

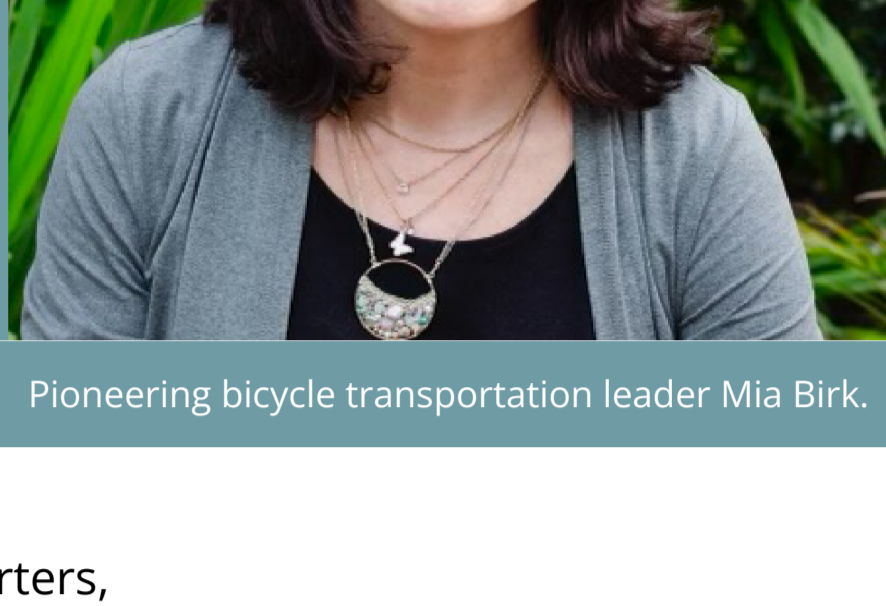
Community Collaboration:
How Students Are Helping Design the Future



From left: Eloy Flores, Angelo Medina, Lewis Byrd, Natalie Petersen, Alyssa Wasouf.

Civil engineering students at Portland State University, in collaboration with Friends of Frog Ferry, are developing designs for the ferry pilot project in Cathedral Park. As part of their senior capstone, students work with external organizations to bring needed work into the community. Their design includes a novel dock and shelter, with associated safety and ADA upgrades to the existing structures. "We are really trying to think through the needs of all of the park users. It's a beautiful park and we'd like our design to reflect that," one of the seniors said. Work on the project will continue through the spring term and culminate in a design report including drawings and cost scenarios, to be used in future developments in the course of Frog Ferry.

From Setbacks to Success:
How Bikeshare Gives Hope to Frog Ferry



Pioneering bicycle transportation leader Mia Birk.

Dear Frog Ferry supporters,

I am the co-founder of Alta Bicycle Share, the company that launched and operated bike share in NYC, D.C., Boston, and Chicago. I also spent several years laying the groundwork for Portland's BikeTown.

With 1500 bikes and 2.5 million trips since its inception in 2016, I think we can all applaud BikeTown's success. But did you know that the BikeTown path was filled with challenges and setbacks?

First, the concept of bike share wasn't readily embraced; City staff, advocates, and I spent years building local support and fending off criticism and objections that it wasn't necessary, would only benefit wealthier residents, and would be too expensive and unsafe.

Next, we helped secure a federal grant; City Council then stipulated no City funding would be allocated to bike share. The contract, which my firm won, thus required us to secure \$6 million from private sponsors; we'd only start getting paid after raising all that money. I knew that would be a huge challenge due to our small media market, lack of big companies, outdoor advertising restrictions, and funky political system. I also knew we'd need the Mayor or a Councilor to be our champion. I wasn't sure I had the connections, knowledge, energy, and passion to get it done, but I'd overcome many challenges in Portland and beyond throughout my career in active transportation, and I was determined to try.

I gathered a high-powered steering committee and developed a valuation study, pitch deck, and list of corporate connections. We held an event at the Art Museum, followed by months of presentations netting lots of interest but no commitments. Time and again, I heard, "Launch bike share and then we'll talk." It was a chicken-egg kind of deal; we couldn't launch without a sponsor and we couldn't secure a sponsor without launching.

From May to August 2013, my company launched bike share systems in NYC, Chicago, Columbus, and San Francisco, a remarkable feat considering the challenges we'd faced: a supplier software debacle, losing our NYC equipment to Superstorm Sandy, and insurance and cash flow woes. Extensive positive publicity (including shout-outs by David Letterman, Stephen Colbert, and Jon Stewart) helped open more sponsor doors; interest picked up. By Fall, I had secured tentative agreements from a title sponsor (healthcare), as well as secondary and station sponsors.

