

May we have some more?

by The Oregonian Editorial Staff
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When Portland unveiled, with great fanfare, the Eastbank Esplanade in 2001, we took the opportunity to comment upon its cost: \$419 per inch. Our prose ranged from the snide to the snarky, tones, if we may say so ourselves, in which we are rather well-versed.

Now, as the city gears up to spend yet another small fortune on yet another of these touchy-feely trails -- this time along Sullivan's Gulch -- we'd like to revisit the issue and restate our position.

We were wrong.

With a nod to Oliver Twist, we'd even like to add this: "Please, sir, may we have some more?"

The waterfront esplanade has been a runaway success. That's runaway as in joggers by the gazillion. And dads with strollers, and moms with fishing poles, and kids with labradoodles, and lovers with stars -- and the downtown skyline -- in their eyes.

Then there are those, thousands each day, who use the path exactly how planners described it: as a "transportation corridor," which explains why we were able to use federal dollars for so much of it.

Why, with what it contributes to everything from our air quality to our daily smile quotient, many have come to think of the esplanade as Portland's quality-of-life spine. Now it's time to connect some ribs.

The Sullivan's Gulch Trail -- a polite term for a bike/ped path along the Banfield -- would run from the Steel Bridge to Northeast 122nd Avenue. Along the way, it would link 10 Portland neighborhoods, mesh with such major civic investments as the Hollywood Town Center and the Gateway Regional Center, and revitalize lots of land far too long forlorn.

You don't think proximity to a bike path enhances property values? Just wait until you see homes on the Albina Fuel site at Northeast 33rd and Broadway being advertised as "on the trail."

Already, the Springwater Corridor links downtown to Gresham, and beyond. Planning is under way for a path from Waterfront Park to Lake Oswego, and another from South Waterfront to Beaverton. We'll soon extend the Eastbank Esplanade along the Willamette Greenway to North Portland, then on to Vancouver, recognizing our pressing need to better plan, and operate, as a bistate metropolitan region.

That \$419-per-inch investment -- more than \$30 million -- that we made on the Eastbank Esplanade was the catalyst for much of the redevelopment of Portland's inner east side. The next series of trails promises similar jolts of economic energy to neighborhoods too long left feeling disconnected from the city's core. Amsterdam spends about \$36 per citizen a year on its bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. Portland spends about \$2 a person, per year. We have, in other words, only just begun.

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