



## Portland hosts its annual block party on two wheels

**Bicycling - An estimated 18,000 people ride 12, 24 or 38 miles during the 11th annual Providence Bridge Pedal on Sunday**

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As he rolled his bicycle down Southwest First Avenue toward the starting line of Sunday's Providence Bridge Pedal, 8-year-old Jacob Robeledo was anxious.

"I'm pretty nervous, Dad," he told his father, Manny. "People might run into me. And the bridges, they might fall down."

It was an unnerving scene for the uninitiated. Hundreds of bicyclists packed in close at the start. Caught up in the excitement, cyclists by the dozen rang their bells, making this small corner of downtown sound like a Buddhist temple.

Nevertheless, Jacob was soon pedaling his way across the Hawthorne Bridge. He was one of an estimated 18,000 riders who rode 12, 24 or 38 miles in an elaborate zigzag across Portland's bridges. Now in its 11th year, the Bridge Pedal has become the city's biggest two-wheel party.

Organizers say the Bridge Pedal is the second largest community ride in the country and the third largest in the world, not surprising for a city in which cycling is increasingly a mainstream political issue and cyclists have accumulated political clout. Proponents tirelessly push cycling as a practical, healthful and environmentally friendly alternative to commuting by car.

Aaron Tarfman, 30, was eager to explain the benefits of cycling to any and all comers. He had hauled a blue velour couch (by bike and trailer) onto the west end of the Ross Island bridge, half of which was closed to auto traffic. "Look at what these bikes have done today for this bridge," he said. "It's safer. It's sociable. There's a sense of community."

A major beneficiary of the event is the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, which lobbies for more and better bike lanes and other infrastructure to support cyclists. Evan Manvel, executive director of the alliance, pointed out that of the 10 Willamette River bridges in Portland, only four could be considered cyclist-friendly -- the Hawthorne, Burnside, Broadway and Steel. The others, in normal traffic conditions, are too hazardous or are off limits altogether. Manvel envisions a day when even the freeway bridges are bike accessible.

"Engineers can do amazing things," he said.

Which brings up the big draw of the Bridge Pedal -- the route. Thanks to a host of road closures, Bridge Pedal participants cruise through territory they would normally fear to tread (or roll), including over the spectacular summits of the Marquam and Fremont bridges.

Amid live music, refreshments and mechanics, hundreds of cyclists got off their bikes, cell phoned a friend ("You wouldn't believe where I'm calling from . . .") and took in the eye-popping views. For this day, anyway, the typically breakneck stretch of freeway more resembled a neighborhood block party.

Ed Vranizan, 52, of Northeast Portland was among the crowd at the top of the Marquam, along with his kids, Annie, 21, and Sam, 18. Annie and Sam rode together on a tandem recumbent bicycle, which places the riders in an upright seat with back support, as opposed to a normal bike saddle. Sam, who just graduated from Grant High School, has cerebral palsy. This was his second Bridge Pedal.

Ed Vranizan, an architect, said a donation from his employer, CH2M Hill, allowed Shriners Hospitals for Children to buy the specially prepared bike.

On the Marquam, a squad of mechanics furnished by River City Bicycles was busy. Some of the bikes were as rusty as their riders.

Nancy Pionk's vintage Trek imploded as she ascended the hill up the bridge. The Portlander, riding with her sister, M.J., thought her ride was done and dreaded the thought of having to walk the bike back into downtown.

But Jesse Fairbank, a River City mechanic, managed some quick repairs. "Both the front and rear derailleurs had problems," Fairbank said. "Her chain broke. But we got it together. It's rideable."

About three hours later, cyclists were rapidly crossing the finish line, including young Jacob Robeledo. True to his pre-ride fears, he suffered a minor crash after a collision with another cyclist. But like a seasoned weekend warrior, he persevered and, afterward, was eager to show off his war wounds.

"I got some, what do you call it, road rash," he said, showing off his bandaged elbow. "Can you take a picture of it? I can take the bandage off."

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