

Bicycling in Downtown Wenatchee - Ways to Go North & South

by Charles Hickenbottom

Previous articles in Wenatchee Outdoors have led bicyclists to downtown Wenatchee from East Wenatchee and to downtown Wenatchee from the west. This piece provides analysis of travel north-south once a bicyclist has reached downtown. Four north-south streets are available, defined here as streets on the west side of the Burlington Northern train tracks, and between Second St and Kittitas St. To be more precise, these streets run northwest to southeast. Beginning from uphill and working downhill, the streets include Chelan Ave, Mission St, Wenatchee Ave, and Columbia St. Wenatchee's Apple Capital Loop Trail, is of course a north-south route, but is not a part of downtown Wenatchee.



The inaugural Greater Wenatchee Bicycle Advisory Board (GWBAB) of 1998 suggested that the city of Wenatchee adopt/develop a formalized north-south bike route through downtown Wenatchee. A 2005 map prepared by GWBAB and the City of Wenatchee showed Columbia St as a possible north-south route. The 2017 Wenatchee Valley Bike Map prepared by the Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council portrayed comfort levels on various streets with colored line symbols. Currently however, no formalized north-south bike route has ever been adopted for downtown Wenatchee.

Chelan Ave and Mission St both share similar characteristics of multiple lanes, one-way traffic, and motorized vehicles often traveling over the speed limit. Neither arterial is used much by bicyclists.

The four north-south streets (left, red lines) that pass through downtown Wenatchee are shown.

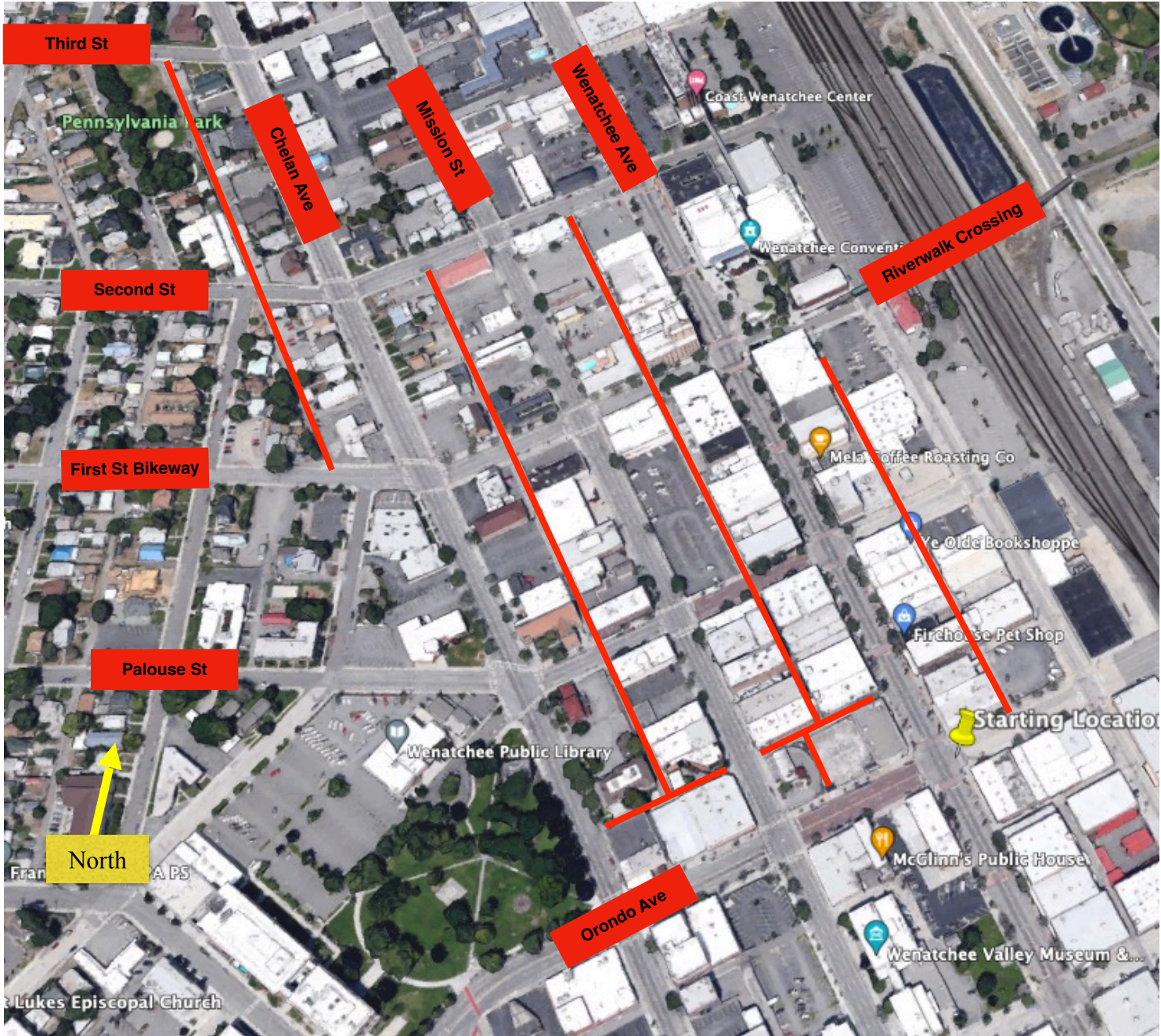
Wenatchee Ave (map, previous page) between Second St and Kittitas St features diagonal parking. While the speed of motorized traffic on Wenatchee Ave is slower as compared to the one-way couplet, bicyclists must use extreme caution by watching for motorized vehicles backing out of parking spots. The safest way to navigate this corridor by bicycle is to take the middle of the lane and ride single file with motorized traffic. This technique may not appeal to less experienced cyclists unaccustomed to riding in traffic. Columbia St between Second St and Chehalis St has the lowest traffic counts, thus has the most comfort for bicyclists. The road surface is rough in places; take care when riding. Riding south between Orondo Ave and Kittitas St involves watching for vehicles backing out of parking spots. Riding the middle of the lane makes a bicyclist easier to spot by motorists backing out of parking spots.



