

## **Only dead pedestrians make headlines.**

by Tom Schneider

Another pedestrian killed by poor planning and the priorities of our local car culture! Whether the 9-year-old was walking or riding his bike from Churchill skate-park to Churchill Plaza market doesn't matter. There was no marked crosswalk there and no awareness by drivers about people who aren't in vehicles. He could have walked or ridden to the crosswalk a block away, but he didn't. He was a kid. Eugene Traffic Safety Department knew this was problem spot but has taken no action for years. Note: it's a 'Traffic' Safety Department, not a 'Pedestrian' Safety Department.

There are many such known pedestrian dangers all over our 'green' Eugene but with the 'Sustainable Eugene' emphasis, we are busy finding ways to mitigate elite athletes carbon footprints when they come to next year's Olympic Trials. Maybe we don't have time to look out for our youngsters or the economically disadvantaged.

Another example. There are bus stops on either side of W. 11<sup>th</sup> very close to the Adult and Family Services office near Garfield. Problem is if you get off or need to get back on the bus on the south side of W. 11<sup>th</sup> there is no crosswalk there at Arthur Street to the office. Handicapped or economically disadvantaged people without a car are expected to walk a block up to City View or back to Garfield to cross busy W. 11<sup>th</sup> at a crosswalk. Guess what? They don't! They J-walk! With their walkers or canes, carrying packages or children they dodge the cars on W. 11<sup>th</sup>. Not pretty. The focus, the money, is on planning for cars not the safety of people. Will someone have to get killed here too?

Measures other cities use? More road signs warning drivers of pedestrians, radio or TV campaigns reminding drivers to yield to pedestrians, flashing-light crosswalks, brighter street-painting of existing crosswalks, putting crosswalks where pedestrians use them not where they are convenient for automobiles. These would all be helpful. But who walks?

Eugene plans for vehicles and bicycles, not pedestrians. We're busy patting ourselves on the back for being such a bike-friendly town and coddling that vocal 5% of our residents who commute on their bikes sometimes. Being a bike-friendly town is great, but who are the majority of bicyclists? They are generally not the economically disadvantaged or physically challenged. Those with nice bikes and bike trailers are often of the same income level as those in their nice

cars talking on their cell phones. They may make different choices but the point is they have choices.

9-year-olds who didn't go to an inconvenient crosswalk or the physically challenged person who didn't or couldn't walk 2 extra blocks to cross W. 11<sup>th</sup> safely are not the problem. We are the problem! Eugene drivers don't think about pedestrians as they hurry here or there. City government can take steps to change that. Eugene Police can ticket people who enter a crosswalk while a pedestrian is in it.

It was embarrassing this spring to witness a rushing BMW nearly hit a pedestrian in a well-marked crosswalk on Broadway close to Adams Place early on a Friday evening. There is no pedestrian awareness with Eugene drivers! It's time to take the initiative to make Eugene a leader in pedestrian safety and have a safe, truly fun, easy city to walk around in. What more accessible, green, sustainable, simple action can we take than safely walking somewhere? Let's do it before one more innocent gets killed or maimed.