



The Oregonian

Bicyclists on Broadway to get a lane of their own

A "cycletrack" through the PSU campus would separate riders from motor vehicles

Friday, May 01, 2009

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On Tuesday night, hometown rock band The Decemberists appeared on "The Colbert Report" and gave a national TV shout-out to Portland as a "big biking town."

On Thursday, Portland Mayor Sam Adams made it a little a bigger, promising to remove one of three automobile lanes on Southwest Broadway for a dedicated "cycletrack" near Portland State University.

The 7-foot-wide bikeway would cut through the heart of the university campus between Clay and Jackson streets. Parking spaces on the west side of the street would be moved several feet to the left, away from the sidewalk, creating a barrier of parked cars between cyclists and auto traffic. There would also be a 3-foot painted "shy zone" between parking and the bikeway, allowing people to get out of cars without disrupting bike traffic.

If it works to alleviate conflicts between motorists and cyclists, city transportation officials said separated bikeways could pop up on other busy streets.

"Part of the intent here," said Rob Burchfield, the Portland Bureau of Transportation's head traffic engineer, "is to demonstrate how something like this would work."

Burchfield is confident the experiment will show that cycletracks, common in European cities, improve traffic safety and flow.

Adams, whose list of "First 100 Days" promises included a downtown cycletrack, announced his plans at a PSU sustainability conference.

As transportation commissioner, Adams has the authority to push the project forward on his own, his office said. What's more, much of the cost, expected to be about \$80,000, will come from savings in this year's transportation budget.

Initially, the exclusive bikeway was targeted for the North Park Blocks. But the Portland Fire Bureau opposed the plan, saying there wouldn't be enough room for emergency vehicles.

Broadway might be a better location anyway, said Roger Geller, the Bureau of Transportation's bicycle coordinator. "The current condition for bike commuters on Broadway is substandard," he said. "There's narrow parking, a narrow travel way, a narrow bike lane."

Geller said the cycletrack would provide "more space and comfort" for both motorists and cyclists approaching Portland State, one of the city's most popular bike destinations.

Another plus: Transportation officials said the targeted stretch of Broadway is under capacity and includes no major intersections.

In North America, cycletracks are novel but hardly new. New York City has one in the heart of Manhattan, and planners are incorporating the concept into making a large part of Times Square car-free. Chicago,

meanwhile, is eyeing an elevated cycletrack through a heavy-trafficked part of the city.

In Portland, the \$5.4 million Northeast Cully Boulevard improvement project, set to begin construction soon, will have a paved cycletrack from Killingsworth to Prescott streets resembling those in Montreal.

But the Broadway cycletrack, slated for completion in August, would be the city's first because it will require considerably less engineering and cost. Just, Burchfield said, "some new paint and moving a few signs."

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