

# 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## DESCHUTES COUNTY BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

20 May 2024

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### 1. Overview

The mission of Deschutes County Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee (BPAC) is to promote and encourage safe bicycling and walking as a significant means of transportation in Deschutes County. The committee serves to advise Deschutes County, the cities of Bend, LaPine, Redmond, and Sisters, as well as the Oregon Department of Transportation. BPAC is comprised of 13 volunteer citizen members with regional representation from across Deschutes County. The committee holds monthly meetings to discuss current bicycle and pedestrian projects and programs, provide input, and advise local agencies concerning bicycling and walking interests and priorities. BPAC meetings are open to the public and include agency representatives as non-voting participants.

### 2. Safe Sidewalk Awards

BPAC created the Safe Sidewalks Awards in 2006 to recognize those businesses and property owners who go beyond the legal requirements to remove snow, ice and debris from sidewalks. This year we are honored to present Safe Sidewalks Awards to the following individuals and organizations:

- Brian Earls - Shell Station and Highlander Hotel, La Pine
- Deschutes County Facilities Department - Lee Randall, downtown Bend
- Ernie Kanning, NW Bend
- Mike Chambless, SE Bend
- The Miller Lumber Company, NE Bend
- Redmond Proficiency Academy, downtown Redmond
- Trinity Episcopal Church, downtown Bend

### **3. E-Bikes and Micro-mobility Situation Update**

After a fifteen year-old was killed in traffic while riding his e-bike in Bend, a new state law about e-bikes, Trenton's Law, was passed and signed by the governor this March. The law, sponsored by State Representative Emerson Levy of Bend, changed Oregon's 27 year old definition of e-bikes to conform with the three-class definition used by 36 other states. Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes are limited to speeds of 20 mph or less. Class 1 e-bikes use the electric motor only when the rider is pedaling while Class 2 e-bikes allow the rider to engage a throttle without pedaling. Class 3 requires pedal assist with no throttle but allows speeds up to 28 mph. The law reaffirms that riders must be 16 years old or older. All local legislators voted in favor.

A second bill would have established a task force to study all aspects of micro-mobility to lay the groundwork for more extensive reform of rules relating to e-bikes, e-scooters, e-skate boards, and one-wheel electric devices or anything else that can be thought up along those lines. That bill died in committee but is likely to be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

In response to the new law, the Bend-La Pine School District established a new policy banning students younger than 16 from riding e-bikes and e-scooters to school. The policy lays out a series of steps to involve the parents if students younger than 16 do bring e-bikes or e-scooters onto school grounds.

The Deschutes National Forest started an environmental analysis to examine whether Class 1 e-bikes might be allowed on their trails. Public engagement will occur early this summer of 2024 and they plan to have a decision this fall of 2024.

There doesn't seem to be a community consensus on any of these issues. Some in the community think that children should be encouraged to walk and ride bikes, including e-bikes, to school citing benefits including improved academic performance and physical health and decreased traffic congestion around schools. Others are concerned that children put themselves and others at risk by riding on sidewalks, ignoring traffic laws, not wearing helmets, and riding with multiple people on the bike. Use of e-bikes on forest trails engenders a similar split in public opinion.

There has been very little movement on this issue over the last year except that public discussion towards resolution of some of the related issues has begun. Casual observations suggest that the use of e-bikes and other micro-mobility devices is growing fast. The development of rules and community norms to help make this transportation mode a useful and safe part of transportation system is lagging behind the development and use of this technology.

#### **4. Central Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Summit**

The 10th Central Oregon Bicycle & Pedestrian Summit was held in Sunriver on October 26 and was attended by over 40 people. This unique event brings together Central Oregon residents, transportation planners, city and county officials and experts from around the state to review what has been accomplished and what still needs to be done to make walking, bicycling, and using transit safe, comfortable, and accessible for everyone in Central Oregon. Since the summit started in 2011 it has been held in communities all across Jefferson, Crook, and Deschutes counties.

