

Portland can be proud of its commute options

By Liz Stutts

This week, Portland plays host to more than 500 members of the Association for Commuter Transportation. And let me cut right to the chase: We like what we see here. To put it plainly: Portland works. This city “gets it.”

Our association’s membership consists of business representatives, land use planners, government officials, bicycling and pedestrian advocates and transportation-management association directors. We’ve come to Portland from almost every U.S. state and dozens of cities in Canada, Europe and Japan.

The City of Roses has attracted nearly twice as many of our members as any of our conferences in several years. While in Portland, our members are attending more than 50 conference sessions.

We’re also previewing Portland’s new MAX line to the airport, riding the Portland Streetcar through the Pearl District and Northwest Portland, studying the Tri-Met dispatch center and seeing how Nike Inc. helps its employees to carpool, van pool and bike to work.

Portland, perhaps more than any other city in North America, exemplifies what our organization is all about. Our mission extends beyond the “build it, and they will ride” approach, even when the transportation infrastructure is as varied, flexible and accessible as Portland’s.

Our members focus on building strong win-win partnerships between the public and private sector at every level: in the workplace, in the community, throughout metropolitan regions and across the United States and the world.

In Portland, we’ll be discussing the long-term benefits of weaving “transportation demand management” into economic development efforts and long-range land use planning. Our association supports its members’ efforts to enhance mobility, improve air quality and conserve energy through transportation demand management activities.

Portland dramatically illustrates the quality of life communities can achieve when people are given real choices about how to move around and get from place to

place.

When we look around Portland, what do we see? A varied mosaic of vital neighborhoods and a dynamic user-friendly downtown full of things to do and see; people of all ages and backgrounds calmly and creatively enjoying every part of their city at all times of day.

Everyone’s walking or hiking or riding pretty much where they want, when they want. They’re catching trains, buses, trolleys, light rail and taxis easily and comfortably. They’re relaxed and appear to be having fun just living in Portland.

Even the employees getting to and from work conveniently in carpools and van pools and shuttles seem more at ease than commuters in other car-bound towns. It helps that so many Portland employers wisely encourage their workers to use the widest range of commuting options.

That’s why the federal Environmental Protection Agency has also chosen our 2001 International Conference to salute employers from Oregon and Washington and across the nation that have joined the agency’s “Commuter Choice Leadership Initiative.”

These savvy employers are going the extra mile to give their workers more choices and more incentives to take advantage of transportation alternatives. Businesses like Nike, Intel and the management of the Lloyd Center know that today’s employees and smart high-tech talent are seeking commuting options.

Portland could have sprawled like hundreds of other cities. Yet, because of the foresight of your community in the past 30 years, Portland today has far more choices than dozens of other prosperous, fast-growing cities.

These more auto-dependent regions are wondering if they may have waited too long to begin thinking regionally and investing their resources beyond the automobile, the expressway and the parking deck.

You may not realize just how good you’ve got it up here, Portland. But our association members and much of the rest of America’s business community does. So keep it up, Portland. The rest of the world is watching to see what you do next.

Liz Stutts, a Florida resident, is president of the Association for Commuter Transportation.