

Viewpoints

Whenever you need to go somewhere, consider walking

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

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Commentary

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downtown area. This is the case during the farmers' market, summer concerts, the lighting of Christmas Village and other events.

Events are a great way to get people walking in the downtown area, but it is not practical to host major events on a daily or weekly basis. Can something be done to entice

more people to walk on a daily basis? One of the most effective tools is retailing and restaurants.

Retail businesses attract walkers. The term "window shopping" accurately describes the power of retail stores to generate foot traffic. The retail businesses and restaurants along 25th Street have greatly increased the number of people walking along 25th Street between Wall and Grant avenues. The opening of the Salomon Center has stimulated pedestrian activity on 23rd and Washington. The continued enhancement of retailing in downtown Ogden will do a great deal to create a vibrant and welcoming downtown where people enjoy walking.

Can other things be done to promote walking in downtown Ogden? The answer is certainly yes.

Efforts to beautify

the downtown will help. Attractive street signs and benches can send important psychological signals that walking is appropriate. Anything that increases perceptions of safety will make walkers more comfortable. In my view, making the effort to promote walking in downtown Ogden will yield significant dividends for the city.

One of my favorite quotes from Henry David Thoreau regards walking. Thoreau said, "There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of a 10 miles radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the three score years and 10 of human life. It will never become quite familiar to you."

Thoreau was writing of the countryside, but walking also has the capacity to make an urban environment discoverable. Walking makes a city familiar in ways that other modes of transportation don't. It would be nice if visitors arriving in Ogden via FrontRunner were inclined to discover Ogden by taking a leisurely walk through Ogden's downtown.

The long-awaited day has come. Intercity mass transit has come to the Top of Utah. FrontRunner is making the trek from Ogden to Salt Lake on a regular schedule. We now wait to see how commuting patterns will change in the coming months and years.

One question that many are considering is how to get from the FrontRunner stations to their ultimate destinations. In Ogden, Utah Transit Authority buses provide a viable choice. Others wish for alternative options. There is talk of streetcars and bus rapid transit. I understand that an imaginative entrepreneur is going to offer a pedicab service in downtown Ogden. In case you don't know, a pedicab is something of a cross between a bicycle and a rickshaw.

Interestingly, an option used in cities across the country has received almost no attention in Ogden. That option is walking. When I travel to our country's major cities, walking is one of my preferred modes of transportation. On many trips I have walked from midtown Manhattan to the Met Museum, across Central Park and down to Times Square. My wife and I once walked from the Golden Gate Bridge to Fisherman's Wharf, through Chinatown,

then back to our hotel. On cold and windy Chicago afternoons I have walked from Water Town Plaza along the Magnificent Mile to the Art Institute, and then made the return trip. Because of these walks, I have a knowledge and affection for these cities that would not have been gained if I had relied on mass transit.

Given my experience in other cities, I began to ponder what could be done to increase walking in Ogden. What can be done to change habits and foster walking as a mode of transportation in downtown Ogden? Several things come to mind. People tend to walk in cities where lots of other people are walking. A key reason for this is that people tend to feel safer when they are in groups. Walkers are common in downtown Ogden when large groups come to the

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