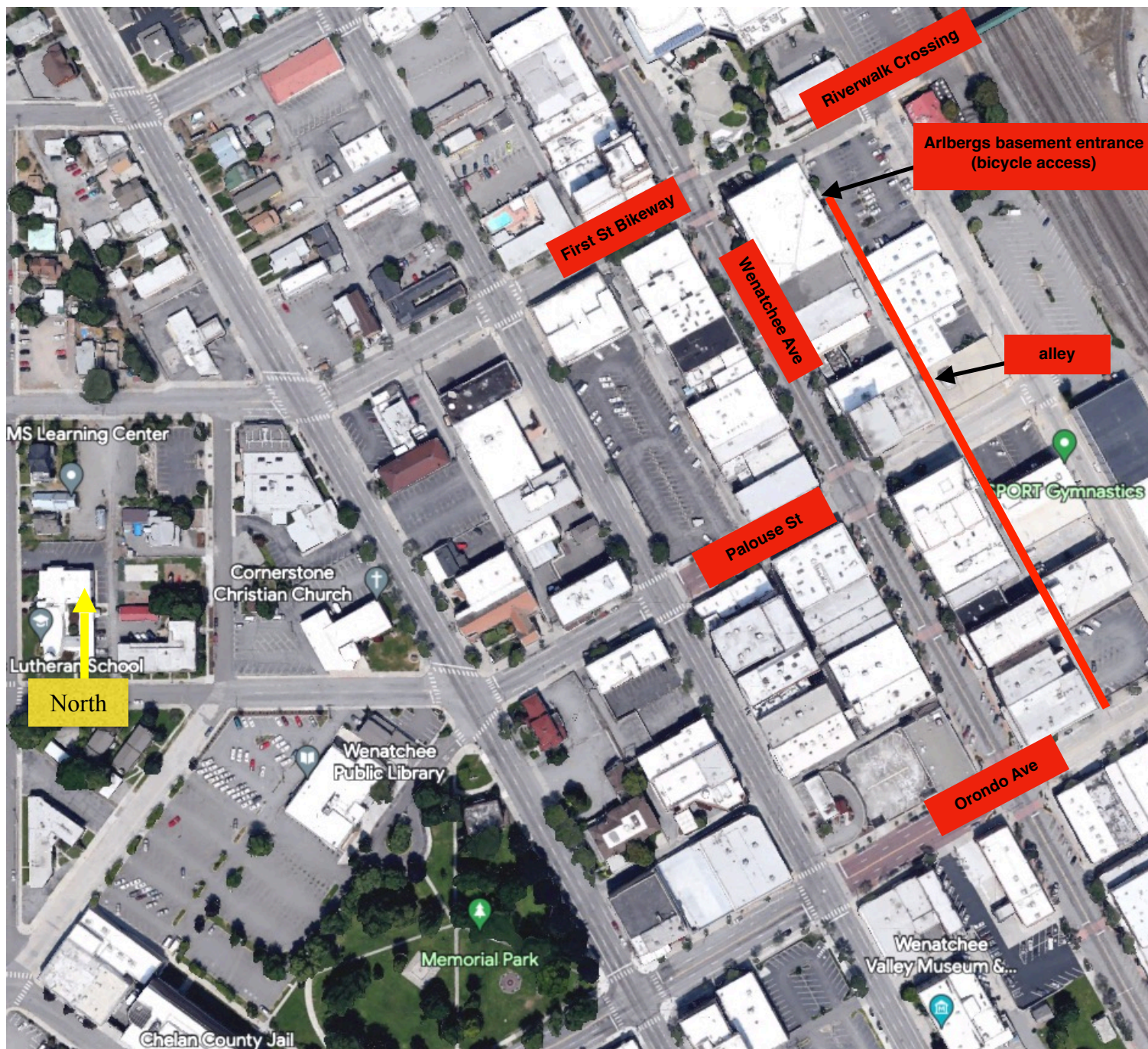
Columbia St southbound between Orondo Ave and Yakima St (left) shows cars parking straight in. Columbia St southbound between Yakima St and Kittitas St (below) shows diagonal parking. Bicyclists are safest not riding to the right, where a bicyclist is vulnerable to motorized traffic backing out of parking spaces. Riding in the middle of the lane, single file with motorized traffic, is the safest method to negotiate this street when riding southbound.



