

I Velo Heart Oakland

New sharrows, better bike racks, a parklet boom, and permanent repair stations improve the two-wheel appeal of the East Bay.

By Heather R. Johnson

From Uptown to Fruitvale to Temescal, the fruits of years of advocacy can be seen all over the streets and sidewalks of Oakland. Gradually (very gradually), pothole-riddled pavement is being replaced with new asphalt and paint, including striping for bike lanes and sharrows. More businesses are asking for bike racks and parklets. BART is warming up to bikes. We can ride over part of the Bay Bridge. All in all, it's a good time to ride in Oakland, and it's only getting better.

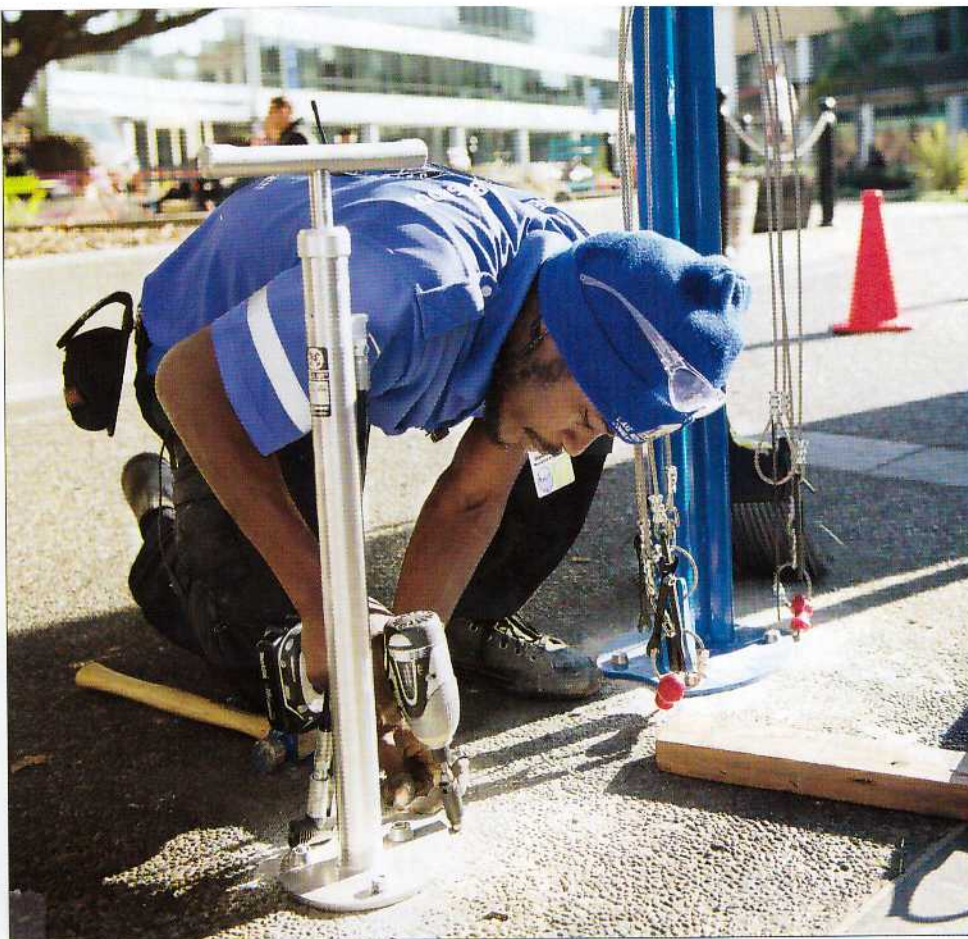
In 2011, the local advocacy organization Bike East Bay and the volunteer-driven Walk Oakland Bike Oakland pushed the city of Oakland to revive its Bicycle Master Plan, which was adopted in 2007 but not well executed, as very few bikeways were created. After a few years of hard work, Oakland has more than 100 miles of new bike lanes (not including sharrows) and the goal of completing the master plan's proposed 218 miles by 2020 seems within reach.

Recently, a combined two-wheeled push from local business improvement districts and the businesses themselves has led to the installation of more bike corrals, secured bike parking, and even bike repair stations. Add to that a high concentration of bike shops; a healthy, outdoor-oriented community (though childhood obesity remains a problem); and several active, supportive bike clubs; and you've got the makings of a real bike culture.

"The Complete Streets model is becoming so important as urban areas develop, especially Oakland," says Andrew Jones, district service manager for Lake Merritt/ Uptown Association and Downtown Oakland Association. "Biking is the fastest-growing form of transportation. It just makes sense for us to support that mode."

The WOBO-Bike East Bay team is focusing on five key corridors to create safe, crosstown bike routes. "These are the highest-used corridors and also some of the trickiest," says WOBO president Chris Hwang, referring to the roadways' various widths, lane changes, and quirky intersections. "There is great potential for use, but there are also real safety issues. Improvements can make the difference between riding a lot and not riding at all."

The city of Oakland is methodically adding bike lanes on Broadway from City Hall to Lake



Temescal. With City Council approval, Telegraph Avenue will receive protected bike lanes from 20th to 29th streets and buffered bike lanes (a bike lane paired with a painted buffer space) from 29th to 41st streets beginning in early 2015. "We think the protected bike lanes will encourage a lot of people to try bicycling for the first time, because they are perceived as much more safe," says Dave Campbell, advocacy director for Bike East Bay. "The goal is to create a familiar experience, like an off-street path."



14th Street, from downtown to West Oakland, may receive similar treatment, and new bikeways are being added around Lake Merritt. "Upgrades near Kaiser Center and Harrison will start next year," says Campbell. "In the next couple of years, people should be able to ride from the lake to 14th, to downtown, to Telegraph, and either to West Oakland or Berkeley."

To accommodate the increased bike traffic, Oakland upped the ante for much-needed bike parking and other amenities. Coil-like rows of on-street bike racks, called bike corrals, can be seen everywhere from Burma Superstar to Timeless Café to Pizzaiolo as well as The New Parkway Theater, Kamdesh Kabob House, and Flora Restaurant.

The Uptown Bike Station, opening near 19th Street BART in January 2015, will offer secure, attended parking for up to 150 bikes. Most BART

stations already offer electronic lockers, which cost a mere three to five cents per hour and provide a high level of security.

The Downtown Oakland Association, with the help of Bay Area Bikes and Awaken Café, secured funding for the city's first bike repair station. The handy rack of tools and pumps is bolted in front of the espresso bar at Broadway and 15th Street, not far from Frank H. Ogawa Plaza. "I saw one at the Emeryville Public Market, and knew I wanted one for our district," Jones said.

The idea caught on. Another repair station is ready to help fix a flat at Franklin Square near Ike's Sandwiches. Four more will be installed in 2015. And if you just need a pump, some bike shops, including Montano Velo (on Piedmont Avenue) and Manifesto Bicycles (at 40th Street), have one outside.

People-watchers will be pleased to know that the city recently accepted applications for 15 new parklets. For the price of two parking spaces, a local business can have seating for a handful of folks and parking for about six bikes. "The parklets create people-friendly streets and even have a traffic-calming effect because of the narrowed lot to the street," says Campbell.

With the passage of Measure BB, Oakland is poised to meet advocates' goals of encouraging people to use their emission-free bike almost every day and to create world-class bikeways that families, commuters, and sightseers can enjoy. "It's not just about promoting bicycling," says Hwang. "It's about building a better city to live in."