Active Transportation in Mount Vernon

Active Transportation

- Background
- Guidelines
- Barriers
- Funding
- Benefits
- Car Culture
- Next Steps

Background - Definition

Active Transportation = People-Powered

+ Electric wheelchairs & bicycles

Background - Importance

1/3 of people don't drive.

Different "Types"

Commuting

- Utility trips, from A to B
- Local streets

Recreation

- Long distance, touring, for fun, organized rides
- Regional routes

Background - Facilities

Guidelines

National Level

2010 Policy Statement on Bicycle & Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations & Recommendations:

Incorporate safe and convenient walking and bicycling facilities into transportation projects.

State Level

ESSB 5186:

Requires the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan to include a pedestrian and bicycle component.

[RCW 36.70A.070(6)(a)(7)]

Guidelines

Complete Streets:

ESSB 1071

To encourage local governments to adopt Complete Streets Policy designed to provide safe access to all users.

Barriers – Facilities

Before

After

Barriers – Land Use

space required to transport **60 people**

car

bus

bicycle

Funding

Local streets have always been largely paid for by local taxpayers, often through property taxes.

Funding – Space/Cost Efficient

Funding

- Safe Routes to School
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Grants
- Complete Streets

More $$ every year!

- Transportation Benefit District

Benefits - Health

- Reduced chronic disease
- Better mental health
- Longer lives

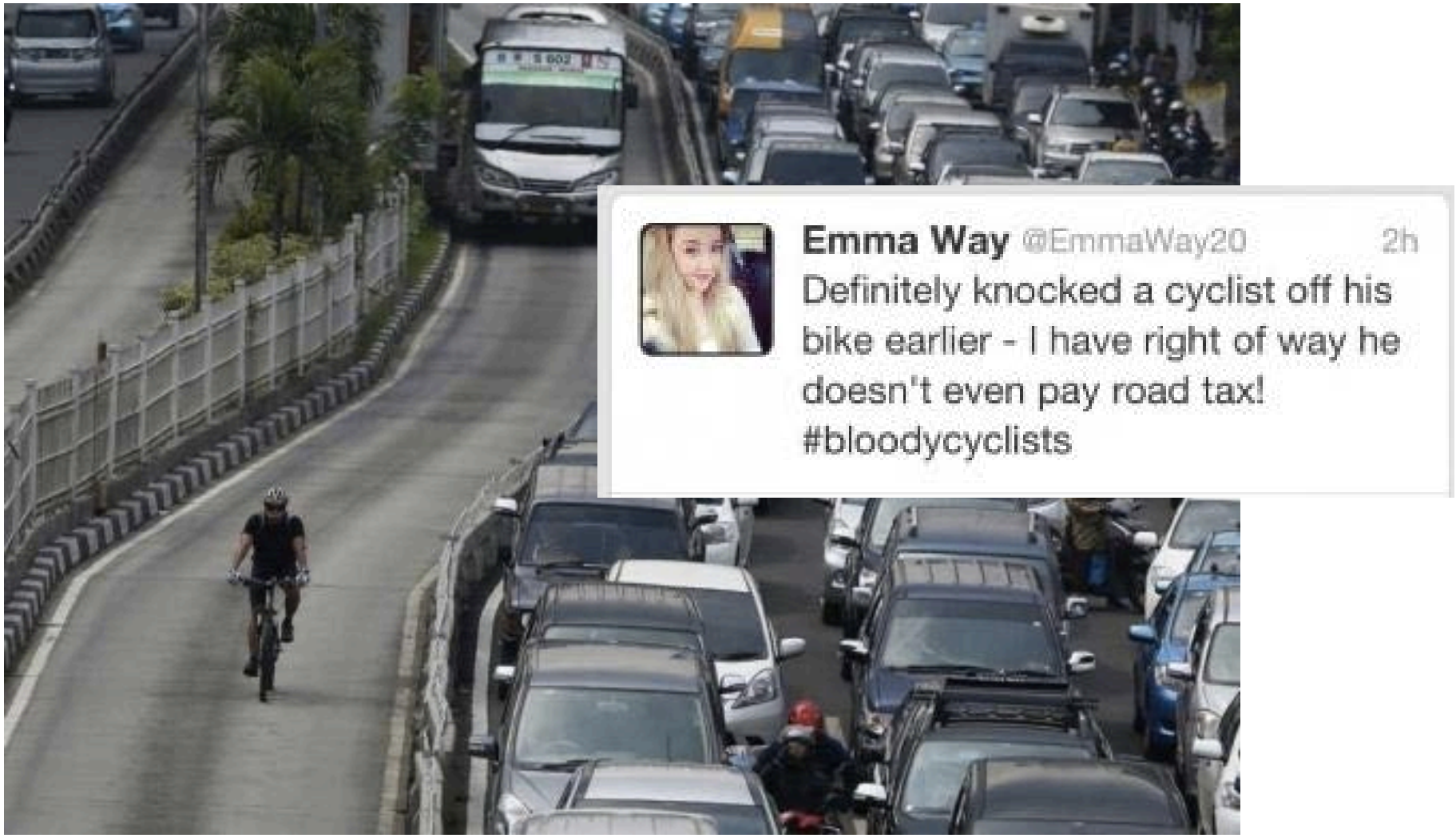
Benefits - Economy

Recreational cyclists spend

$3.1 Billion statewide annually.

Active transportation is good for business.

Car Culture


Emma Way @EmmaWay20 2h
Definitely knocked a cyclist off his bike earlier - I have right of way he doesn't even pay road tax! #bloodycyclists

Next Steps

- Complete Streets Policy
- Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan
- Safe Routes to School
- Bicycle Friendly Community
- Champion safe streets for all!

Thank You

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Active Transportation: People Powered Mobility

Slide 1: title

Presentation prepared for the Mount Vernon Planning Commission meeting, June 21, 2016.

This script was prepared to accompany a PowerPoint presentation made by Liz McNett Crowl, Skagit Healthy Communities Coordinator.

Slide 2: Outline of presentation

Background: Slide 3

What is non-motorized or active transportation? (Definition)

