



# the reflector

promoting health for people and the planet

A Newsletter from the OHSU Bike Commuter Group

October 2004

## Biking in Amsterdam

Portland has been touted as being one of the best cities for riding a bicycle in the US. The Reflector wondered just how Portland stacks up against other cities in the world. Carol Orange, who works for Oracle spent twelve years living and commuting to work by bicycle in Amsterdam. She currently commutes from Northeast Portland to Downtown.

**The Reflector:** How did the physical structure of Amsterdam change your experience of bicycle commuting in Portland?

**Carol:** It changed it completely. There is nowhere in Amsterdam that is hard to get to by bike. This is impacted by the compactness of the metropolitan area. I lived and worked on one edge, and the furthest I ever had to go for anything was under 1 hour from home. In addition, all neighborhoods have shops, which tend to be grouped. You can get to the grocery store, the post office, the cheese shop, the butcher, the pet shop, the pharmacy, the handy stuff shop, etc., all within five minutes by bike from home. Because the stores are close together, you can hit several without



Bike parking, Amsterdam-style. Safety in numbers!

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## november resources

The Bike/Walk PAC was formed in August 2004 to serve as the political arm of Oregon's bicycling and pedestrian community. Its goals include working to elect local and statewide candidates who will represent the interests of

Oregon's bicyclists and pedestrians, advocating for funding for facilities that benefit bicyclists and pedestrians, improving biking and walking safety, promoting Oregon's image as a leader in bicycling and walking, and endorsing ballot measures that impact bicycling and walking in Oregon. For more information, <http://bikewalkpac.org/>.



## Curbing Obesity

In May 2004, a conference drew an unusually diverse audience. Participants included city planners, architects, physicians, environmentalists, meteorologists, dietitians, social activists, policy planners, and politicians. The conference, titled, Obesity and the Built Environment: Improving Public Health Through Community Design, was held in Washington DC to discuss the "built environment" and the ramifications it holds on our daily lives.

In a nutshell, the built environment includes just about everything you can think of: environments developed by humans, public policy, political action, and access to things like organic food, places to exercise, or even quiet, leisure time. The focus at the conference was the way we build our environment, how it contributes to obesity, and how it can be modified to waylay the increasing incidence of obesity.

Participants concluded that the built environment in the US has led to a sedentary lifestyle and easy access to unhealthy food. James Hill, MD, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Boulder exclaimed, "It's surprising to me that in this environment anybody can avoid being obese." Three important aspects of the built environment that require attention in relation to obesity are the cost of healthy food, the state of school cafeterias, and neighborhood and city development.

**Food Economics.** In a fast food nation, Americans have grown accustomed to easy access to food high in calories and fat and low in beneficial nutrients while gaining one or two pounds every year. Affordability and accessibility are to blame. Fast or processed food is cheap and easy to find or prepare, while nutritional supplements and low-fat meats are luxury items for most working families. Although a diet based on whole foods, such as whole grains, legumes, and produce is relatively inexpensive, food preparation is perceived as time-consuming by most Americans.

**The School Lunch Program.** Originally, the National School Lunch Act (1946) intended to eliminate nutritional deficiencies in military recruits. Today, the program has devolved into a fast food and junk food campaign to instill brand loyalty in children. "If marketing is the curriculum

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of our culture,” Alex Molnar, PhD, Arizona State University, Tempe, said, “corporate America has effectively turned teachers and principals into agents for advertisers” through fundraisers that sell candy, corporate sponsorships of educational programs, and “pouring contracts” with soda companies to fund facility projects. An alternative offered by Robert Gottlieb, PhD, Occidental College, Los Angeles, California is the Farm to School Program that would incorporate local organic produce into school lunches and close the loop with field trips to the farms to learn about food production and nutrition while getting a bit of exercise.

**Neighborhood and City Development.** As one of the most bike- and pedestrian-friendly cities in the nation, Portlanders should be well aware of how the built environment can contribute to a reduction of obesity. Sidewalks, bike lanes, and parks encourage physical activity. Every hour in a bus or car per day is associated with a 6% increase chance in developing obesity, while each kilometer walked daily correlates with 4.8% reduction in the likelihood of obesity. Yet another reason to bike to work!

**Source:** Richardson, Kristin. Conference Report “Highlights of Obesity and the Built Environment: Improving Public Health Through Community Design,” held May 24-26, Washington, DC. *Medscape Diabetes & Endocrinology* 6(2), 2004.



**Oct 12 Bike Repair at OHSU and 14 Revolution Bike Works** available for bike repairs, please contact by phone (971) 563-1820 or email [repairs@revolutionbikeworks.com](mailto:repairs@revolutionbikeworks.com) for estimates.

**Oct 14 September Bike Commute Challenge Celebration**  
BridgePort Brew Pub  
1313 NW Marshall, 6 - 8 pm

**Oct 20 Know Your Rights Legal Clinic for Bicyclists**  
Presented by Ray Thomas, a Portland bike lawyer. Noon, location TBA. Write to [bike@ohsu.edu](mailto:bike@ohsu.edu) to register or for more information.

