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Bikes Bring a Better Future

On average, the El Pasoan is not as healthy as people in other places in the United States, such as Colorado. In Colorado, people ride bikes, climb mountains, or do other activities. Bill Hanna, in his article “Texas Ranks as 10th-Fattest State,” states that because of this, Colorado had the lowest obesity level in the United States in 2012. Hawaii was also noted for having low obesity rates. However, that same year, Texas ranked as the tenth-fattest state. How can the city help improve this situation? Bike trails.

Bike trails are a separate path off the road, while bike lanes are an actual lane on the road intended for bikes to use. At first glance, it might not sound like that much of a difference, but think again. Many people are discouraged from riding bikes because of the dangers of bike lanes. Bike lanes along busy roads pose a threat to both bicyclists and motorists. Because they are adjacent to the road, motorists have to be even more aware of their surroundings, as do the bicyclists. Already, many motorists are distracted while driving. The latest statistics of the Texas Department of Transportation show that 75,561 car accidents, 297 fatal, occurred during 2011 due to driver inattention. However, bicyclists are at a major disadvantage in terms of protection. They have no metal cage surrounding them; they do not have air bags or restraining belts. They are as unprotected as any pedestrian.

With bike lanes, bicyclists are forced to share the road with vehicles that usually weigh between one or two tons. In addition, many motorists disregard bicycle lanes completely,

sometimes parking or passing other cars on them. This is just one reason why many people are discouraged from riding bikes here in El Paso.

On the other hand, bike trails are off the road and usually paved. Because they are off the road, the risk of being hit by a car decreases tremendously. Many bicycle trails are landscaped, which makes it an enjoyable ride. Another benefit is that the bicycle trails can be engineered in such ways as to allow pedestrians to walk or jog on the same path without becoming a hindrance to bicyclists.

A graph posted by Mark Byrnes on the website *The Atlantic Cities* shows that some cities in the Southwest of the United States increased in the number of bike commuters, including El Paso that saw a 100% increase in bike commuters in the past decade. However, Byrnes goes on to say that while the Southwest and El Paso saw a modest growth during the past decade, the number of bike commuters remains low.

Finally, having more bike commuters would help El Paso's traffic congestion. Currently, major roads and freeways such as I-10 are often congested during rush hour, which, in turn, ends up costing people time and money. Having an even larger percentage of people riding bikes for short trips could significantly reduce traffic congestions and would help make El Paso a more efficient and green city.

Perhaps, if we had bike trails instead of bike lanes, more people would be willing to ride bikes. Cities such as Kansas City and Colorado Springs have many bike trails that are easily accessible to the residents, allowing recreation that is safe and relaxing. Also, high-end businesses and industries like to see such facilities in cities that their employees are able to use. Businesses know that healthy employees make for a healthy work force, and therefore increase their efficiency. High-end jobs could be brought to this city, and with high-end jobs comes money. All these benefits could start happening tomorrow – if El Pasoans invest in their city today.