

## **The Oshkosh Bike Plan**

The problem with Oshkosh's draft bicycle plan is that it appears to have been written by traffic engineers who don't bicycle. It needs to be rewritten by biologists, who do.

Traffic engineers think in arterials. If you're at the Murdock Pick and Save, and you want to go to the Public Library, a traffic engineer will expect you to take the nearest arterial, either Jackson (when it reopens) or Main, drive down to some other arterial like Church/Merritt, and so on until you reach the library. Which is what most drivers would do. Just not bicyclists.

I bike a lot, and I never bike down Jackson or Main. Why would I, when I have Wisconsin or Central or Jefferson as quieter, safer, more enjoyable options? Putting bike lanes on Jackson would be a waste of street paint and pavement. And to pretend that someday we'll put bike lanes there, on streets where we all know they'll never happen, to pretend that this constitutes a bike plan is patently ridiculous.

I do however, and have repeatedly, bicycled Oshkosh Avenue. But that's because if I'm at the University and I have an appointment at Aurora Hospital, that's the only route available. But not many bicyclists are willing to battle the Oshkosh Avenue traffic. So pretending that a few signs or a little street paint will suddenly make Oshkosh Avenue bicycle friendly is again utter nonsense.

A biologist would immediately recognize our problem: fragment habitat. If you live east of Bowen, you can bicycle safely on Evans or Grove. If you live just south of 9<sup>th</sup>, you can take 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> as far as Mason. And if you live in Westhaven, you can safely and pleurably bicycle around Westhaven.

What you can't do safely or easily is bicycle from Evans to 10<sup>th</sup> to Westhaven. We have plenty of nice pockets of bicycle habitat, but they're fragmented, with few to no good links. So the first thing a biologist would do would be to identify all those natural corridors within the existing habitat, those Osbournes and Minnesotas and Larks and Tafts and Sterlings and Smiths and Nevadas. A biologist would then look to find where they join, and where they don't. And then he'd identify the changes needed to make them link up. That's what a biologist would do.

What he wouldn't do is expect his elk and grizzly bears to stroll down their own lane on the interstate. Yes, US 89 and 287 connect Glacier Park to Yellowstone, but those are for zooming cars, dummy, not perambulating mule deer. You don't have to be a biologist to know that cars and bison don't mix. Just, apparently, not a traffic engineer.

So lets assemble a team of bicyclists and biologists, to see whether Oshkosh can come up with a real bicycle plan. One that doesn't pretend that you can eliminate a traffic lane on Witzel without drivers noticing; one that doesn't pretend that a pair of bicycle lanes down Witzel will make bicycling safe and pleasurable. That way maybe the idea, of an Oshkosh so nice to live in you could actually bicycle across it, could become in fact an actual Vision, and not just what it currently is, a pipe dream.