Topics at this year's summit included:

- Proposed connector pathways between Sunriver, Bend and La Pine
- Sunriver Panel
- E-Bikes and Safety
- Trail Connectivity and Deschutes County Transportation System Plan
- Bicycle Commuter Stories
- Safe Streets For All
- ADA access in Path Design

#### **5. Transportation Systems Plan Update 2020-2040**

2023 was an important year for the Deschutes County Transportation Systems Plan (TSP), a plan required by the State of Oregon for their major roads, as well as other modes of travel such as bike, bus and railroad. The TSP identifies roadway segments and intersections that will need improvements based on future traffic volumes and current land zoning. For BPAC this has presented an excellent opportunity to engage in conversations that promote and encourage safe bicycling and walking as a significant means of transportation in Deschutes County.

- In 2019 BPAC proposed to the Board of County Commissioners that there be an increased focus on "Lower stress connecting routes between municipalities" and "Connecting Trail Systems for Transportation". BPAC were encouraged to proceed.
- From 2019 to 2022 BPAC met with municipalities, Deschutes County, park districts and agencies, identifying bicycle and pedestrian connections needed for safe transportation. This resulted in a "vision" for a safe, low-stress bicycle and pedestrian travel network and over 30 specific "connections" for travel between municipalities and recreational areas.

In the first half of 2023 a draft TSP update was presented to the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners for review and adoption. BPAC had worked with county staff and their consultants to draft language that included bicycling and walking in the plan as transportation options. This was the first time the long-term plan called out the need for safe bicycling and walking as significant transportation options, and identified separated facilities (such as multi-use paths) as the preferred option. Having these connections included in the TSP does not identify specific routes, provide funding, or guarantee that they will be built, but

provides a foundation and encouragement for agencies to propose projects and apply for funding.

The draft plan also contained a list of envisioned low stress connections between communities and recreation areas. This is an important milestone for the county as its population grows in years to come. Additional activities BPAC participated in to support bike/ped transportation in the updated TSP include:

- August 2024 - Submitting written public comment in support of the Draft TSP Update as written
- November 2024 – Several BPAC members provided testimony at the public hearing on the 29th

In March of 2024, the county commission approved the TSP including the connections between communities and recreation areas. The new TSP will go into effect on June 18, 2024.

## **6. Community Connections**

The idea of community connections as described in the county's new Transportation System Plan is gaining momentum.

Planning for the path from **Bend to Lava Butte** is complete. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and project design are in progress. County zoning approval has been granted but that approval has been appealed to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA). ODOT is the lead agency and other agencies are involved. BPAC is monitoring this project.

The path from **Lava Butte to La Pine** is in the planning process and BPAC has a representative on the citizen advisory committee.. Three conceptual alternative routes have been developed and the public was asked for comment. A preferred alternative has not yet been selected. No decisions have been reached yet. Again, ODOT is the lead agency and other agencies are involved.

ODOT has begun preliminary work on the **Sisters-Redmond-Bend** active transportation plan. The focus is on using the right-of-way for major roads between these cities. They plan to hire a consultant this spring or summer to help develop the plan. Other agencies will be involved in the planning effort. BPAC will be heavily involved in this effort.

## 7. Letters of Support

BPAC periodically submits letters in support of grant applications by agencies for projects in the county. We submitted three letters in 2023:

- In **March**, we submitted a letter supporting Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) grant application for Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) for funding for multi-use paths along US 97. One path would go south from Redmond to a mobile home park on the west side of the highway. The other would be north from Bend to a mobile home park on the east side of the highway. The grant application was unsuccessful.
- In **June**, Cascades East Transit requested a letter in support of a Transportation Growth Management (TGM) grant from ODOT to help develop a capital plan. Following advice from ODOT, they did not pursue the TGM grant but are using Statewide Transportation Improvement Funds (STIF) instead.
- In **July**, the Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT) and the Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization BMPO requested a letter of support for a federal Safe Streets 4 All grant. They were awarded \$144,000 which will help fund the Deschutes County Transportation Safety Action Plan.