Bicycle Times: Anticipating the Sail Transport Connection

Contributed by Karen Brooks
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Editor's note: "Moving Around the World: the Sail Transport Network" is a new article in the relatively new magazine Bicycle Times. The publishing team also puts out the mountain biking magazine Dirt Rag. Seeing sail transport as an extension of biking is a smart way to anticipate the future. People imagine life without the internal combustion engine and cars, but do they also see ways around trucking and ocean-going freight relying on polluting, dwindling oil?

You may already have begun to use a bicycle more for your own personal transportation needs, but have you ever thought about connecting cycle power with other renewable-energy vehicles to create a petroleum-free global trade network? Jan Lundberg has. Lundberg is the founder of Culture Change, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing petroleum dependence. One longstanding goal of his is now coming into fruition with the Sail Transport Network (STN), begun in the Puget Sound to serve Seattle. STN activists are now launching projects in a handful of other parts of the U.S. and Canada. In Portland, Oregon, the immediate venture is to deliver malted grain to a local brewery, then deliver the finished product to happy consumers, using a combination of wind and pedal power.

“Sail Transport Network is paradoxically one of the simplest, clearest initiatives that ever saw slowness and frustration in such a way for so long in these urgent times. But I'm still here! The idea originated in the late '90s and had its first attempt in 1999-2000 in the Puget Sound. Cheap oil did us in, pretty much until 2006; between times it was a minimal web presence. Now I can report that we've come a long way,” says Lundberg.

Lundberg has been inspired by the Sail Transport Company, which has been delivering vegetables and honey to points around Puget Sound, Washington, for two seasons. In 1997, in Humboldt County, California, his group Alliance for a Paving Moratorium began Pedal Powered Produce, a cargo-bike delivery service for local produce. Combining these two modes has a lot of potential to move goods across considerable distances, especially as more people get involved.

“A fully operational STN (for more than the Puget Sound and Portland's brewing scene) will happen when the idea of using available sail boats for practical purposes—enhancing food security and passenger service—occurs to the average sailor and yacht owner in more than a few localities (as is the case at present),” Lundberg explains. “Higher petroleum prices and oil shortage might have to occur first. For we have done much to prepare, propose and publicize while the oil's flowing.”

STN’s big goals go far beyond Portland. “Future plans include bringing cacao (basis of chocolate) and coffee from the tropics to the Pacific Northwest and the U.S. Gulf Coast. Think of the U.S. coffee and chocolate addicts getting their fixes guilt-free over both climate concern and oil consumption! Of course, waterways are necessary because the Pedal Power Produce component of

STN can't go hundreds of miles inland. But as you know, over a hundred yeas ago and from time immemorial there was trade of such goods even far inland. It will come back."

To find out more and to get involved, go to SailTransportNetwork.com