

Speaker: We should hit the road

Open city streets to all forms of traffic, transportation expert advises

By Amy Hamilton

Saturday, March 14, 2015

Just because practically no one walks or bikes along traffic-laden streets doesn't mean they wouldn't do it if the roadways were constructed in a friendlier way.

That was the takeaway from Amber Blake, a multimodal administrator of Durango's transportation system.

"If you build it, they will come," she said, addressing a number of participants at Friday's Walking and Biking Summit at Two Rivers Convention Center.

The event attracted a couple hundred people for seminars and forums to brainstorm ways to make our area more receptive to walking and biking.

Blake pointed out that Durango currently is working on a plan for residents to feel comfortable walking or biking around their city of about 16,000 people. Their measurement of safety hinges on whether parents would feel comfortable sending a 7-year-old out on the route.

New construction on Grand Junction streets already is created with attention to bike lanes and sidewalks, not solely vehicle traffic.

Some highlights of Friday's event showed designs for a portion of North Avenue that include a buffer zone between vehicles and traffic in some areas. The city of Grand Junction has secured grants and funding for some of that construction.

Plans for Horizon Drive also include slowing traffic and having spaces for pedestrians. A remodel of the roadway is expected to cost \$16 million, but no funding model has yet been identified.

Encouraging walking and biking also is the aim of the Colorado Department of Transportation. Since 2010, the state agency has committed to completing new construction on roadways with a focus on alternative transportation options, said Becky Jacobsen, bicycle, pedestrian, and scenic byways manager for the agency.

"We can't keep designing (roads) just for motorized travel," she said.

Jacobsen pointed to studies that show more people of color are using alternative travel to get around and more older Americans are taking up bicycling. In fact, bicycles are being sold at a higher rate than motor vehicles, she said. The role of governments and municipalities is to help all of its residents feel comfortable getting around, she said.

"If you have a protected bike lane, more people who aren't the spandex crowd are going to use it," she said.