

I live in Bethany, outside Beaverton, and I regularly ride my bike in Washington County for shopping, errands, and commuting to my nearest MAX station for work.

The portion of my riding that I can do on off-street paths is FANTASTIC. The portion that I have to do on major traffic-filled roads is TERRIFYING.

More of my neighbors would join me riding their bikes if there was a better way to do it. We only have to go somewhere like Sunriver or Fort Stevens State Park to see the impact of safe paths--if we build them, people will ride on them. But they have to be truly connected to where people want to go, and welcoming enough that a responsible parent would send their middle-school kid to ride there alone.

Middle schoolers are like an "indicator species" for safe bike infrastructure. Would you, or would anyone, send a middle schooler out to ride? If not, why not? Fix those things, and we'll build a truly interconnected bike network for all ages and abilities. A stripe of paint by the side of the road is NOT safe or welcoming.

My challenge for the Oregon Legislature is this: pick just ONE middle school, somewhere in Oregon, and make its catchment area a test project. Build truly safe, protected, Dutch-style bicycle infrastructure, so that every child can safely ride a bike to school. And watch the community change. Watch the car drop-off lines shrink. Watch kids and families ride to sports practice, to work, to parks, to the grocery store, to friends' houses. Watch kids' grades rise because of daily exercise. Watch the property values rise. Watch obesity levels shrink as people of all ages safely and easily integrate exercise into their lives. Watch that one middle school area truly thrive with businesses, health, and independence. Watch people transform their lives, and not just the middle schoolers and their families. And then ask ourselves, why don't we do this everywhere? So I challenge you. Do it for ONE middle school. And watch what happens.

Sincerely,

Tina Ricks  
Bethany