

The Oregonian

Portland officials want you to move your abandoned car

*By Noelle Crombie
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Portland transportation officials have a message for the hundreds of motorists who ditched their vehicles amid Wednesday's snow storm: Please move it when it's safe to do so.

Officials said Thursday that efforts to clear the city's main thoroughfares is complicated by abandoned cars lining those roads so they urge people to retrieve their vehicles.

"We want people to, if at all possible, use Trimet to get to your vehicle and try to get it at least off the busy streets onto a side street where you can park legally," said Dylan Rivera, a spokesman for the Portland Bureau of Transportation.

The Oregon Department of Transportation said it is trying to clear roads and highways Thursday morning. Many drivers left behind their cars late Wednesday as snow piled up, making it difficult for highway crews to keep traffic moving.

Tow trucks have worked overnight to get cars off of highways. In some cases, state crews nudged cars out of the travel lane and into the shoulder, said Don Hamilton, an agency spokesman.

If you left behind your car on a state highway and want to find out if it has been towed, call 503-283-5859.

Willamette Week

5 Things You Didn't Know About Multnomah County's Homeless Count

*By Nigel Jaquiss
December 14, 2016*

Every two years, on one night in January, volunteers and government workers fan out across the country to do what's called the "point-in-time" homeless count. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requires the count and establishes rules for how it should be conducted.

Since October, 40-year-old Ryan Deibert, who works for the city of Portland and Multnomah County's Joint Office of Homeless Services, has been preparing for this year's effort, which is set to take place Jan. 25.

Deibert has done four previous tallies, including one in 2015, when Multnomah County counted 3,801 people who met the federal definition of homeless—872 were in emergency shelters, 1,042 in transitional housing and 1,887 "unsheltered." That total was little changed from 2013. Here's what Deibert says about the count, results of which are to be published by May.

It's a big job: Hundreds of volunteers from more than 20 organizations take to the streets, clipboards in hand.

Outreach workers know many places where the homeless sleep, but finding them all requires some detective work. "One of our first challenges is trying to identify all the places where people are camping," Deibert says.

Workers here try to contact every person, rather than estimating.

Multnomah County is compact and relatively flat so this is easier to do than in many counties with large populations. The volunteers divide the county into grids and reach out to people in camps, in soup kitchens and on the street. "We also ask multiple times in multiple sites," Deibert says.

The volunteers record basic information to avoid duplication.

To preserve privacy, counters write down a homeless person's first initial, first three letters of the last name, and age. They also ask people how long they've been homeless, and record the number of people who refuse to cooperate. "We get some pushback, but we rely heavily on outreach workers who already have relationships with people who are homeless," Deibert says.

The one-night count actually continues for a week.

Outreach workers will ask people where they slept on the night of Jan. 25 to capture any they missed on the night designated for the count. "We know we don't reach everybody that night," Deibert says. "We know it's an undercount."

Counties must participate in HUD's process or lose out on federal funding.

There's no reward, however, for finding extra people. "The count's required, but it has nothing to do with how many resources we get," Deibert says.

The Portland Mercury

The City Knows How to Curb Deaths on Outer Division

By Dirk VanderHart

December 14, 2016

ON OUTER Southeast Division Street, the traffic violence plays out in a tragic loop.

Just before 7 pm on December 7, a 51-year-old man named Myit Oo was fatally struck near Division and 156th, not far from the spot where 25-year-old Joe Stone was killed in 2013.

Kristi Finney-Dunn knows Stone's story too well. The man's mother, Kim, is part of Finney-Dunn's group, Oregon & SW Washington Families for Safe Streets. It's a coalition of people who've lost loved ones to crashes.

So the first thing Finney-Dunn did when she learned of yet another fatal crash in that spot last Wednesday was call Kim Stone. She wanted to say, "I know this must be hard for you."

She'd learn precisely how hard mere minutes later, when police reported the second fatal accident on Southeast Division in a matter of hours. This one occurred where the busy five-lane road passes SE 87th—very near where, in 2011, a drunk driver ran Finney-Dunn's son Dustin off his bicycle.

“We’re pretty much reeling,” she said Saturday afternoon, pointing out the spot where her son was killed. While she spoke, 30 or so demonstrators used hay bales to shut down two travel lanes of Division in a bid to get city officials to take action.

Portland police note that neither man killed last week was crossing Division at a marked crosswalk, a factor that might well have played a role in the incidents. Activists say it’s more than that.

Fatal crashes repeating in the same spots along Division are “more than just a coincidence,” Jessica Engelman, an organizer with the group BikeLoudPDX, told people at Saturday’s protest. “That’s a sign these are problem areas.”

Last month, Portland City Council adopted a Vision Zero Action Plan, aimed at eliminating serious traffic-related injuries and deaths by 2025. BikeLoud and its supporters argue outer Division is a great place to start.

They say the road has been allowed to remain needlessly dangerous east of SE 82nd, even as the Portland Bureau of Transportation recently made a portion of the road west of 82nd drastically safer.

In 2013, the city spent a little more than \$100,000 to restripe Division from SE 60th to 80th. The change reduced the street from two travel lanes in each direction to one, and gave PBOT the room to install wide bike lanes in each direction.