One hitch: the healthcare company President wanted to hear directly from the Mayor, not a hired contractor (me) before formally committing to the unprecedented multi-million dollar investment. The Mayor deferred to the newly-appointed Transportation Commissioner, who insisted upon a meeting first.

One day in October, I headed into City Hall for that meeting. Staff had prepped the Commissioner, who lacked knowledge of both bicycling and transportation as a whole. In the room were five dedicated staff and the new PBOT Director.

My presentation went well enough and I concluded by explaining that all the bike share sponsorship deals - in London, Denver, Boston, and NYC - had been closed by politicians. All he needed to do, I said, was to call to express the City's excitement and commitment.

He responded with a smirk and a simple, "Sure, I'll call." Then, he paused, while everyone in the room leaned in intently, shoulders touching like a team in a huddle.

"And," he proclaimed. "I will talk to him about our maintenance backlog and street fee campaign."

Everyone gasped. He wanted to talk to our sponsor about potholes, not bike share! In that moment, all the air rushed out of the room, like a balloon pricked by a slender needle, whooshing by in a sharp wind, leaving an eerie silence in its wake.

I didn't give up then. In the weeks that followed, I worked with PBOT staff to get the Commissioner to instead sign a letter of support, and I convinced the sponsor to keep going. We went through a branding exercise (the winner: PoGo), while lawyers for us, the sponsor, and City negotiated agreements. More challenges: Willamette Week started requisitioning emails; someone leaked the sponsor name and contract details; I was hounded by media requests and frustrated by sloppy reporting.

Then, another setback: our supplier, wounded by the software debacle, filed for bankruptcy protection. We quickly pulled together an alternative; City staff let us know they'd need time to think about it.

By this point, the Mayor and Commissioner were deep into their unpopular street fee campaign, which provoked snarky Oregonian editorials asking both how the City could justify asking for more taxpayer money while promoting bike share and whether bike share was a good idea at all. Every article made the sponsor deeply uncomfortable; worse was the lack of response from the City. Finally, in June 2014, the sponsor pulled out.

PBOT staff and I agreed it was time to put the project on hold. At year's end, our company was acquired by a group of NY investors and rebranded as Motivate.

For two years, bike share faded into the background while PBOT completed the street fee campaign. During that time, PBOT and Motivate quietly kept going, drawing virtually no media attention, ultimately securing \$10 million from Nike. That, finally, got the politicians on board.



BikeTown was launched in July 2016.

A few lessons. First, Portland is a hard place to get things done. You have to be creative, courageous, persistent, stubborn, and determined. When one thing doesn't work, try another. Second, bold ideas take time - decades even - to come to fruition and almost always face tremendous obstacles. Light rail, streetcar, bike share, and numerous infrastructure projects (e.g., Eastbank Esplanade, Steel Bridge Riverwalk, Earl Blumenuer Bridge) come to mind. Third, for meaningful change to happen, the following human elements must come together in lockstep: political champion(s) + bureaucratic leadership + community advocates in Frog Ferry. When they do, magical things happen. Funding is found; red tape gets cut.

I know that Frog Ferry has been through the ringer already, but change is really, really hard to come by. I say: keep at it! Frog Ferry is too important to give up on.

Mia Birk is an Executive Coach and business advisor who served as Portland's Bicycle Coordinator from 1993-1999. She co-founded and led [Alta Planning + Design](#) and Alta Bicycle Share, and authored [Joyride: Pedaling Toward a Healthier Planet](#). More about Mia at www.miabirk.com.

Letter From Our Founder
Keeping the Dream Alive

Many of you have been wondering about news from the lily pad. Our Frog Ferry believers continue to keep the dream alive by suggesting a new green transit mode, wearing their Frog Ferry gear, and making candidates for City Council and Multnomah County Commission aware that we need new fun innovative ways to revitalize our region...funded by federal dollars. Please use your voices and imagine a better Portland. Teamwork makes the dream work!

With appreciation,
Susan Bladholm

How can you help?

Frog Ferry supporter Mitch Tracy wearing his FF baseball cap during recent travels to Thailand.

- We need elected leaders who will help carry the torch for new, proven, climate-friendly, low-cost transit modes. **Please reach out to your favorite elected official or candidate to let them know.**
- Please consider donating. Every little bit helps us as a 501(c)(3). We have been 100% volunteer driven for the past 18 months.

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