

OUR OPINION

1950s-era policy must be updated for 2009 life

A recent study reported by the Chronicle last week revealed that Bozeman's greenhouse gas emissions increased by 32 percent between 2000 and 2008, a period during which the city's population grew by some 38 percent.

The news prompted city commissioners to announce plans for a task force to come up with recommendations for reducing those emissions, including building standards that will create more energy-efficient homes and businesses. Sixty percent of the emissions increase was attributed to electricity consumption.

The commissioners are largely motivated by the threat of climate change; carbon emissions have been blamed in part for causing those changes. But regardless of one's assessment of the climate change threat, a 32 percent increase in emissions in the air we breathe should be cause for concern for all of us.

It's interesting that news of the emissions increase came just days after the announcement of state coalition aimed at getting the soon-to-be renewed federal transportation bill to include provisions that address the need for "bikeable, walkable, livable" communities, according to one member of the coalition.

A push for the inclusion of extensive, safe and practical walking and biking trails in our communities may sound like one of those feel-good campaigns that doesn't really accomplish much.

But on further consideration, Bozeman — and at least several other Montana communities — are different than cities in many parts of the country in that people here really like to walk and bike just about any time they can. They walk and bike to work, to shop, to school and just for the fun of it much more than the populations of other similarly sized cities.

Don't think so? Make a point of observing the behavior in other cities when you travel. It's rare to witness as many people walking and biking as is apparent here in Bozeman at almost any time of the year. This is a place where people live to be outside and physically active year-round, and it's a place where many people will take advantage of almost any opportunity to bike and walk rather than drive — the other major source of our increased carbon emissions.

This is not the 1950s anymore, when federal transportation policy was first articulated during the ascendancy of the automobile as Americans' chosen means of transportation.

We've advanced beyond that, and federal transportation funding should include a substantial component of infrastructure that makes our cities — particularly Montana cities — more walkable, bikeable and livable.