Eastside Esplanade Review
by Julia Reisinger

The Eastside Esplanade is a 1.5 mile path along the east-side of the Willamette river in downtown Portland. It combines with another path on the west side of the river along Tom McCall Waterfront park, and together they combine for about a 2 ½ mile loop. The loop is very popular for anyone living or working in or around downtown Portland, especially over the lunch hour and after work. The loop contains a floating walkway, and crosses the Hawthorne and Steel bridges with no vehicular traffic, just lots of walkers, runners and cyclists.

I started at the South end by the Hawthorne bridge after parking a few blocks from OMSI, and ran counter-clockwise on a beautiful Saturday morning. It wasn't too crowded, but there were more people on the path as the morning wore on, and I could definitely see how this trail could get congested, especially on the west side along Tom McCall waterfront due to various events, such as rose festival. I thought I wouldn't want to have to wind my way through a crowd if there was a large event going on. The eastside was less crowded, but since it was closer to the highway, it was a lot more noisy. However, both sides were beautiful, and the lack of traffic made it a very pleasant run.

I also have to admit that as a person with a mild fear of heights, crossing the Hawthorne bridge was not my favorite part of the run. At least it wasn't over open grating! Also, while the loop was enjoyable, it was a bit short for my taste. At only about 2 ½ miles, if you want to run longer you have to either run multiples loops, or attach additional miles elsewhere. This wouldn't be difficult because the Eastside Esplanade connects with the Springwater Corridor, but just considering the loop on its own it simply wasn't long enough for me. However, as a nice walk or run over a lunch hour or a short run on a weekend, it's a perfect fit.

Also, along both sides of the river, there were signs detailing different sights (such as the bridges and parks), and the floating walkway was really fun and unique.

Would I run this route by myself? I felt perfectly safe on a Saturday morning, and I imagine over a lunch hour I'd feel the same way, but in the evening, or when it was darker in the winter months? Probably not. The eastside could feel a little isolated since there was only the path, and no businesses nearby.

(info on next page)

Directions:
You can get to the Eastside Esplanade loop from many different routes. Basically, you can park anywhere downtown that is close to the river anywhere between the Hawthorne and Steel bridges, and start the loop anywhere on either side. I started at the Hawthorne bridge near OMSI so from the west, cross the Marquam bridge, and take the exit for OMSI. If you simply follow the signs, you can park in several different parking lots, but if you want to park at OMSI it costs $3.

Bathroom: There were no bathrooms where I started, but there are a few on the west side of the river, and the loop is short enough that you probably don't need to worry about it. But to be safe, you might want to "go before you go".

Parking: There is ample parking all along the route, including where I started at the Hawthorne bridge.

Surface: Paved bike path the entire route.

Traffic: None. The trail is closed to traffic.

Popularity: Not too bad when I was running, but definitely getting busier by the time I finished. The east side had more cyclists when I started, and the west side (as I was finishing the run) had more runners and walkers.

Plusses: The scenery, the lack of traffic, and a paved trail so no risk of tripping. Also a fun stretch along the floating walkway

Minuses: A little noisy on the eastside due to proximity to the highway, and I anticipate a little congestion on the west side if there are any events going on downtown. And as I mentioned earlier, any fear of heights might increase your anxiety as you cross the bridges.

Rating: 4 out of 5 (a little short, but multiple loops or adding on to the loop would allow you to go further).

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