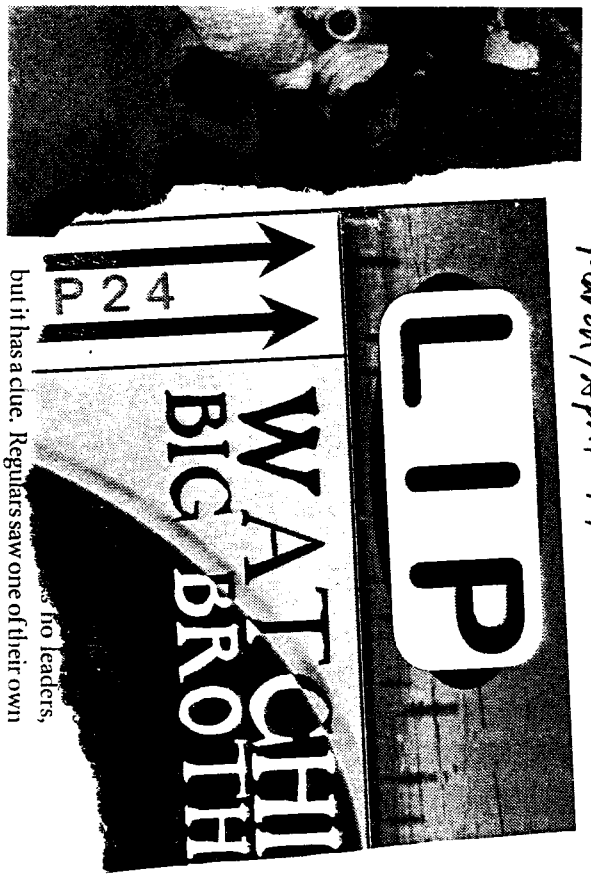


March/April '97



# CLIP

## WATCHING BIG BROTHERS

...no leaders, but it has a clue. Regulators saw one of their own flattened on Madison Street and three others charged with felony assault. It was a learning experience. On a better day, Critical Mass will serve as a celebration for cyclists, an encouragement for leery non-cyclists, a parade for observers, and just another kooky traffic slowdown for those trapped behind the wheel.

### THE FREE RIDE ZONE: A Community Bicycle Project

by Suzanne Carlson

Do you remember getting your first bike and learning how to ride it? I remember training wheels, banana seats, Big Wheels, and ten-speeds. I remember crashing as a Kindergartner and going to school with a big scab on my face. I remember riding to middle school and locking my two wheels up in the Bike Portable.

Kids love bikes. During the summer, they take over the streets on borrowed and broken bicycles. With the proper tools, they might grow up to be professional bike racers, environmentally-aware bike commuters, or bike mechanics with job security. At the Free Ride Zone, we want to foster this enthusiasm by putting the tools kids need in their own hands.

The Free Ride Zone will teach young people how to fix bikes, reward them with their own set of wheels, and

provide a fleet of free bikes for community use. It is modeled after successful programs already in operation across the United States, including in Portland, Oregon. We will have four bicycle programs operating out of a nonprofit bike shop in Southeast Seattle:

- **Farm-A-Bike Program:** Teach youth from ages 8 to 18 basic bicycle repair, maintenance, security, and safe riding skills. Participants will repair and earn their own bicycle as a graduation goal.
- **Vocational Education Program:** Teach 16 to 20 year-old young adults to run a neighborhood bicycle repair shop. Curriculum will include comprehensive bicycle repair, community service workshops, and field trips to local shops to prepare graduates for employment as mechanics.
- **Neighborhood Ride Program:** Youth and adults will explore their neighborhoods together to celebrate their hard work. Rides offer incentives for youths to ride safely, keep their bicycles in good repair, and learn new routes around the city.
- **Free Ride Zone Distribution Program:** Used bicycles will be repaired and redistributed in two ways. They will be sold to low income Seattle residents at an affordable price or in exchange for community services, and they will become part of a bicycle library for free use by citizens making trips throughout the city.

Free Ride Zone programs address a variety of community needs and provide dynamic solutions. Our first spoke is youth. With a little encouragement, kids can do anything they want. We will give hands-on education, recreation, adult attention, job skills, and life skills. Our bicycle curriculum will feed some kids love of bikes, and will provide others with a diversion from trouble. Adult volunteers will serve as mentors, bringing kids up to speed as bike mechanics and gear-heads.

The second spoke is bicycles. Bicycles are affordable, environmentally-sound transportation that do not require a drivers license. In addition to mentoring youth cyclists, the Free Ride Zone hopes to get adults to shed their mental training wheels and enjoy the recreation, transportation, health and environmental benefits of bicycling. We will get old, neglected bikes out of basements and back onto the streets.

The third spoke is community sustainability. Southeast Seattle, home of the Zone, is a richly diverse neighborhood with the city's highest transit ridership, youth population, and, unfortunately, rate of poverty. These

conditions are prime for bicycle transportation, but Southeast Seattle doesn't have a single bike shop. The Free Ride Zone will provide a one, plus a community resource that educates kids, promotes alternative, human-scale transportation, and allows adult volunteers to give back to the community.

Our first bike repair class, The Bike Zone, is underway at John Muir Elementary in partnership with the nonprofit Powerful Schools. The students are fixing up donated BMX bikes in class that we will donate to Powerful Schools for education, transportation, and recreation when we are done. The bikes are in marginal shape, so the students get to break out their tools and work on real-life examples of broken bikes.

Other bike advocates around town are interested in starting the bicycle library. The Black Cat Cafe in the University District, 10B Bikes in Belltown, EcoGenerator in the Cascade neighborhood, and the Free Ride Zone are all plotting to put bikes out on the streets for public use. Programs like this, in effect worldwide, are often called "Yellow Bike Programs" because of the distinctive paint jobs of the cruisers.

The Free Ride Zone is currently homeless, but as soon as we find an appropriate site, we will be ready to launch our programs. For more information, or to volunteer, contact Suzanne Carlson at 726-9380.

**WERE NOT BLOCKING TRAFFIC  
WE ARE TRAFFIC!**

# CRITICAL MASS

critical mass (n): 1. a group of people, especially a group of cyclists, who ride together in order to draw attention to a cause or to protest against a particular issue. 2. a group of people who ride together in order to draw attention to a cause or to protest against a particular issue.

**LAST FRIDAY of every month  
5:30pm - Westlake Park**

Critical Mass has no organizers. Critical Mass is worldwide. Critical Mass is a way for cyclists and others to show solidarity against car culture. For more information see <http://www.critmass.com/html>. See you at Mass!