

Bicycle Commuter Tax Break Is a Bittersweet Victory for Measure's Sponsor

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PORTLAND, Ore. — People who pedal to work each day have long sought a kind of commuter equality: a federal tax break for biking similar to those given for parking or riding public transit. Last week, after years of rejection, the credit suddenly became law.



Brendan Hoffman/Getty Images

Representative Earl Blumenauer founded the Congressional Bike Caucus.

Scheduled to take effect in January, the credit was among a range of energy and tax provisions quickly added to the \$700 billion financial rescue.

Yet here in the district of the congressman who first pushed for the bicycle bill, Representative Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat who wears a bicycle lapel pin and founded the Congressional Bike Caucus, no party is being planned.

“Who wants to celebrate?” said Jonathan Maus, who edits a blog that promotes cycling here in Portland. “Because I think a lot of people agree with how Blumenauer voted.”

Even with his cycling tax credit attached to the financial rescue bill, Mr. Blumenauer voted against the measure. After all, thousands of constituents had contacted his office to oppose the [\\$700 billion rescue bill](#) and he was frustrated that it did not do more to help individual homeowners, according to an aide.

“He was looking at the big picture, the state of the economy,” said Lucia Graves, a spokeswoman for the congressman. “If anything it was a diversion,” she said of the cycling tax credit. “It’s great that it was on there, but it was not the point.”

Come January, bike commuters will receive a monthly credit of up to \$20 that can be spent on maintaining, repairing or buying bicycles.

Employers, many of whom have long provided tax-free parking and transit benefits, will establish how they administer the cycling tax credit, Ms. Graves said. Employers will be able to deduct the credit from their corporate taxes.

“The idea was to level the playing field for cyclists,” she said.

Portland has a higher percentage of people who bike to work than any other American city, according to the [Census Bureau](#).

In the past year, bicycle traffic on the main bridges over the Willamette River into downtown rose to about 18,000 from about 14,000 last year, according to Mr. Maus.

Nationwide, many bike enthusiasts have praised the new tax credit, even some frustrated that it was part of the rescue bill.

“It’s a totally weird, ironic political situation,” Mr. Maus said. “It’s a pretty small victory. But this gives a lot of people around the country the ability to walk into their human resources office or their manager’s office and ask for the credit. It helps move the conversation forward.”

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http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/10/us/10bike.html?_r=1