



NOT LIVING IN A PARKING LOT

North Coast Citizen * 1 June 2006 © Tom Bender * <tbender@nehalem.tel.net>

We'd be crazy to buy a car without a steering wheel, and with a gas pedal that is bolted wide open to the floorboard. It could do a lot of damage.

That's true of anything let loose to careen around without control. And it's what we've done with the automobile. Two-thirds of the ground in our cities is paved for automobiles. We spend hours cocoon-trapped in them every day. We wouldn't have either an oil or global warming crisis today if we'd bothered to buy even the efficient cars available 15 years ago.

Ever see a python that had swallowed a pig? One huge bulge being squeezed along from one end to the other. Well, that's what's coming our way. Here. First, the Hwy101-26 junction got jammed up, so we spent millions creating a more hazardous freeway-type interchange. Then the pig got caught at the North Cannon Beach Junction. So we spent millions more turning Cannon Beach into an urban freeway. Now, guess what? Cannon Beach can't figure out where to park all the pigs. I mean cars. And surprise, Seaside is now a traffic jam. All just for three peak weekends a year. Amazing!

Well, who's next down the python from Cannon Beach? Us. Did you hear that? Us. It's simple, and inevitable. Too many people in too many cars will destroy us and the rest of the Oregon Coast and its Once-Scenic Highway Once-01. You'll be able to get from here to Cannon Beach faster, so you'll have less time to enjoy your scenic, I mean non-scenic drive.

Unless we get a steering wheel and unbolt the gas pedal. Or maybe it's time to digest the pig.

I was lucky to visit one of my sons last year when he was working in Italy. Turns out, in a walled city with no cars. Turns out also, that most European cities have banned cars from the city centers. They had too much good stuff to lose, more precious than parking lots. So they have busses, and taxis, and some very high-speed luxurious trains, where you can relax, even sleep, while you travel. And enough exercise walking to the grocery or work that they don't have to spend two hours a day in a gym to get rid of their car-bellies.

So now Manzanita is doing what Cannon Beach, and every true-blooded American city has done, trying to figure out what to do with cars once there's too many to park on the street. And ODOT is trying to figure out how to squeeze the next 20 years projected traffic through the Manzanita curves. And the python keeps slithering down the road from Cannon Beach. And oil hits \$79/barrel. And nobody denies the world is running out.

Ding!!!! Maybe it's time for a change. The only thing we know is that projecting that past is a dead-end, any way we look at it. What we DO know is that we DON'T know what is going to happen. So maybe it's time to try something different. Or lots of somethings different, and see what works out.

One thing that may be worth a try is to declare Nehalem to Cannon Beach junction a "Car-Free Vacation Zone". During the summer, charge a \$40/day toll on non-coastal cars. More, if needed. Anyone can bypass the zone on Hwy 53. Alternative to the toll would be a parking lot at the CB Junction and near Nehalem. Run passenger trains and busses out from PDX. Free local jitney busses taking people where they want to go, paid for by the toll.

Ever take one of the top-down jitney busses on the Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park? WOW! How wonderful it would be to be able to enjoy the drive into Ecola Park - not having to drive and dodge oversized vehicles on a narrow, twisty road. Able to enjoy the forest you came to see.

Add home delivery of groceries from the stores. Bicycle rentals. Music people can stop and listen to without finding a parking space. Give people a totally different vacation experience. One very successful in Europe and elsewhere. Cut gas use way down, attract the growing market of people who don't want to go into debt driving to the beach. No downtown parking lots plugged with tourist cars, no Scenic 101 turned into a freeway.

Give it a dream. Give it a try. What can we lose? Might gain a future.