

Bicycle safety is a 2-way street

A Bend group formed in the wake of last year's high-profile bike crashes is working to educate cyclists and drivers because, the group says, when it comes down to it ...

By Scott Hammers / *The Bulletin*

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Anticipating that economic conditions and environmental concerns will lead to more people riding bikes this summer, a Bend group is working on a campaign to teach cyclists and drivers how to safely share the road.

Carolyn Bonner-Eagan, head of the Road Users Safety Task Force, said the group was born out of a number of high-profile bike crashes last year, including two fatalities.

On June 24, 85-year-old Duane Noteboom was hit by a pickup truck near Costco and died of his injuries four days later.

Keith Moon, 50, died at the scene Aug. 13 when he was struck by an SUV on Southeast Second Street.

On Sept. 18, a Bend police officer broke multiple bones when he was struck by a car driven by a 17-year-old girl while riding his bike home from work through southeast Bend.

Later that day, a 23-year-old Bend man was hit by a car while riding through the roundabout at Skyliners Road and Mt. Washington Drive, and suffered injuries that resulted in the loss of his leg.

An examination of police reports of bicycle-involved crashes in Bend since 2007 shows bike crashes in all corners of the city, but particularly concentrated toward the center of town, along streets like Greenwood and Franklin avenues.

Clusters of crashes can be found in two locations, between Seventh and Eighth streets on Greenwood, where there were seven crashes between January 2007 and April 1, and on Franklin between First and Third streets, where there were six in the same period.

Although not all crashes involved a car or second vehicle, the vast majority occurred where multiple streams of traffic came together. Of the 57 recorded incidents, 45 involved intersections, parking lots or driveways. Four crashes were reported in roundabouts.

Sgt. John Carlon of the Bend Police Department said he's not aware of any locations in the city that are significantly more



Melissa Jansson / The Bulletin file photo

Commuter Options volunteers Al Matson, right, and Jon Hansen, second from right, teach bicycle safety skills to Cascade Middle School sixth-graders last week while riding along Century Drive in Bend.

dangerous than others.

A bicyclist himself, Carlon said he'd be wary of areas where traffic moves fastest, as drivers and bicyclists have less reaction time, and the collisions are potentially more severe.

Carlon has seen the results of high-speed collisions firsthand — he was among the officers who responded to the crash scene in April 2007 after a hit-and-run driver traveling at 60 to 70 mph struck Kimberly Potter, of Bend, killing her instantly.

Carlon said he's not certain if the number of people riding bikes has increased over past years, but he suspects it has.

"A lot of people ride bikes in Bend, and they ride at all times of the day and night," he said. "People who work in restaurants and stuff like that, we see them riding home at two or three in the morning, so there's always bikes on the road in Bend."

Preventing crashes

Bonner-Eagan said that while there has not been a significant increase in bike crashes in recent years, most of them could have been prevented if either a car driver or a bike rider were aware of and abiding by the rules of the road.

"What we could attribute most of those crashes to was people who really didn't know what they were supposed to be doing on the road. Whether it was cyclists riding the wrong way or cars blowing stop signs that were causing the crashes, it was motorists and cyclists doing the wrong thing. There weren't really any engineering or traffic issues that could solve what was going on."

Bend does a good job of educating children on how to be safe cyclists, but adult education has lagged behind, Bonner-Eagan said.

Last year's \$4-per-gallon gasoline motivated a lot of people to start biking, she said, including many who may not have been on a bike for years. Because "99.9 percent of cyclists are also drivers," Bonner-Eagan said, it makes sense to target both groups at the same time.

Task force member Cheryl Howard realized drivers and bike riders could use a refresher course on the rules of the road when she nearly ran down two bicyclists near Drake Park last summer. After the cyclists blew a stop sign right in front of



Melissa Jansson The Bulletin file photo

Cascade Middle School sixth-graders learn how to signal when they approach a roundabout along Mt. Washington Drive last week in Bend. A Bend group is working on a campaign to teach cyclists and drivers how to safely share the road, and part of that is ensuring that bicyclists ride with traffic and follow all traffic-control devices.

her car, then just as quickly changed direction and rode up onto the sidewalk, Howard and her husband drove away from the near-miss imagining how an accident involving two cycling advocates running over two cyclists would play in the media.

“We’re both just like, ‘What are you doing? You’re either a motorist or you’re a pedestrian, but you can’t behave as both,’” she said, referring to comments she would have directed to the cyclists. “You gotta be predictable, and you’ve got to pay attention to traffic control devices. That means you.”

Drivers and cyclists

The task force has developed fliers targeted at drivers and cyclists alike, and hopes to distribute them at bike shops, the DMV, oil-change outlets and other locations.

The fliers advise drivers to always pass cyclists on the left, look for bikes before making a right turn and check for approaching bikes before opening their doors into traffic.

Cyclists are advised to ride with traffic, follow all traffic-control devices, use lights at night and be aware of right-turning vehicles.

The task force has struggled to find funding for the project. On Tuesday night, the group will be at a meeting of the Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization to request funding to print 2,500 fliers.

Howard said she’s taking the long view and expects the group will be able to expand its efforts once it has a demonstrated track record.

“There’s going to be some cyclists where we don’t change their attitudes, and there’s going to be some motorists (where) we don’t change their attitudes, but I’m really thinking that’s a smaller group,” she said. “A lot of people don’t realize what the laws are, and once they know them, I think typically most people will want to do the right thing.”

Scott Hammers can be reached at 541-383-0387 or at shammers@bendbulletin.com.

Crash clusters

A large portion of the bicycle crashes reported in Bend over the last two years were close to the city center. Two notable clusters can be found on Franklin Avenue between Northeast First and Third streets, where six crashes were reported, and between Northeast Seventh and Eighth streets on Greenwood Avenue, where there were seven. For a map of incidents in Deschutes County over the past two years, **see Page A6**.



Source: Deschutes County Sheriff's Office

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Commuter Options volunteers Al Matson, right, and Jon Hansen, second from right, teach bicycle safety skills to Cascade Middle School sixth-graders last week while riding along Century Drive in Bend.

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Cascade Middle School sixth-graders learn how to signal when they approach a roundabout along Mt. Washington Drive last week in Bend. A Bend group is working on a campaign to teach cyclists and drivers how to safely share the road, and part of that is ensuring that bicyclists ride with traffic and follow all traffic-control devices.

On the Web

- For a map of the Bend-area bicycle and pedestrian system, go to www.bend.or.us/ and search for “bicycle” + “appendix F.”