions to no longer talk about bicycling. It's city council because they were afraid of what it would look like because they hadn't done enough equity work. So basically, how would you be surprised that bicycling is in decline? If every signal you're sending is that it's not something you can be proud of. It's not something you can put front and center. You remove it from all your transportation project names because God forbid, I don't know why it became kind of like-

Taylor Griggs ([00:53:40](#)):

Well, moving to greenways instead of bicycle boulevards.

Jonathan Maus ([00:53:42](#)):

Yeah, bicycle boulevard. Yeah, neighborhood greenways used to be called bicycle boulevards. Even the Williams Project itself was called the Bicycle Development Projects, that's what those were called first. And even before it got controversial, they changed the name to North Williams Avenue Traffic Safety and Operations Project.

Taylor Griggs ([00:53:59](#)):

Yeah, it's just convoluted.

Jonathan Maus ([00:53:59](#)):

They didn't want to put the word bike in there.

Taylor Griggs ([00:54:02](#)):

And that's fine because I well...

Jonathan Maus ([00:54:06](#)):

In some ways I don't blame. There's good reasons to not lead with the word bike or have this bike centric outlook on everything don't get me wrong, but in the context of how we did it, which was basically just completely abandon it and really be afraid to put it forward. That was a bad move. That was not great. And maybe I didn't have the courage to talk about it more, even though I was thinking about it all these years because I know the blow back I can get as Bike Portland guy saying, "Hey, we need to talk about biking more." It's also worth saying that it happened in a time in Portland where we were going through tons of crises, not just the protests after George Floyd was killed, but even other stuff downtown we've been dealing with the policing issue, racial injustice stuff, housing. Those were huge issues at City Hall for years in the last decade that I personally didn't feel like it was appropriate to be down there talking about bicycling a lot, right?

Taylor Griggs ([00:55:03](#)):

Sure.

Jonathan Maus ([00:55:04](#)):

And I haven't even mentioned how there's just been a complete erosion of bicycle related politicians in City Hall. There's literally nobody. And this started I think I remember being at a transportation candidate forum and sitting in the back of the room. This was probably 2018, I want to say during an election for a city council, and talking to someone next to me like oh my gosh, nobody on stage at this transportation candidate forum is really like a bike person or a transportation person.

Taylor Griggs ([00:55:34](#)):

Yeah, it's really mean a lot if somebody in city council would bike to work. It would, it would be a good demonstration that they genuinely cared about this issue.

Jonathan Maus ([00:55:44](#)):

Or even take the bus.

Taylor Griggs ([00:55:46](#)):

Oh, sure. Exactly.

Jonathan Maus ([00:55:47](#)):

I can't believe given all we haven't even talked to other problems with triMet and a lot of the same perception issues exist with TriMet if not more and have you seen anybody at City Council do a photo op? No.

Taylor Griggs ([00:55:55](#)):

No. It would be great. Yes, I think that some people have brought up if the bike count included electric scooters and things like that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:56:04](#)):

It didn't. It definitely didn't.

Taylor Griggs ([00:56:05](#)):

I don't know if that's significant enough to make up a really large portion, but that is something that people are embracing more and I really support and so maybe that's something to consider.

Jonathan Maus ([00:56:15](#)):

Yeah, I agree. I think we could do a lot more with micromobility stuff. Just blanket the scooters, put more scooters. I mean, I think BIKETOWN obviously, and I think we're going to be hearing there's no way the city can continue on without adding a bunch more to BIKETOWN, adding a bunch more bikes so I'm looking forward to that. And I think dropping a bunch of bikes into the system will be very healthy. So quickly let's talk about- Oh, sorry.

Taylor Griggs ([00:56:38](#)):

Okay. Were you going to talk about how-

Jonathan Maus ([00:56:40](#)):

I was going to say just let's talk about some path forward.

Taylor Griggs ([00:56:43](#)):

Solutions?

Jonathan Maus ([00:56:44](#)):

What are some solutions?

Taylor Griggs ([00:56:44](#)):

Well the BIKETOWN thing for sure and also the e-bike rebate potential in Portland and in the state. I mean, just having people have bikes will help.

Jonathan Maus ([00:56:55](#)):

Yeah. Well, like one of your predecessor here, one of them, Ellie Blue who is awesome, who wrote for us, this is back in gosh '07 or so, I'm pretty sure she wrote a story on Bike Portland talking about the best urbanism policy would just be to give free bikes to every person.

Taylor Griggs ([00:57:09](#)):

Yeah. A lot of people I know who don't bike it's because actually they just don't have a bike and it's difficult to know how to get one and what to do. So the bike rebates for electric bikes I think would be hugely helpful so that's one way I think. I don't know, I mean the cultural aspect is really hard to pin down and know what to do about it. If the culture has just changed so much there's no step by step kind of fix to that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:57:43](#)):

Well, yeah. Well I think the cultural thing can be fixed just by having a PR strategy. In the past, I think Portland's bike culture was the beautiful kind, the organic kind. It just happened because of the things that were in the water, the shoulders that we were standing on of Bud Clark and the people that fought the Mount Hood Freeway and all these other beautiful creative people in Portland that started things like Zoobomb and Sprockets and all this cool stuff and Pedalpalooza. That was like the engine of this beautiful cultural moment that I'm not saying that we can create that or should try, although there's still a lot of awesome stuff going on in town around that thing. So it's more like now we just have to do it the more awkward way of just having good PR principles. Start to talk about cycling. Go do photo ops, right? Get on the bus. If you work at city council, take the bus somewhere, put it on your social media, more marketing campaigns, that kind of stuff I think is definitely something we should do.