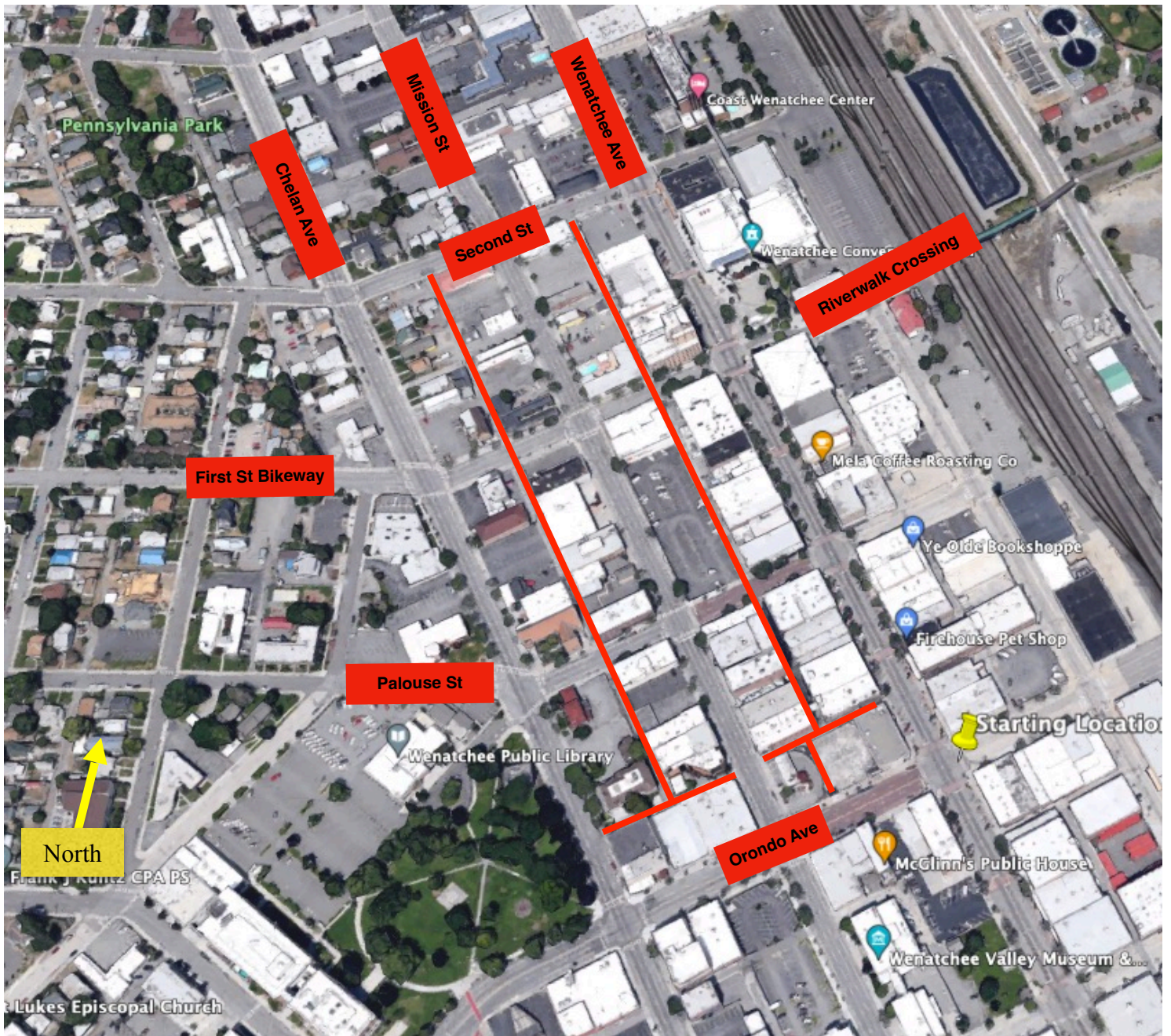
Little known to motorists are four paved north-south alleys (below, red lines) that may appeal to bicyclists looking for quieter less-stressful routes that provide utility in getting around downtown Wenatchee. These four alleys in combination with a few east-west streets and short east-west alleys will be examined more closely to illustrate how a bicyclist can easily navigate to some important locations downtown. Use caution, alleys get less maintenance than streets. By riding without haste, it's not difficult to avoid rough patches and some occasional broken glass.



