

Equity bike ride attracts large, diverse group of bicyclists to East Portland

Aug. 26 ride highlights equity efforts by several governmental and non-profit organizations

Nearly 70 bicyclists from many different walks of life turned out for the Equity Bike Ride on Thursday, Aug. 26 in East Portland. The ride, which was co-sponsored by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), Audubon Society of Portland, Bicyclists of Color, Community Cycling Center, East Portland Action Plan (EPAP), Friends of Trees, and the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), rolled along Portland streets and portions of the I-205 Multi-Use Path. The ride originated and ended at the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), with stops along the way that provided riders with an opportunity to learn about equity efforts by the ride's co-sponsors.

“Equity populations are our fellow neighbors, friends and communities who tend to live in areas that lack the things many of us take for granted, such as sidewalks, good roads, bike lanes, and affordable access to healthy food,” said ODOT Region 1 Public Policy and Community Affairs Manager Shelli Romero as she addressed the crowd of bicyclists during opening remarks. “Collectively, our [the ride's co-sponsors] work traverses the common threads found in economic, racial, geographic and environmental equity.”

The Equity Bike Ride followed on the heels of Bikes for All – a forum sponsored by the Community Cycling Center that addressed why access to bicycling matters, especially for communities of color.

“Bikes for All was an open forum where about 50 people, program providers, and policymakers came together to have a conversation about ways of broadening access to bicycles and improving transportation health equity,” noted Alison Graves, Executive Director of the Community Cycling Center. “People made new connections during the highly engaging discussion.”

Meryl Redisch, Executive Director of the Audubon Society of Portland, said that the organization recently opened a satellite office in the Lents neighborhood with the “vision and hope of serving all East Portland residents and helping to achieve the goals of the East Portland Action Plan.” Redisch added that “East Portland has some excellent natural assets, but there still exists many neighborhoods that are park deficient.”

Before taking off from IRCO, PBOT Portland By Cycle Program Manager Timo Forsberg (who shared leading the ride with Logan Lauvray of Friends of Trees) said that the group would get to experience many different types of bicycle facilities along the ride, including local streets with and without bike lanes, unimproved streets, and parts of the I-205 Multi-Use Path. “You will see what kind of challenges bicyclists in East Portland face, but also learn how to maneuver different types of bike facilities,” he said.



A large group of diverse bicyclists gathered at IRCO before leaving on the Equity Ride, which led cyclists through city streets and the I-205 Multi-Use Path while learning about different equity effort in the region.

The first stop along the ride was on the I-205 Multi-Use Path at SE Hawthorne Street, where riders learned about improvements to the path, including a three-year greening project with Friends of Trees.

Standing next to freshly planted trees, Elizabeth Craig with ODOT, and Logan Lauvray with Friends of Trees, spoke to the crowd about a \$410,000 Metro Nature in Neighborhoods grant that is funding the addition of trees and shrubs along the entire 16.5-mile path over a three-year period. The path runs through many neighborhoods and communities – some significantly less green than others – so the project is not just about improving the environment, but also about equity.

“During the first planting season, we worked with over 400 volunteers to plant more than 1,500 trees and shrubs along the path,” Lauvray said. The next planting season will start in October.

Craig added that ODOT is working on a number of additional improvements to the path to “make it more user-friendly and to increase the number of people who use it by foot, bike or transit.” Craig mentioned that ODOT recently worked with TriMet to secure federal stimulus funding to add overhead lighting on the path from Lents to Gladstone, and that ODOT is working to build a new under-crossing at SE Division Street.

Representatives from TriMet also weighed in on the equity conversation. Communications Specialist Thomas Ngo said that during construction of the MAX Green Line, \$62 million in construction contracts went to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

After traveling a few more miles, the group stopped at Portland Community College to hear final remarks from several speakers. East Portland Action Plan member Jim Chasse thanked the group for taking part in the ride and noted that, “small steps can lead to big changes.” EPAP works to develop strategies and actions to address multiple issues facing the East Portland community.

Before leading the group back to IRCO for some mingling and snacks, Forsberg spoke about PBOT’s Transportation Options program, which encourages people to explore all the alternatives to driving alone, including bicycling, carpooling and using TriMet. He joked that “it’s lonely sitting in traffic all by yourself” and encouraged people to get out of their cars. He added that a big part of equity is connecting schools, parks and access to businesses, which is one goal of PBOT’s Neighborhood Greenways program.

In wrapping up, ODOT’s Romero thanked the group for participating and said that she is “happy about the work we are all doing individually, collectively and collaboratively.”

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