Active transportation primarily refers to walking and biking, but also includes wheelchairs, scooters, skateboards, skating, strollers, runners, and even extends to equestrian use and horse and buggy, although those are more rural uses. Anything that is people-powered, is active. The exceptions are motorized wheelchairs and E-bikes. Electric bicycles are becoming more popular because they give freedom of mobility with less strain on the body, they go further and faster than a normal bike, and they can give a much needed boost up steep hills.

Why is it important? (Importance) Slide 4

I will talk about the economic and health benefits of active transportation in a moment, but first, I want to emphasize that active transportation is not a fringe group of lycra-wearing older white men on their $3,000-dollar road bikes. Over 30% of our population don't drive, as in cannot or chooses not to drive a car. This includes children who need to get to school or a friends house, older adults who want to age in place, low-income families who can't afford a car, individuals that have lost their driving privileges and an increasing amount of all ages of adults who are choosing to bike and walk as their mode of transportation.

At last night's County Commissioners hearing, a man shared the story of his 24-year old son who chooses to use his bike as his mode of transportation, he chooses not to get a driver's license. They used to live in Big Lake, and because it wasn't safe to bike to the City, they moved to Mount Vernon. *Because of their transportation choices, they moved.* Transportation is not an

afterthought for some people, and this City has the opportunity and responsibility to plan a street network that is inclusive and safe for all transportation choices.

Active Transportation Facilities: Overview Slide 5

People bike and walk for many reasons, you can classify different types of users. This is simplified:

1. Transportation; or commuting utility trips from home, to work, school, shopping, and primarily utilizing local streets. Children walking and biking to school.
2. Recreational; health, fitness, social, fun: riding for distance or touring, walking the dog, participating in organized rides or events and perhaps using regional routes.

Slide 6

When we talk about active transportation facilities we are meaning bikeways, walkways, and non-motorized facilities: sidewalks, ADA curb cuts and accessibility, shared-use paths and trails, standard bike lanes, buffered bike lanes, protected bike lanes, bicycle boulevards, and access to transit.