The easternmost of the four alleys (below, red line) is anchored on the north by the basement entrance into Arlberg Sports and on the south by Orondo Ave. Inside the basement entrance into Arlbergs is the bike shop. Outside the door is a handy bike rack. From this alley it's also easy to ride or walk across First St to access the Riverwalk Crossing and the Loop Trail. From the alley a bicyclist can ride up Palouse St for access to the Wenatchee Library, Memorial Park, and Chelan County Courthouse. Palouse St also provides handy connections to Washington St, Idaho St, Castlerock St, Cherry St, and the Kittitas-Fuller bike route.



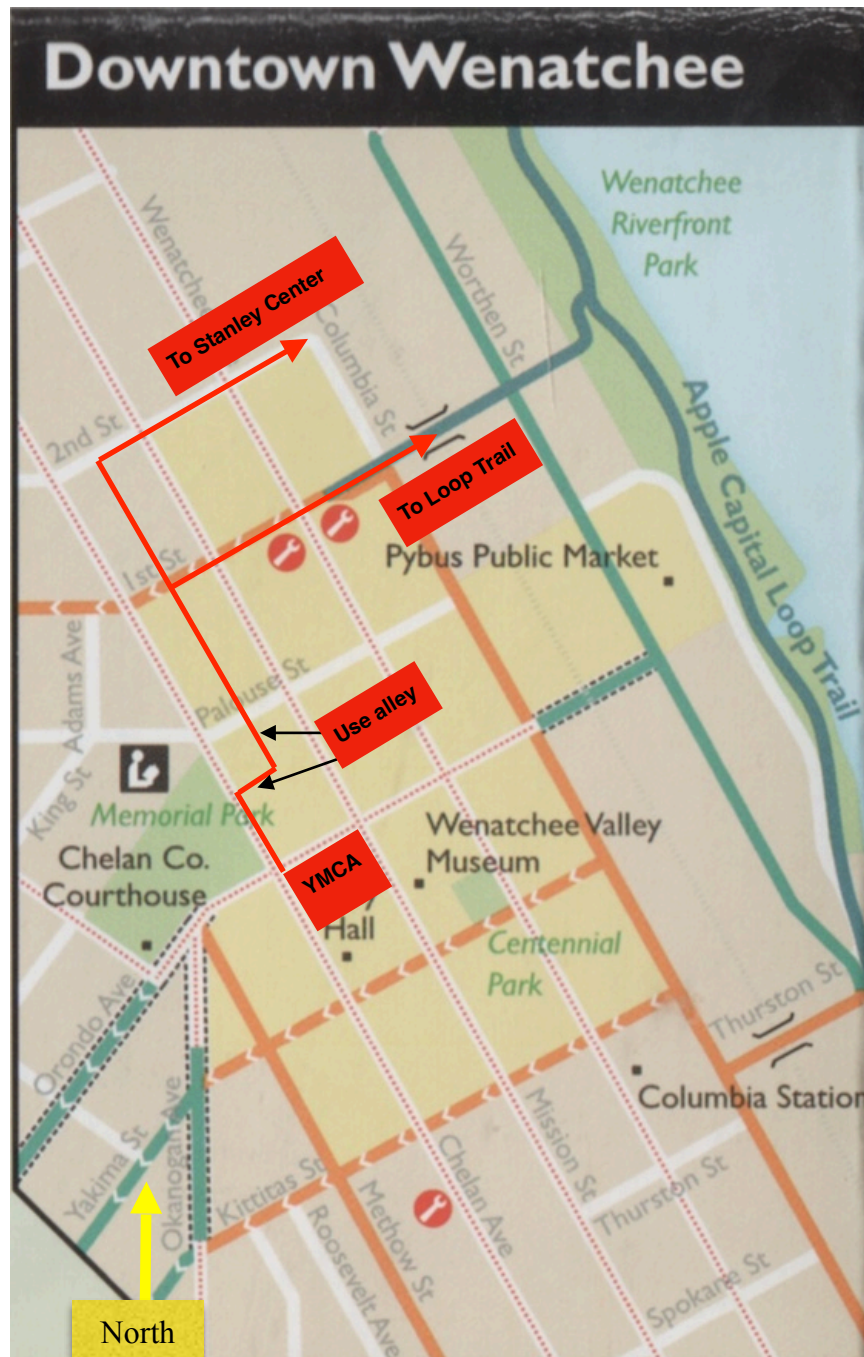
Two somewhat similar alleys (below, red lines) are anchored on the north by Second St. Both of these alleys allow north-south travel while avoiding the more heavily used north-south arterials. Best access to the alleys is via Second St, First St Bikeway, Riverwalk Crossing, and Palouse St. By riding through a parking lot just north of Orondo, the eastern alley extends from Orondo Ave to Second St. The western of the two alleys extends from Second St south to within 1/2 block of Orondo. Just north of Orondo Ave, two east-west alleys allow easy connections to Chelan Ave, Mission St, and Wenatchee Ave. Just as an example, one could lunch at Bob's Classic Brass & Brew on Second St and then bicycle to Performance Footwear on Wenatchee Ave just north of Orondo Ave without ever needing to bicycle on Wenatchee Ave.

