Scribe Report

January Luncheon Meeting: Neighborhood Greenways

By Paul Cho, ITE WA Scribe, City of Redmond

Someone asked if we played in the streets while growing up. Many replied, “Yes.” When further prodded for what types of activities were played, biking, baseball, hockey, and tag topped the list. However, those same people were asked if they’d now let their children play in the streets and the replies were silent head shakes. Those were the opening questions and answers at ITE WA’s January luncheon meeting hosted at the Nile Shrine Golf Center in Mountlake Terrace.

Section President, Jim Ellison, commenced the meeting by welcoming members that traveled the farthest, from Bellingham and Sequim. He then asked for a round of self-introductions from the 53 members in attendance. Following the introductions, Mr. Ellison introduced the guest speakers, Eli Goldberg and Cathy Tuttle, from a citizen-led organization called Seattle Neighborhood Greenways. This organization imagines a city connected by safe, family friendly streets where children and families can walk and bike to school.

Neighborhood greenways are public streets with vehicle volume and speed. Cars are permitted for residents and services but priority is given to people who walk and ride bicycles. A major distinction between a bicycle boulevard and a greenway is added value for the majority of the users, ranging from kids to seniors. Bicycle boulevards allow for up to 3,000 vehicles per day and speeds up to 30mph. Greenways on the other hand are for less than 1,000 vehicles per day and speeds under 20mph, using traffic calming measures. A good yard stick to use to determine if a street is a greenway is if residents feel that the street is safe enough to allow their kids to ride their bikes on it. The goal is not to lower the traffic volume on a road or street to make it into a greenway. The goal is instead to find one or more characteristics in a road or street that make it a greenway and then maintain or enhance those characteristics. Seattle Neighborhood Greenways’ website provides the following characteristics:

- **Safer bicycling and pedestrian connections.** Pavement markings alert people driving to expect people walking and bicycling. Improved crossings and curb ramps make walking easier and safer.
- **Crossings that help people across our busier streets.** Improved crossings at main streets help people walking and bicycling get across streets more easily.

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- **Guidance information along the route to get people to where they are going.** Markings on the pavement and signage let you know where your Greenway goes and what’s nearby, like parks, schools, and business districts.
- **Reduce auto cut-through.** Speed bumps and traffic diverters can keep cars trying to avoid main streets from speeding through on neighborhood streets.
- **Reduce auto speeds.** Speed bumps and other road treatments can help to slow automobile traffic on greenways.
- **More “eyes on the street”.** More people out on the street walking and riding their bicycles makes for a safer and friendlier community!
- **Green.** Biking and walking can be a form of transportation that is relaxing, pleasant, and inclusive. Greenways provide easy access to open space and have many park-like functions that can be very climate-friendly. Planting trees, public art, rain gardens, planting gardens of all kinds along our Greenways are an integral part of evolving our streets to be pleasant places to bike and walk along.

Until recently, the standards for building non-motorized facilities in the city of Seattle were based on comments from 7% of the population that actively spoke on behalf of bicyclists. The city realized that if left unchanged, these standards would not encourage growth in bicycling for the majority of the population. The shift in thinking now centers on the 60% of the population that don’t like to ride on the street with traffic or in bike lanes. The city’s community outreach now attempts to engage more of the population to learn about and record their interests, their routines, and their experiences with bicycling, so that they understand the tribal knowledge of residents in neighborhoods within the city. They hold neighborhood meetings where they ask questions such as the following to the attendees, which include people of ages from child to senior. Where do residents like to go? How do residents bicycle around their neighborhood? How do they get from one neighborhood to another? What routes would they like to take? What would encourage a mother and her children going for a bike ride to feel safe? How are children getting to school? By school bus, by car, by bicycle, on foot? How can we get our children to school without bussing or driving them? What do people at bike shops hear?

After each meeting, city staff and meeting attendees hit the streets to walk and bike the routes discussed. They explore the parts of the neighborhood where residents enjoy and feel safe bicycling and also look at areas where citizens have concerns. The city also collects some information about the routes used by residents, such as measuring the gaps bicyclists have to cross major arterials at unsignalized intersections. The city and the residents then strive to make specific improvements happen.

After the presentation, a round of questions and answers followed, about crossing treatments, emergency vehicles, and applying greenways in suburban areas. Mr. Ellison requested any outstanding announcements and reminded the members of the joint ITE/IMSA meeting on February 11 (see page 1) before adjourning the members.