There are a variety of street types and what might be appropriate on an arterial would not be necessary or appropriate on a local neighborhood street with light residential traffic. Different conditions, different solutions, but all users are considered and planned for and there will be safe connections and pathways throughout the community that allow for all modes to get to their destinations. But to be clear, while we like separated trails, it is important to note that most facilities are shared, common roadways.

Guidelines for Active Transportation: Slide 7

The United States Department of Transportation released their policy statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations in 2010. The purpose of this document is to reflect on the Department's support for the development of fully integrated active transportation networks. They state that walking and bicycling facilities foster safer,

more livable, family-friendly communities; promote physical activity and health; and reduce vehicle emissions and fuel use. The DOT policy is to incorporate safe and convenient walking and bicycling facilities into transportation projects by:

- Considering walking and bicycling as equals with other transportation modes
- Ensuring that there are transportation choices for people of all ages and abilities, especially children

Did not read:

- Going beyond minimum design standards
- Integrating bicycle and pedestrian accommodation on new, rehabilitated, and limited access bridges
- Collecting data on walking and biking trips
- Setting mode share targets for walking and bicycling and tracking them over time, and
- Improving active transportation facilities during maintenance projects.

At the state level, Senate Bill (ESSB) 5186 requires the Transportation Element of a comprehensive plan to "include a pedestrian and bicycle component to include collaborative efforts to identify and designate planned improvements for pedestrian and bicycle facilities and corridors that address and encourage enhanced community access and promote healthy lifestyles" [RCW 36.70A.070(6)(a)(7)]. Simply, a bicycle and pedestrian component is now specifically required in a community's comprehensive plan.

Slide 8 – Send Complete Street handout

More recently, the National and State governments have taken a pro-Complete Streets stance, both adopting and encouraging Complete Streets policies be implemented at all levels of government. A Complete Streets policy ensures that the planning of active transportation facilities goes from being on paper to on the ground by creating language and guidelines for implementation of such facilities. It makes it so that every time we plan a road, repave a road,

restripe a road, whenever we *touch* the road in any way, we consider all modes of transportation and prioritize people or the most vulnerable users first.

Barriers to Active Transportation Slide 9

Having a network of safe walk and bikeways is essential in providing a comprehensive street network for all users. In fact, cities with higher levels of bicycle commuting also have on average 70% more bikeways per roadway mile and six times more bike lanes per arterial mile. Cities that have installed a protected bike lane, the kind you see in Seattle, that have a physical barrier between the bike lane and traffic, have seen a commute increase of up to 171%. The #1 way to increase bicycling and walking, is to make facilities safer for all ages and abilities.

Slide 10

The second biggest barrier to active transportation is land use. Having services and destinations near where you live and work is important. This is where land use becomes key in promoting a healthy, active community. Think about this:

How mobile are you without your car?

How much freedom would you have?

Can you walk a mile to the grocery store? Bike to work?

If the answer is no, what reasons are in your mind? Safety? Distance? Is time a factor?

Because those are the thoughts that many people have as they first consider their options, and more people choose their convenient car.

Cities with smart growth, compact development, mixed use development, grid street design, and walking and biking facilities have the highest walking and biking mode share. Because it's convenient, fast, safe, and fun. Look at these comparison photos, which one looks the most like Mount Vernon? Well we have a little of both, but I'd say the majority looks like the one on the left. Big parking lots, big box stores, big streets. On the right, that looks like old downtown Mount Vernon, the streets look inviting to walk and bike, there are trees and shops to browse

through, and there are people living, shopping, working, and playing all in one area. The picture on the right doesn't just happen, it happens through zoning and land use policies, it happens through Complete Streets policies, it happens, because you make it happen.

Slide 11

I'm sure we have all experienced some traffic delays, even in Mount Vernon, and the best way to alleviate them isn't necessarily to widen the road, but to give another option. So lets see what it looks like when people get out of their cars…

- 60 People in their own cars takes up a lot of space on the street compared to one bus, or 60 bikes, or even 60 people walking.

Slide 12

- Now think of parking, the massive empty asphalt parking lots, the perceived lack of parking in downtown Mount Vernon, consider the cost of creating one parking stall is between $20,000 and $30,000 each, then consider that 10 bikes can fit in one car-parking spot. When you walk, you don't even need a parking spot.