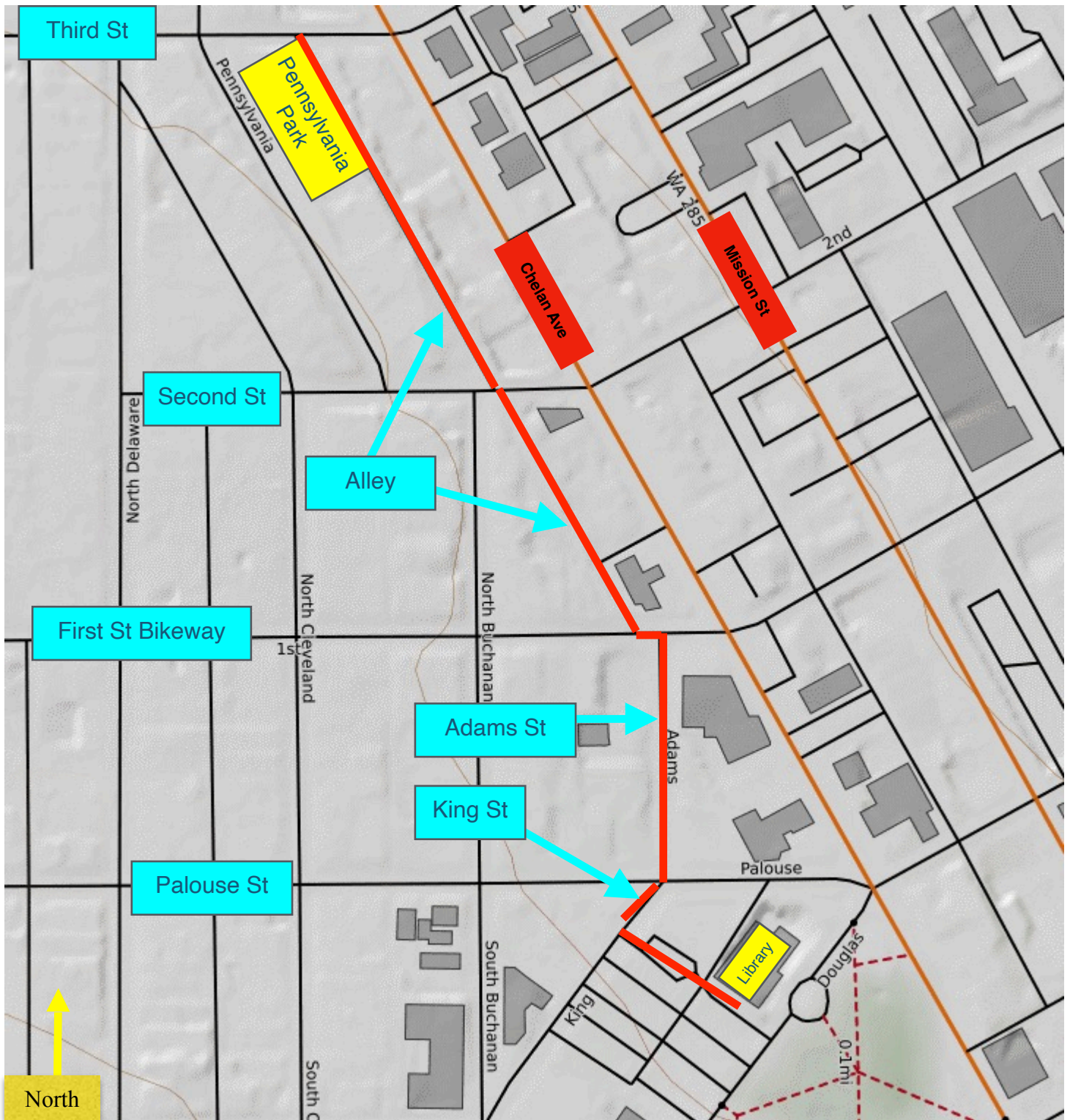




If bicycling to the Wenatchee Library, Memorial Park, or Chelan County Courthouse from the Loop Trail, an alley will be most useful. Follow the First St Bikeway west from Riverwalk Crossing. Midway between Wenatchee Ave and Mission St, turn south and ride the alley. At Palouse St turn west and continue to the parking area for the three public places. Quality bike racks are located in front of the library. The same alley also works well for access to the Stanley Center if coming from Memorial Park area.