Taylor Griggs ([00:58:37](#)):

They can't abandon the issue and it gets unpopular. It's really shouldn't be something we're worried about making sure our local officials and politicians just drop it because there's a tide turning against it. People should have convictions strong enough that they don't just drop this issue when the bike counts are low.

Jonathan Maus ([00:58:59](#)):

I agree.

Taylor Griggs ([00:59:00](#)):

It's scary to me that yeah, we're so worried about maintaining this story that we're still here and all this stuff or else they're just going to forget and just like, okay, well I don't know, get rid of the bike lanes or not build a single other one.

Jonathan Maus ([00:59:15](#)):

Yeah, it's frustrating because we spent, we meaning the community at large, a lot of great activists and people volunteered many, many hours of time to create plans that enshrine this stuff biking, transit, climate friendly transportation supposed to enshrine this stuff in city policy. But in reality, the city still makes political decisions when it comes down to it. Or they put decisions into a black box that people can't really influence. Like we're seeing with this thing with Southwest Gibbs on the website where it goes into this little alternate review process that no one knows what exactly happens and they end up only counting driving trips and not walking and biking trips. So that demoralization of activism over time has really been problematic because then fewer people want to step up and volunteer 'cause they feel like even if we pass an awesome bike plan it doesn't matter because when the winds shift so do the politicians. So we need to keep that compass strong and keep going in the right direction.

Taylor Griggs ([01:00:13](#)):

It has to be something that people they just continue to do regardless.

Jonathan Maus ([01:00:17](#)):

And obviously obvious stuff, I just want to say for anybody that is going to hear this, this is not the time to go quietly into the night and to be shy about biking. We need to double down on biking right now because of what I mentioned earlier about the political peril that these headlines put biking in. If we don't turn around and start getting some electeds and influencers to get really loud about biking right

now, I worry that it could continue to get worse in terms of that local narrative. And we're already going to see, I guarantee if you listen to city hall testimony, any kind of commenting or anything, it's going to be a stronger and stronger refrain. Ever since the biking started to decline I started hearing this more where people are looking at bike lanes that are new and they're not seeing a bunch of people using them and they're just beating PBOT over the head with that and saying, look, it's a failure.

Jonathan Maus ([01:01:10](#)):

Why do you keep putting money into this? That to me is a really big problem that the city needs to address head on. And they only do that by doubling down and getting louder about it and then making their actions follow their rhetoric. So we cannot continue to compromise projects for driving and throughput capacity of cars. As long as we do that, we're never going to get biking rates up. So pricing is going to be important. We have a whole plan for pricing that we haven't enacted necessarily that's just sitting there so those are some of the things that we need to do. But it's going to be a lot of hard work going forward I think to get out of this hole, but one thing I always like when these kind of things happen is that at least now it's very public.

Taylor Griggs ([01:01:52](#)):

Yes, and I think we're in a place now too where first of all, it's public we can talk about it.

Jonathan Maus ([01:01:57](#)):

We've acknowledged the problem and then now we can work on it kind of thing.

Taylor Griggs ([01:02:00](#)):

And also before as we've talked about, there were diversity problems within the bike community. There still are of course. There's groups like BikePOCPNW creating more diverse group of advocates and people are just aware of things in a way that they weren't in the past. I mean, the climate crisis is becoming more and more dire all the time. This is terrible. I hope it will spur people to act. There's really no way we can continue going like this. Yeah, we have to be doing what we can. It's really too late for us to be wishy-washy about this.

Jonathan Maus ([01:02:46](#)):

Yeah, I agree.

Taylor Griggs ([01:02:47](#)):

So I hope that advocates don't become too demoralized by the negative headlines and the negative comments that will come from City Hall. I understand that people will feel demoralized, but I hope that there's a community strong enough that we can push through those feelings. And I think that there is.

Jonathan Maus ([01:03:11](#)):

Yeah, there are. We've seen some really good signs just recently so the demise of Portland's bike scene has been greatly exaggerated I'll just say. It's still there. It's still awesome. We just have to probably work harder to bring it out from the shadows and put it back into the spotlight. I'm certainly going to playing my role in doing that, and we are, Taylor and I on Bike Portland and people like... We're going to share a clip here from Jenna Phillips, Jenna Bikes, who is going to take us out on a positive note. So thanks for listening everybody.

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Jenna Phillips ([01:03:45](#)):

I feel very optimistic about the future of biking as we go into the better weather months. I think these habits are going to come back and this is the time where you can convince people that it is the better alternative.

Jonathan Maus ([01:03:57](#)):

That'll do it for this episode. Thanks to co-host Taylor Griggs and to all of you who've shared your thoughts with us so far. Be sure to check the show notes for things we mentioned in the episode. Thank you so much for listening, and to all of you who support Bike Portland, thank you very much. It's your financial contributions that make our work possible. And if you're not a subscriber yet, please do sign up as soon as you can at bikeportland.org/support. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus, and until next time, I'll see you in the streets.