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## Cyclists have ways to go

byCycle's trip planner omits guesswork in pathfinding

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If you commute via bicycle, chances are you've already heard of byCycle. If you haven't, you're in for a two-wheeling treat.



JONATHAN HOUSE / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP  
Wyatt Baldwin, left, and Lauren Donohue thought it would be great if someone started an online bike trip planner. Two years ago, they decided to build one themselves.

Designed to be "the MapQuest for bikes," byCycle's online trip planner allows cyclists to plot bike-friendly routes across town. Enter starting and ending addresses, and the planner plots a bicycle-sensitive course between them. Click anywhere on the map, and the Web site gives the nearest intersection. Choose two points, and the Web site calculates the best biking route between them.

The trip planner is the brainchild of byCycle founders Wyatt Baldwin and Lauren Donohue. Recent graduates of the University of Oregon, they were sitting around their Portland house talking about how great it would be to have a tool that would help cyclists and bicycle commuters plan routes through the city. One day they realized they themselves were the innovators they had been waiting for.

"We decided we were just going to build it," Donohue says.

Together, they founded byCycle in November 2004 as a Portland-based software development organization to provide tools that promote transportation and sustainability in the city. Their primary — indeed, their only — project is the online trip planner.

"We had to learn some skills," admits Baldwin, who studied computer science in Eugene. "We had to learn a lot of stuff along the way," Donohue says. "Four years of college didn't really prepare us to build this application."

They found an ally in Metro, the regional government serving Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties. Metro has provided the lion's share of

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data needed to develop the trip planner. Without good data of city streets, the application would be useless.

Metro's Mark Bosworth shares byCycle's enthusiasm for the project. "We had the same dream for a long time, of a trip planner for bicycles," Bosworth says. "Most people think, 'I don't want to get killed.' That's what's keeping people off their bikes."

### Breaking free of the freeway

Autocentric resources like MapQuest default to the quickest route for cars. "The first thing MapQuest does is it tries to put you on the freeway," Bosworth says, which is not an option for cyclists. The byCycle trip planner offers "normal" (faster) and "safe" modes when plotting routes.

By plotting bike-sensitive routes, the trip planner is "very commuter-oriented," encourages people to leave the car at home and helps keep cyclists safe.

"It's a great tool," bicycle commuter Adam Marx says. "I'm impressed with it. I use it a lot. I appreciate all the work (they) put in on it."

The trip planner currently covers Portland, Milwaukee and Pittsburgh. "Quite a few other cities have contacted us," Baldwin says, with inquiries about being added to the trip planner coming from as far away as the United Kingdom, but many people don't know how to get started. "If they have data, and want to give us money, we can do it," Baldwin says.

From the beginning, Baldwin and Donohue have funded the project almost entirely themselves. "We actually got paid by Milwaukee," Baldwin says. But for adding the Wisconsin city to the trip planner, byCycle received less than \$1,000.

"We've paid for it by having regular jobs," Donohue explains. Putting Google ads on the Web site has brought in about \$15, and byCycle has received one donation of \$15. T-shirts — designed by Donohue, who has an art degree — are available for sale on the byCycle.org site and at some area bike shops.

"We're going to keep working on it and making it better," Donohue says. "We'd also really like to get more regions involved." While the Portland application currently is restricted to the city limits, the short-term vision is to connect Washington, Multnomah and Clackamas counties, and integrate Clark County.

"We could link up Corvallis and Eugene," Baldwin says, but lack of funding stands in the way. "There are a lot of little problems that could be improved if we had more resources."

### Help needed in many forms

ByCycle hopes to partner with businesses and sponsors to support further development of the trip planner. It also welcomes individuals who can donate funds, equipment or skills.

Currently, they are in need of more robust Web hosting, data from areas outside Portland, a testing computer and assistance with programming, fundraising, advocacy and gadgeteering — "inventing a gadget to make it easy for people to refer to printed routes while they are riding along," Baldwin says.

The current trip planner takes hills — a cyclist's nemesis — into account when plotting the best course. Moving forward, byCycle wants the algorithm to consider elements like road quality and vegetation coverage (think tree-lined streets).

"We use real people riding around," Bosworth says. "We're trying to get real-world experience" into the application, and byCycle encourages feedback on

its public Google group. Ultimately, they expect the trip planner to be self-sustaining, with area cyclists able to upload their own shortcuts and favorite pathways.

“It’s a work in progress,” Bosworth notes, “but it’s working.”

### byCycle on the Web

- [www.tripplanner.bycycle.org](http://www.tripplanner.bycycle.org)
- Online forum: [www.groups.google.com/group/byCycle](http://www.groups.google.com/group/byCycle)

### Resources

- “Bike There,” a tricity map of bike routes in the Portland area (\$6), offers information about bike lanes and multiuse paths. It also rates selected streets that bicyclists share with motorists. Order online, [www.metro-region.org](http://www.metro-region.org), or by phone, 503-797-1742.

- The Portland Office of Transportation will offer two events for cyclists called Summer Cycle: Best Ways to Get Downtown, which provide tips for the safest, most convenient routes across the Willamette River and pointers in negotiating downtown traffic.

*6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 8, Grant Park, Northeast 36th Avenue at Brazee Street;*

*6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 9, Alberta Park, Northeast 19th Avenue at Jarrett Street. No registration necessary, but helmets are required for riders. For information, call Timo Forsberg, 503-823-7699.*

- Visit the TriMet Web site, ([www.trimet.org/guide/bikes](http://www.trimet.org/guide/bikes).

htm) for information on how to transport your bicycle on buses, MAX and the Portland streetcar. The site also offers a list of 10 cycling adventures in Portland, with detailed ride descriptions of both urban and pastoral rides over a range of topographies along with maps of bus and MAX connections.

- Multnomah County offers a free bike map; call 503-988-5050.

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