

Bike Lanes: Paths to Tomorrow

Bicycles are healthy for the environment and healthy for humans too, adding a bit of exercise to a viable transportation option. Although recreational bicycling is gaining popularity, when it comes to reducing automobile congestion, workplace commuters are the true indicators. The 10,000 daily bike trips to Portland's downtown core reduce automobile congestion and help clean the air. In one year, metrocape bikers are estimated to reduce between 3.4 to 5.5 million-vehicle miles driven, saving between 168,650 and 275,060 gallons of fuel. These bikers reduce the need for 3,673 paved parking spaces!

The amount of bike lane mileage that a community provides offers a key indicator of its commitment to improving bicycling accessibility. Simply creating space for bikers gives them a feeling of safety and legitimacy and improves the chances that more people will opt for biking. Portland established its commitment in 1996 by adopting the Portland Bicycle Master Plan, which includes bicycling options as an integral part of the transportation system.

Comparing other places can help put Portland's efforts into context. For example, looking at cities nationally and internationally, of roughly similar size and weather, Portland has a better record of non-automobile workplace commuting than Baltimore, Maryland, a city that doesn't actively promote bike use. However, another similar sized city, Bremen, Germany, which does, boasts a pedestrian/bicyclist downtown, committed public education about cycling, and even separate streets for use by bikers only, offering a model of sustainability that American cities can look to.

by Michael Straight

Miles of Bicycle Lanes and Off-Street Paths in Metro Region (within Urban Growth Boundary)

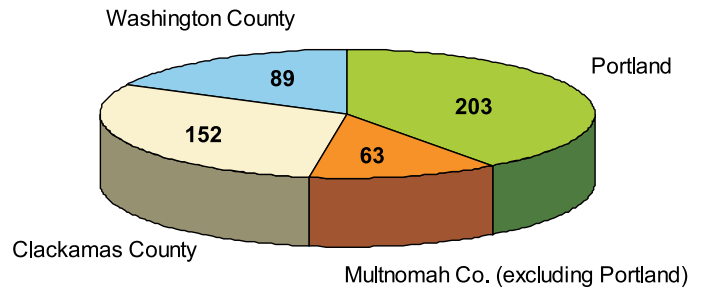


Figure 1

Sources: City of Portland, Metro

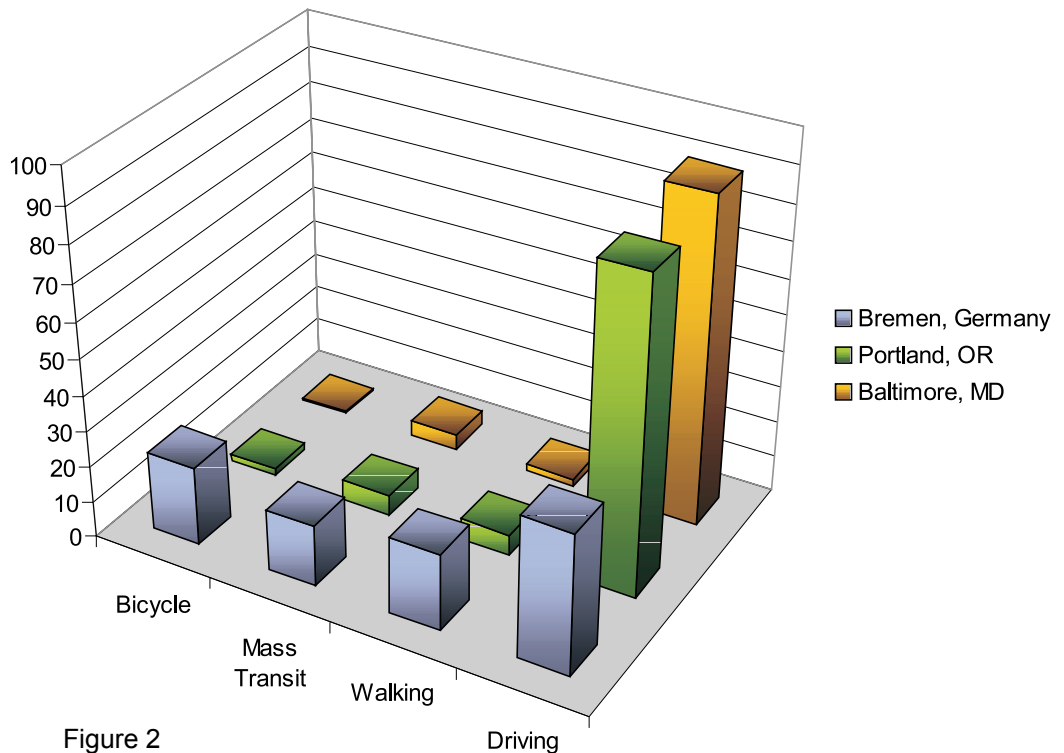


Figure 2

Sources: Baltimore City Council, City of Portland