

OPINION

Covered Bridges Bikeway a boon to Cottage Grove's economy

By HEIDI BEIERLE

Lane County's new Covered Bridges Bikeway, which officially launches Saturday, brings numerous economic opportunities to Cottage Grove and surrounding communities. Bicycle tourism generates investment that circulates longer within local economies and leads to small business growth and increased household incomes, a boon to rural towns.

The Covered Bridges Bikeway follows the Cottage Grove covered bridge tour route around Dorena Lake and the city's historic downtown. The route allows bicyclists of all ages and abilities to have a safe, low-speed, no-traffic cycling experience along the Row River Trail.

Oregon's original roads were designed to complement the landscape's inherent beauty. Visitors know and appreciate this, and contribute to Oregon's \$8.7 billion tourism industry by exploring our natural environments along these scenic roads and paved paths.

Travelers on Oregon's Byway and Tour Route spend an average of \$104 per day, directly benefiting rural businesses and

workers. Bikeway travelers see and experience these sites more slowly than visitors who drive.

Across the nation, reports provide evidence that these bicycling visitors spend more days and more money than other visitors. A 2010 Wisconsin report calculated that out-of-state cyclists generated more than \$530 million in revenue annually. According to a 2008 study along the Great Allegheny Passage, a 150-mile bike trail in Pennsylvania, businesses saw an increase in gross revenue attributable to the trail even during the economic downturn, and paid nearly 20 percent more wages as a result of revenues from bicycle tourism revenues.

The Covered Bridges Bikeway meets the demand for bicycle touring generated by regional, state, national and international marketing. Travel Lane County and the Willamette Valley Visitors Association both market bicycle tourism regionally, and cycling ranks as one of Oregon's top three priorities for increasing the numbers of visitors who explore our state. Consequently, Oregon's bike-friendliness has a critical role in attracting cyclists and boosting state and

local tourism revenues. State-designated scenic bikeways are one tool for inviting cyclists to explore an area.

Lane County's Community and Economic Development Department catalyzed investment in the Covered Bridges Bikeway by funding the project's planning and development. Members of the bikeway's management and marketing team are responsible for enhancing the bike-friendliness of the bikeway, and they understand that the work they do strengthens local economic health.

For families, individuals or groups with diverse cycling and recreational interests, the bikeway accommodates visitors who enjoy cycling on roads or paths and exploring cultural attractions. Visitors may choose to discover Cottage Grove's downtown Main Street district, the area's many covered bridges, local entertainment venues, and the region's mining history, film locations, murals, wineries, earth-friendly enterprises and more. Each of these attractions has the potential to capture bikeway visitors' interest and lengthen the duration of their stay.

Each dollar that these visi-

tors spend circulates within the community. The more money visitors spend at local businesses, the easier it becomes for local recipients of that money to hire local services or purchase local products. Approximately 50 percent of new jobs are created from expansion of existing small businesses. Business growth and job creation both lead to overall increases in household income. People make more money at work, and new jobs are created.

The success of the bikeway and the area's bike friendliness relies on everyone. Each interaction a visitor has translates into dollars spent, re-spent, and grown in the community.

The public is invited to experience firsthand the benefits Cottage Grove and the surrounding area gain from support of the bikeway. Join Cottage Grove and Lane County in a celebration of the Covered Bridges Bikeway launch at 2:30 p.m. Saturday at Trailhead Park in downtown Cottage Grove, in conjunction with Cottage Grove's Covered Bridge Festival.

Lane Transit District bus No. 98 departs Eugene at 1 p.m., bringing visitors to Cot-

tage Grove's downtown. Riders can stop at Rainy Peak Bicycles in downtown Cottage Grove to borrow a bicycle for the three-mile launch event ride to Mosby Creek Trailhead. Bicycles will also be available at Trailhead Park in downtown Cottage Grove for use on the ride to Mosby Creek Trailhead courtesy of Eugene Safe Routes to School and Paul's Bicycle Way of Life.

At the Trailhead, State Scenic Bikeway coordinator Alex Phillips will speak about the economic benefits of the bikeway while people attending the event enjoy sweet treats courtesy of Cottage Grove's Fleur de Lis and giveaways provided by Rainy Peak Bicycles, Arriving by Bike, REI and the Lane Transit District.

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