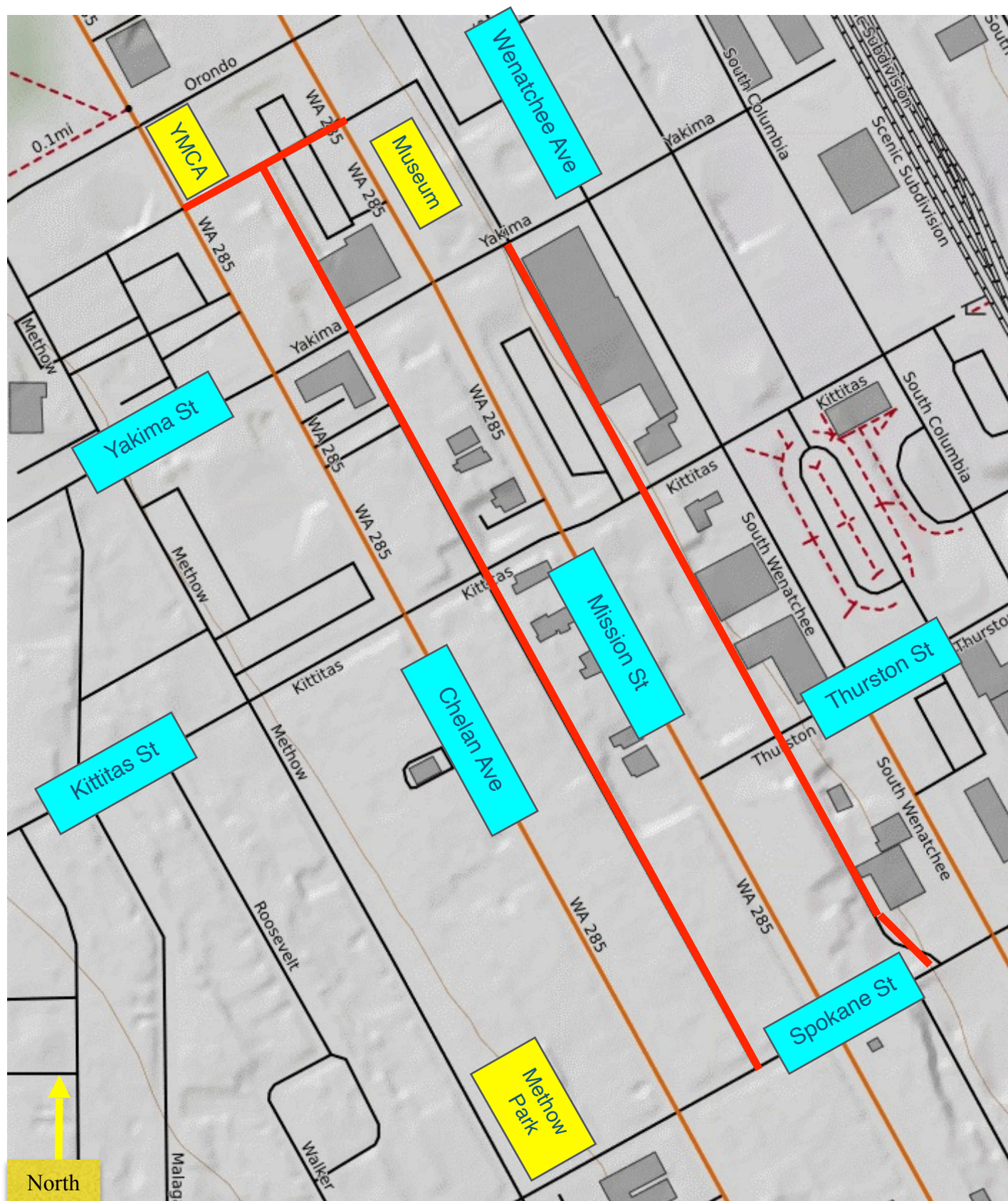
An alley will also be useful for bicycling from the YMCA to either the Loop Trail or the Stanley Center. From the YMCA (below) head north on the sidewalk for one half block, then turn east riding the alley downhill. After one half block, turn north and follow the alley. Logical connections include First St to reach the Loop Trail and Second St to reach the Stanley Center.