## Your Stories

Anytime I leave OHSU between 4:30-6:30 pm I can cruise down Terwilliger passing all of the cars. The 4-5 mile commute home to SE Portland is the same as driving time-wise, and I arrive home refreshed and awakened for the evening, leaving the stress of the workday behind. The commute in the morning takes a total of 15 minutes longer than driving, and I shower at work, having completed my exercise for the day and feeling energized to start my day.



–J.R., OBGYN

I commute from near Lloyd Center, 4.95 miles according to MapQuest. In the morning, when I’m riding up the hill, the commute takes the same amount of time as if I ride Tri-Met — about 35 minutes. Going home, however, is where biking really rocks. I run out the door at closing time, climb on the bike, and coast down the hill in the bike lane, passing all the cars and buses that are backed up in traffic. Typically, I make it home in 25 minutes, as opposed to 45+ via bus. If I’m feeling lazy, I hop the MAX at Pioneer Square and ride it over the bridge to my stop. The nice thing, too, is that if I work late, when the buses aren’t running as often, I don’t have to worry about having to wait 20 minutes at the bus stop. The bike has all the individual convenience of a car with the bonus of being great exercise.



–Ruth

I love it when I am riding down Terwilliger in the bike lane, beginning my 20-minute, 6-mile trip home, and I pass a long line of cars backed up the hill from the intersection of Terwilliger and SW Sam Jackson. Sometimes I estimate that I will reach the Hawthorne Bridge before some of the cars that I pass make it through that light at the intersection.



–Kim, Behavioral Neuroscience

I have been an OHSU bike commuter for over 9 years. I ride year round with very few exceptions. The only day that I was late to pick up my daughter at daycare, I had driven my car. Traffic was so slow coming down the hill at 5:40, I didn’t make it by 6 pm.

–Sharon Susanka

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unlocking and relocking your bike. Meanwhile, it's easy to get to a train that provides excellent frequent service to other places, so it's very easy to live without a car at all, which I did for 12 years. Meanwhile, the center of the city is a meeting point, easy to get to from all directions. It's where friends meet and is extremely bike friendly. Most people who drive into Amsterdam park their cars on the outskirts and walk in because it's too much of a hassle to drive a car in the center. Every few years, there is talk of making the center car free altogether. Some cities in Holland have that feature. As it is, there are several streets in Amsterdam that cars are not allowed on.

**The Reflector:** How is the culture different to accommodate bicycle commuting better or worse than over here?

**Carol:** It's so much better there! I always hear people saying how great Portland is for bike commuters. In fact it's awful. Every day I'm glad I don't get killed. It only looks good compared with similar conditions in other US cities. Here are some physical differences: In Amsterdam, areas with significant traffic where bikes must share the road (sometimes there is an alternative safer route for bikes - often a shorter one), there is a good bike lane - it's wider than we have here, it's painted red so everyone knows its for bikes and not cars, and quite frequently it is separated from the road by a curb, sidewalk, or other barrier. Hence it is a real path just for bikes. Many places in Portland with bike routes do not have safe intersections. Consider NE 39th and Glisan. In Holland, if you are following a bike route, there will be a safe passage through traffic areas if they can't be avoided. In areas like the center where the roads are narrow and there isn't room for a separate path, the bikes have full rights to the road.

Also culturally, I notice is that bikes are the lowest class on the road. Take the Hawthorne bridge: bikes have to share the path with pedestrians who have the right away. This is true all over the place. The roads are designed so that the bikes are the ones that have to have to slow down - either to get around bad traffic locations or to get around pedestrians, skate boards, skaters, etc. If, as a culture, we really value the bike for transportation, we need significant improvement in bicycle conditions on the road in Portland.

Click here for  
information on the  
Kryptonite U-lock recall

One more cultural thing: Because biking is so widespread in Holland, virtually everyone there either bikes, or if they do use a car, 75% (at least) of the people they know are biking including their kids, spouse, siblings and parents. When anyone on a bike could in fact be someone you know and love, you are always more considerate and careful.

**The Reflector:** Obesity in America has been a frequent topic in the media lately. In your experience, did the physical layout of Amsterdam appear to contribute less to societal obesity of than, say, Portland?

**Carol:** Yes. Because you can't take your car everywhere, and because the majority of people are moving about by walking, biking, taking a bus or a tram, they are always getting exercise. This is true of the whole country, not just Amsterdam. So rather than having a few people who get themselves to the gym, the entire society is getting some basic exercise every day, lifelong.

*If you are interested in getting involved and making Portland a friendlier place to bike contact the City of Portland at <http://www.trans.ci.portland.or.us/bicycles/maintain.htm>, join the BTA and vote for candidates who care about bikes: [www.bikewalkpac.org](http://www.bikewalkpac.org).*



Thanks to Krista  
L. Wehrley and Analene  
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during the month of September  
to support the BTA and the  
OHSU Bike Commuters Group. If  
you would like more information  
on how to support these bike  
groups or the FlexCar program,  
please write to the OHSU Bike  
Commuters Group at  
[bike@ohsu.edu](mailto:bike@ohsu.edu).

**The Bike Commuter Group (BCG) promotes bicycling as a healthy mode of transportation that benefits individuals and the environment. For more information about the BCG or to find ways to get involved, contact us at [bike@ohsu.edu](mailto:bike@ohsu.edu) or visit our website at [www.ohsu.edu/bike/](http://www.ohsu.edu/bike/).**