

Prairie Horizons Trail

MARCH 2006 UPDATE

Remember the Prairie Horizons Trail?

Eastern Colorado residents may remember that in July of 2005 several towns in Kiowa and Crowley counties along Highway 96 officially designated a 110 mile segment of highway as the "Prairie Horizons Trail". This trail is a segment of the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail that crosses the country from Astoria, Oregon to Yorktown, Virginia. Every spring and summer our Highway 96 sees many cyclists. Although there are no exact statistics, the Adventure Cycling Association¹ estimates about 300 cyclists per year travel the TransAmerica trail based on the number of maps they sell for that route. However, we know that many cyclists use previously purchased maps.



Cyclists gather at Eads post office in July 2005.

Prairie Horizons Trail Highway Signs to Be Installed in Spring of 2006

The Prairie Horizons Trails (PHT) has some challenges. The biggest concern is width of the highway shoulders – or lack of shoulders in many places. Wide shoulders make on-highway trails safer for cyclists. Shoulder widening on Highway 96 is in the CDOT Region 2 long range plan but, in the meantime, cyclists are contending with semi trucks, inadequate riding space, and motorists who can be insensitive and sometimes aggressive toward cyclists. For these reasons, one of the working group's short-term goals is to have "Share the Road" signs installed along the trail.

This spring, the Colorado Department of Transportation will install "Share the Road" signs along the PHT. Thanks to funding from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) through the Colorado State Trails program, the Prairie Horizons Trail Logo will also be posted on the signs.

*Many thanks to CDOT Region 2
and Colorado State Trails Program!*

Everybody Benefits

Widening of highway shoulders is the ultimate goal of the Prairie Horizons Trail working group. Wide highway shoulders not only make for a safer experience for cyclists, but for motorists as well. Among other benefits, wider shoulders provide space to make evasive maneuvers, accommodate driver error, add a recovery area to regain control of a vehicle, contribute to driving ease and reduced driver strain, and reduce passing conflicts between motor vehicles and bicyclists.²



Probable appearance of highway signs.

¹ <http://www.adventurecycling.org/routes/transamerica.cfm>

² http://www.bikemaine.org/shoulders_reasons.htm

Ways to Help Cyclists Feel Welcome

Another goal of the PHT working group is to make the PHT the most memorable and enjoyable segment for cyclists. Cyclists enjoy the individual attention they get from people they encounter along the trail. Community members can add to a positive experience by helping cyclists feel welcome.

- Post "Welcome Cyclists" signs in business windows (provided by PHT group).
- Talk to cyclists or just smile and wave. Let them know you're glad to see them.
- Get creative by anticipating cyclists needs and helping fill them. For instance, stock bicycle repair tools in your garage or business.
- Show cyclists courtesy on the road. Motorists have harassed cyclists by crossing over the center line to scare an oncoming cyclist or by "crop dusting" – a harmful practice that involves diesel exhaust and unkind drivers.

CHALLENGES OF THE ROAD



Semi truck traffic



Inadequate highway shoulders



Overgrown highway shoulders

Safe Bicycle Passing Tips for Motorists

from Bicycle Colorado www.BicycleColorado.org

Watch for Bicyclists

Bicyclists ride to the right side of the road and on the shoulder when safe. They may be riding in the same lane as cars and may be on the left side of the lane when making left turns. Bicycles are considered vehicles on roads and have the same rights and responsibilities as motor vehicles.

Pass a Bike Like You Pass a Car

1. Just like passing a slower car, first slow down. (Please do not honk as it may startle the bicyclist and cause them veer into your path.)
2. Check to see if you are in a legal passing zone and look for oncoming traffic.
3. If the road is clear, signal to the left and enter the oncoming lane.
4. Give at least five feet distance between the edge of your vehicle and the bicyclist as they may need to change course due to wind, debris, glass, and cracks in the road.
5. After safely passing the bicyclist, signal right and return to the lane.

Thanks for Your Patience

Sometimes when there is oncoming traffic or a no-passing zone, you may need to slow down and wait a few seconds to pass safely. Those seconds can be easily made up later on your trip. Consider them a small price to pay to ensure the life and safety of another person.

True Story

Recently, an interesting story was relayed to Ed Zimmer of the Prairie Horizons Trail working group. In August of 2005, Kay Wells, daughter of Charlotte & Paul McDonell of Ordway was in Chicago to be evaluated in advance of a kidney and pancreas transplant. When Kay's surgeon asked where her support group was, Kay told him that her parents live in Ordway, CO. The doctor surprised Kay and endeared himself to her when he told her he knew where Ordway was. In fact, he had stopped in Ordway and stayed at the Hotel Ordway when he was cycling through on the TransAmerica Bicycle Trail!

WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

Nancy Moore - Ordway, Dwight Gardner - Crowley County, Janet Frederick - Kiowa County Economic Development Foundation, Ed Zimmer - Ordway, Cathryn Anderson - Arlington, Carl McClure - Olney Springs, Berniece McClure - Olney Springs, Deborah Davis - Haswell, Joy Lujan - National Park Service Rivers Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, Wendy Pettit - Colorado Department of Transportation.

To get involved in this effort or for more information, call 719-267-3995 or e-mail prairiehorizontrail@yahoo.com.