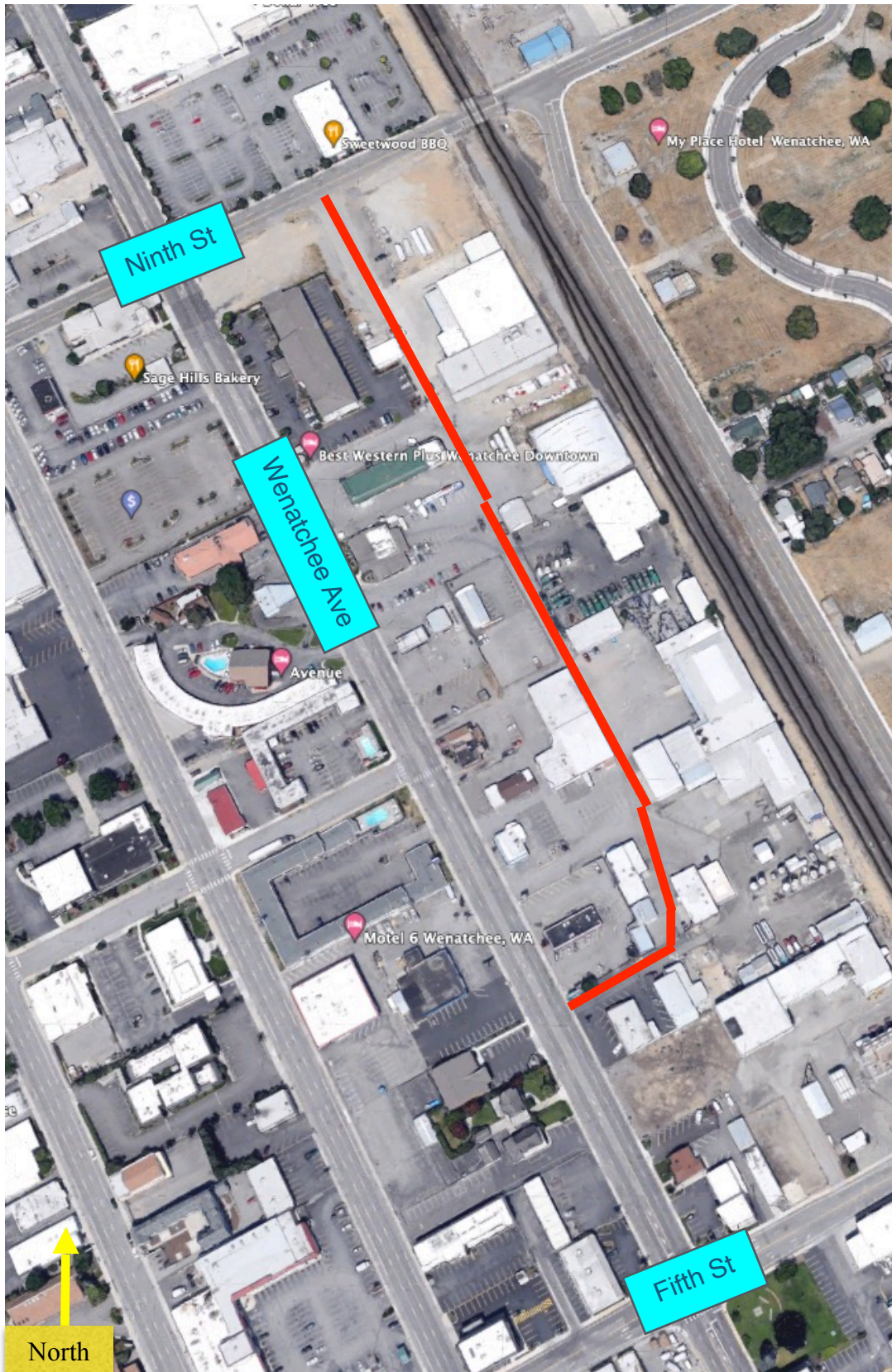


For bicycle riders coming to the Wenatchee Library from the neighborhood near Pennsylvania Park, there is a convenient bicycling route using an alley. Begin on Third St and head south on the paved alley that is below and just east of the park. At Second St continue south on the alley. Where the alley ends at First St, continue south on Adams St. At Palouse St, jog west a short ways up Palouse, then turn south into the parking lot which serves the Wenatchee Library, Memorial Park, and the Chelan County Courthouse.

Two alleys extend south from downtown Wenatchee (below, red lines). Both offer quiet alternatives to the much busier parallel streets. Both alleys include portions of pavement and gravel, neither looks to get much maintenance, so wider bike tires and sturdy bike tubes are recommended. These alleys may be useful for cyclists accessing businesses on Wenatchee Ave, Mission St, and Chelan Ave.



Another north-south alley route (below in red) extends south from Ninth St, not quite reaching Fifth St. A bicyclist can exit the Skookum shopping mall, cross Ninth St, and enter the Wenatchee World publishing site. Continuing south with a feel of passing through a series of parking lots, the route eventually reaches H&D Auto. Here a bicyclist must transition to Wenatchee Ave. This route makes sense if combining locations in downtown with Skookum Plaza.



On the east (river) side of the BNRR tracks is an additional north-south corridor worth mentioning. A combination of Worthen St and Riverside Drive (graphic below) makes a connection between Thurston St and Ninth St. Lacking a bicycle designation for this routes relegates it to mostly experienced bicyclists who comfortably mix with motorized traffic. It makes sense for experienced bicyclists, given the ten mph speed limit on the Loop Trail.

