

## Biking Towards a Brighter Future

If you were to step outside and walk through the state of Hawaii right now, more than one out of every five people you meet are obese, with one out of every ten suffering from diabetes. More than one out of every four will be suffering from hypertension. By 2030, the obesity rate in Hawaii is projected to be over a whopping fifty percent. Without immediate action, Hawaii will descend into an irreparable state of obesity and poor health, where it will be more common than not to suffer from obesity and its side effects. Many studies have shown that increased activity will lead to decreased obesity rates. My proposed solution is to establish bike lanes throughout Hawaii to combat the growing obesity rates by increasing physical activity.

One example of an active population with relatively low obesity rates is Portland. In Portland, Oregon, only 17.9% of citizens reported having no physical activity in their lives. This corresponds with a 23.9% obesity rate in Portland. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, 32.2% of citizens reported having no physical activity in their lives. This corresponds with a 30.4% obesity rate in Chattanooga. This relationship between greater activity and lower obesity rates is seen in many cities throughout the United States. However, it is one thing to find the trend, but another to figure out how to raise the activity level of residents in Hawaii.

Thanks to Hawaii's beautiful weather, and small size, establishing bike lanes would be an extremely effective way to increase activity. Not only would bike lanes allow more exercise, but they would reduce the amount of traffic, and pollution on Oahu. While Oahu does currently have bike paths, they have many flaws. The current bike system on Oahu is mainly centered in Honolulu, and provides no help for those who

desire to travel longer distances. The bike system is punctuated with many gaps between short segments, and oftentimes those segments take roundabout ways that force the rider to travel further than the length of a direct path in order to get to his destination. This is definitely a factor that discourages many from riding bikes for transportation.

Honolulu is the hub of life on Oahu, and many people find themselves traveling there weekly, if not daily. Whether for work or returning home to the city, or simply a shopping trip to Ala Moana, the capital city is a prime destination for many. If bike lanes were to be established from Honolulu to smaller outlying neighborhoods like Hawaii Kai or Aiea, travel on bicycles would become a much more feasible option for a multitude of people. A comprehensive system would allow many more people to consider bicycling as a serious alternative to driving. The increased physical activity from biking rather than driving will drastically decrease the obesity rates in Hawaii, allowing for a better overall life for many.

Portland is an excellent model for an effective bicycle system due to their expansive bike lane system. Six percent of Portland commuters ride bikes. Compared to the national average of 0.5%, this may be a major source of increased physical activity, and therefore lower obesity. Their 319 miles of bikeways encourages and enables residents to bike where they want to go without hindrance. This system is also very cost efficient, as their entire bike path system cost only 60 million dollars to build, the approximate cost of one mile of urban highway.

Mr. Ching dearly cared about every person, whether he knew them personally or not. He graciously gave millions to benefit others. One part of his foundation's mission

statement is to assist in the care of the needy, the destitute, the sick and aged.

Establishing a comprehensive system of bike lanes would accomplish this dream of his in many ways. Not only would it help to make people healthier, but it would prevent sickness in many others. His foundation has already shown support for these objectives through their extremely generous five million dollar grant in support of the University of Hawaii's new Clarence T.C. Ching Athletics Complex. The foundation stated this donation was a way to support student wellness for generations to come. As someone who has personally benefitted from this gift, I have great admiration for Mr. Ching and his endeavor to help others. I have no doubt that Mr. Ching would be delighted to see a program which would help many people to live a healthier, and happier life, as he wished everyone could.