Funding Active Transportation Slide 13

Many Americans believe that roads pay for themselves – that the revenue brought in by gas taxes, vehicle taxes, and tolls covers the cost of building and maintaining the highway network. This has never been the case. Today, taxes and fees levied on driving fail to cover even *half* of the direct costs of highway construction and maintenance, and virtually none of the costs imposed on others like air pollution, noise pollution, crash damages to non-drivers and property, and more. What's more, the gas tax goes towards state highways and usually doesn't even include local streets, where most bicycles and pedestrians are found. Local streets and roads have always been largely paid for by local taxpayers, often through property taxes.

- Active Transportation Already Pays for Most of the Roads it Uses: As general taxpayers in their communities, people who walk and bike help pay for the

maintenance of streets, which are predominantly dedicated to the storage and movement of motor vehicles. They pay, but they don't see themselves being supported in the infrastructure.

Slide 14

- Bicyclists and Pedestrians Are More Efficient: and we don't just mean fuel efficiency. Walking and biking inflict virtually no damage on roads, and take up only a tiny fraction of the road space occupied by vehicles. Bicyclists and pedestrians are likely paying far more in general taxes to facilitate the use of local roads by drivers than they receive in benefits from the state and federal infrastructure investment paid through the gas tax.

Slide 15

- Americans lead increasingly multi-modal lives. Most people are not just a "driver", "bicyclists," or "pedestrian." People use a variety of modes and pay for transportation in a variety of ways. Roughly 2/3rds of American drivers also bicycle, walk, or use public transit during the course of a week.

Many local projects are funded, at least in part, by State or Federal programs like Safe Routes to School, Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Grants, and a new recognition and award program for Complete Streets. Just this year, there was almost $50 million available for these programs, and that amount that has steadily been increasing the past several years.

A Transportation Benefit District is a new potential funding source that Mount Vernon is working to implement. While still in the planning phase, Council is discussing the collection of funds to be dedicated to transportation needs, including options of a license tab fee or a retail tax as well as which ballot to take the vote to the people. A 2% tax would add about 1.3 million to the annual road fund.

Benefits: Health. Slide 16

According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of infirmity. A healthy community as described by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Healthy People 2010* report is one that continuously creates and improves both its physical and social environments, helping people to support one another in aspects of daily life and to develop to their fullest potential. Healthy places are those designed and built to improve the quality of life for all people who live, work, worship, learn, and play within their borders -- where every person is free to make choices amid a variety of healthy, available, accessible, and affordable options.

According to the CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention), Healthy community design can improve people's health by:

- Increasing physical activity;
- Reducing injury;
- Increasing access to healthy food;
- Improving air and water quality;
- Minimizing the effects of climate change ;
- Decreasing mental health stresses;
- Strengthening the social fabric of a community; and
- Providing fair access to livelihood, education, and resources.

Reduced chronic disease, better mental health, longer lives, better air quality – there are many health benefits to walking and biking. The way our community is built from streets to land use to types of services all have a positive or negative effect on our health. Good active transportation planning will help create a place where it's easy to be healthy , the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Benefits: Economic Impact Slide 17

- The 2015 Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State found that bicycle riding is the fourth biggest recreational activity and that bicycle riders contribute

3.1 billion per year to local economies via shopping, lodging, and eating. It helps bridge a gap between urban and rural areas and underscores the importance of not just a connected network of bikeway and trails in the city, but between the cities. Rural trails are opportunities for physical activity, engagement with nature, increasing active transportation, and bringing wallets on wheels to small towns. Investments in bicycling and walking facilities pay back the communities they serve in many ways.

Businesses in cities were resistant to bike facilities in front of their shop, especially if it took away car parking. Then the bicyclists came, the pedestrians came, and now shop owners across the country are requesting more bike parking, better bike lanes, and more walkability. Bottom line: walking and biking are good for business.

Culture Slide 19

We live in a car culture. How did we get this way? First we walked, then we rode horses and other animals… early mass transit: stage coaches, trains; then bicycles, and motorized vehicles. By early 1900's cars come on the scene. It was the infatuation with cars that changed up how we designed our cities. Cars especially made it easier to go faster and farther, making it possible to live farther away from services, work, school. One car family… to a two-car family and now the common right of passage – the 16 year old's first car.