City of Wenatchee decision makers during the planning of Riverside Dr feared taking criticism to include bike lanes for Riverside Dr, given the close proximity to the Loop Trail. It's understandable given that Riverside Dr was constructed well before the City of Wenatchee adopted a Complete Streets policy in 2016. The graphic (below) is from a 2023 planning document prepared by Northwest Studio during the Reimagine Wenatchee planning process to envision what's ahead for downtown Wenatchee.



Reimagine Wenatchee is a public process (2023-24) to plan ahead for downtown Wenatchee. Northwest Studio, a contracted planning firm, presented some vision items (Nov, 2023). Most conspicuous in Northwest Studio's Discovery Phase Summary (page 27) was a proposal for a new through route in downtown Wenatchee from Spokane St to Fifth St by combining Columbia St with a new "Electric Ave" (image below). "Electric Ave" would continue north from the Columbia St / Second St intersection, pass through the former PUD complex envisioned for Wenatchee YMCA, and exit onto Fifth St between Wenatchee Ave and the BNSF railroad tracks. Northwest Studio envisions the entire corridor with bike lanes and new pavement for Columbia St. It appears that GWBAB's decades-old proposal (1998) for a designated bike route through downtown Wenatchee will likely be adopted 25 years later. It's been a long wait. However, no funding currently exists for this proposal. Hopefully the wait for construction funds will not be such a long wait.



Columbia Street could become a shared space for multiple modes of transportation.



Charles Hickenbottom is the author of Greater Wenatchee Bicycle Routes - A History Told Through Maps, Drawings, and Pictures. The book is available for purchase through the Wenatchee Valley Museum and can be checked out from North Central Washington Libraries. Hickenbottom has served for 25 years on local bicycle advisory boards and committees. For two decades he commuted by bicycle to Lewis & Clark Elementary School from his home near Chase Park. Most of his errands around town are done by bicycle. 11-9-2023.