

Protected bike lanes make space for more cyclists

By: [Kent Hohlfeld](#) March 3, 2017 0



Kittelson & Associates helped Sky Lakes Wellness Center plan a protected bike lane in Klamath Falls, Ore. One of the biggest issues that concerned citizens was avoiding losing on-street parking on much of the route. Courtesy of Kittelson & Associates.

New bike lanes usually are not exciting or dramatic projects for engineering firms. They seldom win awards for their efforts.

However, Kittelson & Associates in Portland, Ore., earlier this month received such an honor from the American Council of Engineering Companies' Oregon chapter. The firm's efforts on a protected bike lane project in Klamath Falls earned the company the Judge's Choice award.

Kittelson & Associates became involved when officials with the Sky Lakes Wellness Center in Klamath Falls turned to the Internet.

"We did a lot of research," said Katherine Pope, the center's program director. "We Googled protected bike lanes and found Kittelson & Associates. They had an office in Bend and worked on these kinds of projects.

"We wanted to do something with a permanent impact."

A protected bike lane separates bicyclists from motor vehicle drivers. Project stakeholders want to promote a safe, active mode of transportation.

"We got pulled in when Sky Lakes Wellness Center did a study on health problems," said Marc Butorac, a senior principal engineer with Kittelson & Associates. "They wanted to figure out how to make a transportation investment with a positive health impact."



Sky Lakes Wellness Center employed Kittleson & Associates to help it plan and build a protected bike lane through areas of the city hit hardest by obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other preventable illnesses. Courtesy of Kittleson & Associates.

Pope and the late family physician Stephanie Van Dyke began working on the project in 2005. Van Dyke reached out to John Ritter, a professor at the Oregon Institute of Technology, for help mapping out health patterns within Klamath Falls. Ritter used a system designed to collect large amounts of data culled from a 2010 census report and more than 60,000 unidentified medical records of illness.

"Klamath is undervalued," Pope said. "Our health outcomes are below average in Oregon. We are ranked 35th out of 36 (Oregon) counties in health outcomes."

The data showed areas where residents had the highest rates of obesity, diabetes and other preventable and reversible chronic diseases. That information was used to justify the need for funding and determine where the new bike lanes should go.

"We coached them on the implementation process to go through," Butorac said. "We looked at five or six possible corridors before choosing one."

The first phase of the project calls for installing 1.4 miles of a two-way protected bike lane from Bean Street through downtown Klamath Falls. Rows of posts will separate motor vehicle drivers from bicyclists and walkers.

A second phase of the project will extend a two-way bike lane to Moore Park, with a shared-use path across the Link River.

"The biggest engineering hurdle was getting across that bridge," Butorac said.

Tying a transportation project to health outcomes is rare. But Van Dyke convinced the Cambia Health Foundation, in Portland, to contribute \$104,000 toward the project. The team also received \$209,000 for construction from the Cascade Health Alliance.

"You don't see a (health) foundation fund a transportation study or fund construction," said Butorac. "We have never seen this happen."

Total project costs could range from \$500,000 to \$750,000. The first phase is expected to cost approximately \$200,000. Pope credited Van Dyke's perseverance as a big reason why the team was able to secure the money. Van Dyke died Jan. 13 from injuries sustained when a car slid into her in a sledding accident.

"She made it so they could see how exciting this project was," Pope said. "They (Cambia Health Foundation and Cascade Health Alliance) are willing to try creative solutions."

But “that hasn’t slowed the project,” Butorac said. “If anything, it’s pushed it farther. There is talk of a memorial now.”

Kittelsohn & Associates also helped gain public support for the project. By performing community outreach officials were able to gauge interest and receive feedback on possible routes.

“We had a lot of people speaking in favor of the project,” said Mark Willrett, Klamath Falls’ director of public works. “We had three public meetings and an online open house.”

There was surprisingly little pushback from anyone in the city, Butorac said. The changing demographics of the city, powered by newcomers from California, helped make the project possible, he added.

“The biggest concern we heard was from people worried about taking away street parking,” he said. “In the ‘90s, it was a logging city and really car-centric and reticent about bike lanes. In the 2000s, they started to plan for it and now they are building it.”

Allowing the public to vote on the proposed routes gave the bike lanes a lot of goodwill in the community, Pope said.

The project still needs approval from the City Council. However, two new council members and substantial private funding are expected to lead to construction of the first phase beginning in spring or summer.

“It was really a trifecta of improved health, economic development and multimodal connectivity that helped make this project happen,” Willrett said.

Butorac said that he believes this project will become a model for promoting different modes of transportation.

“This was unique working with a hospital,” he said. “Connecting health and transportation is something you will see more of in the future.”

Willrett said the project could lead to construction of more bike lanes connecting other parts of the city. Ideas include connecting paths to the area colleges and schools.

“This is the first protected bike lane in the city,” he said. “It has made us look harder at these kinds of things.”