That hasn't always been this way and doesn't HAVE to be this way. But what we have is a transportation system that over accommodates cars, and neglects the needs of non-motorized users. It creates a clash of differences

A driver, stuck behind a slower cyclist in a dangerous spot tends to think that this bicyclist is breaking the rules by not going the speed limit, his car is bigger, faster, so the bicyclist should get out of the way. Drivers frequently express their frustration at being detained by honking,

passing close, yelling out the window, or in some other way letting the bicyclist know they don't belong - they aren't equal.

Cyclists, on the other hand are frustrated by a system built for cars that isn't safe or comfortable and will often take safety into their own hands by taking the lane if they don't think it's safe for a car to pass, they ride in the shoulder, they ride two abreast, they go through a red light if it doesn't get triggered by them. All legal in Washington except for the last item.

Some ways to create a culture for all road users is to educate, both mo*torist*s and non-motorists about how to share the road safely. In Mount Vernon, elementary students have been getting Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Training in PE for many years now, and we see the increase in kids walking and biking to elementary school, and now the middle school as they get older. Free bicycle safety education classes are also offered for adults, in fact there is one happening this week that you can sign up for. Another way to reduce road rage is to reinforce in the public mind that cars can kill and need to be driven responsibly.

In a car vs. bike collision, the bike always loses. The city can create bikeways and walkways that create safe interactions with cars through design. And above all, we can all remember that no matter the vehicle, be it foot, bike, or car, each is a person and should be treated with respect and care.

Next Steps: What we think is important to do Slide 20

We've talked a lot about why biking and walking should be supported in planning and by the city. We've talked about barriers and car culture. Now we'd like to talk about what's next…

- **Complete Streets Policy:** Transportation Goal 7 is to create a Complete Streets Policy which helps create roads for all users of all ages and abilities. There is a new pot of money available to those communities who have a strong policy and demonstrate or embody the ethic of streets for all. We shouldn't miss out on this opportunity. We need a mayor-appointed Complete Streets Taskforce working on a policy now.

- **Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan:** We can't build what we don't plan for and we need a plan that outlines how our city can be better for bicycles and pedestrians. It includes a project list so as we find funding and so we can work on creating a complete network. We need to involve our citizens in understanding what they need and want, creating a plan, establishing an implementation schedule. Creating a complete transportation network.
- **Safe Routes to School:** Some of the best examples of street improvements for active transportation have been through Safe Routes to School projects. The City in partnership with the school district need to keep pushing for safer, better facilities, encouragement for walking and biking to school and reducing traffic congestion at schools. Students walking and biking to school lays a foundation for health and readiness for learning.

  Added comment: The city needs to plan on the 1-mile scale not the .25 scale that Planner Rebecca Bradley Lowell presented earlier. The Mount Vernon School District, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, National Safe Routes to School all consider it safe for children to walk 1-mile in establishing their 1-mile walk zones.
- **Bicycle Friendly Community:** Some of you may not know that last year Mount Vernon applied to become awarded as a Bicycle Friendly Community through the League of American Bicyclists and were recognized with an Honorable Mention award. The League then also provides a written report with recommendation for improvement. This process is another way to measure improvements for bikes, The look at the five E's: **E**ngineering, like bike parking and on-street facilities, **E**ducation like our community bike classes, **E**ncouragement methods like our Bike Month activities or organized rides, **E**nforcement like what laws and policies we have in place to support active transportation, and finally they assess **E**valuation and Planning, like if we have a Bicycle Master Plan, if we do an annual report on performance measures. In a couple of years, with steady progress on implementing some of their recommendations we will reapply, hoping to reach the Bronze, Silver or Gold level in the future. There is also a Walking Friendly Community award. Perhaps this is another possible way to work on making improvements for walking in our City.

- **Champions.** Finally, we need you all to be champions, to be aware of all road users, to push for better roads for all and value the importance in supporting compact land use with a transportation system that meets the needs of our diverse, healthy and vibrant community.

Thank you.

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