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South Waterfront Greenway section opens to public

By Inka Bajandas
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The first segment of the new South Waterfront Greenway park and riverfront path is now open to the public.

Portland Parks & Recreation workers on Thursday removed the fences blocking public access to the greenway. An official grand opening for the park and trail along the Willamette River in Portland's South Waterfront District is scheduled for June 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Major construction of the \$15.5 million project wrapped up last fall, but fences remained up around the new park to allow the grass to mature. Work on the former industrial site involved removal of more than 32,000 tons of contaminated soil and debris left over from sawmills, ship building, a concrete plant and various dump sites. The restored riverbank was also made more hospitable for salmon and other wildlife.

The 1,250-foot-long riverfront trail and park with benches, lawns and public art will be the middle segment of the planned 1.2-mile South Waterfront Greenway. The Portland City Council in 2004 approved a concept plan for the park and riverbank restoration project to eventually extend from the River Forum Building on Southwest Macadam Avenue to the Marquam Bridge. When complete, the path will serve as a bicyclist and pedestrian connection between downtown Portland and the Sellwood Bridge.

Planning is under way for the north and south segments of the trail.

Portland Business Journal

Portland tests bring data into the bike commute equation

By Skip Newberry
May 18, 2015

Editors note: This is the first of a two-part post by Technology Association of Oregon President Skip Newberry exploring how the city's tech community is working to build smarter infrastructure. The next installment will appear next week.

With its naked bike ride (one of the world's largest), high percentage of bike commuters (the most of any major U.S. city), and its 319 miles of bikeways, Portland is known worldwide as a bike-friendly city.

Portland is also known as a vital hub for technology and as a city with a highly engaged, civic-minded populace. Place these factors together, and you've got the perfect building blocks for the Global Cities Project Challenge, which seeks to "advance the deployment of Internet-of-things technologies within a smart city/smart community environment."

For the past nine months, a collection of large and small companies, students, academics, and public sector employees from the region have been working on a project focusing on intelligent transportation and air quality in Portland.

Given our unique bike and tech culture, you won't be surprised that in Portland bikes aren't just for fun and commuting; to a new generation of transportation analysts and data geeks, they're also the perfect mobile data-gathering platform.

I recently had a conversation with Brad Biddle, founder of the Open Bike Initiative, and Will Henderson, CEO of Knock Software. These two bike activists, entrepreneurs and self-avowed transportation data nerds are working to find ways to make biking easier, safer and more convenient.

As part of Portland's Global Cities Project team, they are also exploring ways to use bicycles to collect and track transport and air quality information in an open, standardized format to help improve transportation decision-making in Portland.

With the population of the Greater Portland Metro expected to increase by one-third in the next 20 years and double in the next 50, most of us would agree that now is the time to start planning a smarter, more sustainable transportation infrastructure for Portland.

But how do you make smart decisions about Portland's future transport systems when we have so little solid, broad-based data on how parts of our infrastructure work today?

According to Will Henderson, we don't actually know much about how Portlanders use their bikes to commute and get themselves around. Most of the data we do have comes from the automated bike counter on the Hawthorne Bridge and from a once-yearly bike count, in which people at select locations around Portland hand tally for four hours the number of bikers they see on a single summer day.

Starting this year, the city also did a 24-hour manual biker count in mid-May. Though Portland is doing a great job to collect data by hand, they can only do so much without automated tools.

Henderson's company is developing two technologies to improve the volume and breadth of data available about Portland bike usage. The first are low-cost hardware sensors that will provide continuous counts of bike riders at various locations around Portland. These sensors use lidar technologies, which are based on laser-powered range finders (which are also used for machine-based vision in self-driving cars and remote sensing applications for drones) to detect and count bicyclists among other users of streets and trails.

Henderson's other product is a smartphone app called Ride that interacts with the sensors and provides an interface for riders to access information on real-time routing, mapping and traffic information, and for providing feedback on biking experiences. As soon as a rider finishes a trip, the app will ask him or her to rate the trip with a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to gauge the emotional response to the ride.

All this data is aggregated into a database where it provides a continuous, real-time data flow for Ride maps and traffic alerts, and is made publicly available in open formats on the web. Henderson intends that the information be easy to use.

"We want to build a tool that's as simple and intuitive to use as Google Maps," he said.

Henderson wants the app to be a map with various overlays of information from different sources, which users can toggle through to find the information they need.

The city of Portland has entered into a pilot program this summer with Henderson to place some 20 sensors in various locations in the city, with the goal of testing how effective the sensors are in the field. Henderson is optimistic for the success of the pilot.

"There's an openness in Portland to embrace the role of technology in city planning and traffic issues," he said. "Portland is really open to trying something new."