In October 2014, PBOT also formally lowered the speed limit on the same stretch, from 35 mph to 30, but by then, drivers were already moving slower. “Crashes are expected to decrease about 30 percent and speeding has decreased 56 percent, yet there has been little change in travel time over the 20 blocks,” a May 2014 PBOT report said.

In fact, that modified portion of Division has exceeded expectations. PBOT says crashes were reduced by 50 percent during the year after it was modified, though traffic flow didn’t change [PDF].

“We’re here to say, ‘What you did down there you need to do up here,’” Engelman said Saturday. Then her group set about creating a sense of what that might look like.

For six blocks in each direction—from SE 84th to 90th—the protestors set hay bales, cones, and signs (“Lives > Speed”) in the outermost travel lanes, forcing drivers to use a single lane each way.

It went about how you’d expect. Some honked in support. Others called out things like “Bullshit!” and “Get that out of the road!” A few sped down the center turn lane, or veered into the bike lanes to dodge the makeshift barriers.

One man, who declined to give his name, got out of his truck while patronizing a plant nursery, calling the protestors “fucking idiots” and saying the road was meant for cars.

He’d cooled down somewhat after arguing with an activist, but remained unconvinced. “I’m just not sure how effective this is,” he said, reasoning: “There’s a mortality rate associated with everything.”

Despite the frustration, Division’s a hazard for motorists, too. Of the 30 “high crash corridors” PBOT has identified throughout the city, Division causes drivers serious injuries the most often.

It's also the fourth-most dangerous street in town for pedestrians, according to city figures, and the second-most dangerous for cyclists.

Of course, cyclists and pedestrians, without the benefits of a car's protective cocoon, are most easily injured. Of five traffic deaths on Division this year, four have been pedestrians. One was a driver.

Despite all of this, PBOT's not likely to grant BikeLoud's demands.

Not long after the activists departed on Saturday, city employees stopped to clean up the protestors' handiwork. "After dark, the hay bales would have presented a considerable hazard," PBOT spokesperson John Brady says.

Brady says a "road diet"—as a reduction in travel lanes is often called—isn't practical for this part of Division, which PBOT thinks is too wide to make such a change effective. Instead, the city's considering installing medians, pedestrian islands, and crosswalk beacons to help make conditions safer.

It's also planning to install speed cameras at Division and 156th in order to force people to slow down. In addition, the city wants to educate the community on road safety, and will seek the state's permission to lower speeds on "sections of outer Division," Brady says.

Speeds are currently set at 35 mph on much of that stretch. Activists have pushed for 20 mph.

"They need to slow the speeds down, and people in cars need to pay attention," Finney-Dunn said Saturday, waving a picture of her son at passing motorists. "I'm not saying pedestrians can't do better, or bikes can't do better, but cars are what kill."

Hall Monitor—A Dull Blade?

By Dirk VanderHart

December 14, 2016

Here are a few things we know about living (or trying to live) in this city.

Low-income Portlanders are being pushed to the margins. In fact, the latest completely depressing report from the Portland Housing Bureau indicates persistent rent increases have rendered every neighborhood in the city unavailable to the average black, Native American, Latino, and single-mother-led household.

At the same time, we're short roughly 25,000 affordable units, a small fraction of which will be addressed by the \$258.4 million housing bond voters approved last month. Salaries aren't rising at anywhere near the rate of monthly rents (which are up an average of 30 percent since 2012). Buying a home is even more out of reach. Most people believe homelessness is on the rise.

Everyone agrees something's got to change. The bad news is that one of the biggest tweaks on the horizon for adding affordable units might be a flop for years to come.

On Tuesday, Portland City Council held its first formal hearing on Inclusionary Housing (IH), the much-pined-for tool Portland won permission to enact at the state legislature earlier this year. Essentially, it allows officials to demand some of the affordable housing that the market is neglecting to produce.

Befitting the urgency here, the city has worked for much of the year to concoct a robust plan—one that council may adopt next week.

As written, the policy requires affordable units where many other cities' laws make them voluntary. In new housing projects of 20 units or more, the IH policy would mandate one-fifth of the units be affordable for people making 80 percent of the city's median family income (\$52,800 for a household of three). They'll be required to maintain that affordability for 99 years.

In exchange, developers can tap a list of incentives—including increased density allowances and tax and fee abatements—intended to help developers offset the costs of foregoing profits. The City Budget Office estimates Portland will lose between \$4,674 and \$57,529 in revenues per affordable unit.

If it strikes the right balance, plenty of people say Portland's IH plan could be a huge help in keeping neighborhoods diverse and economically viable. Boosters include labor unions, bike advocates, academics, and environmental activists.

"We're on the threshold of doing something really considerable for the city of Portland," Portland Housing Bureau director Kurt Creager told council on Tuesday.

Problem is: No one can say when that help will be on the way.

As the drum for IH has pounded ever louder, developers (who are skeptical of the proposal, of course) have pounced. According to the Portland Tribune, there are permit requests with the city for roughly 14,000 units—all of which are filed early enough to completely skip affordability requirements. "Historic supply," one developer called it.

"We may very well see so many projects beat the... deadline that for the next several years, the bulk of development done in this city is not going to be inclusionary housing," Commissioner Nick Fish said Tuesday.

Portland needs tools, and this new one might not be sharp for years to come.