

Yakima Street - Past and Present Bicycle Use

by Charles Hickenbottom

An analysis of Yakima Street in downtown Wenatchee pertinent to bicycling is best done within the framework of what's nearby. Parallel east-west streets on either side of Yakima are Orondo Ave and Kittitas St. Streets north-south in downtown Wenatchee that cross Yakima St include Columbia St, Wenatchee Ave, Mission St, Chelan Ave, Methow St, and Okanogan Ave. A CalTopo image (below) shows Yakima St and its surroundings.



Wenatchee's first bike lanes were placed on nearby Orondo Ave in 1997, covering the distance between Triangle Park and Washington St. One can see on the Google Earth image (below) that the bike lanes on Orondo Ave, while helpful for bicycling to Plaza Superjet, didn't quite reach Chelan County Courthouse for eastbound bicyclists, and certainly didn't connect a bicyclist with the downtown shopping areas along and nearby Wenatchee Ave. Nearby Yakima St, with much less traffic volumes, has always been the logical choice of many bicyclists to head east all the way to Columbia Ave.



Yakima St is important for bicycle use. Access to public destinations shown below include Wenatchee City Hall, Wenatchee Police Station, Wenatchee Valley Museum, and Centennial Park. From the foot of Yakima St at Columbia Ave, bicyclists can turn north on Columbia Ave to access the Riverwalk Crossing and the Convention Center. It's also convenient to head south on Columbia Ave to access the bus/train hub at Kittitas St and the Thurston St Underpass to head towards the Reclamation Bridge leading to East Wenatchee.



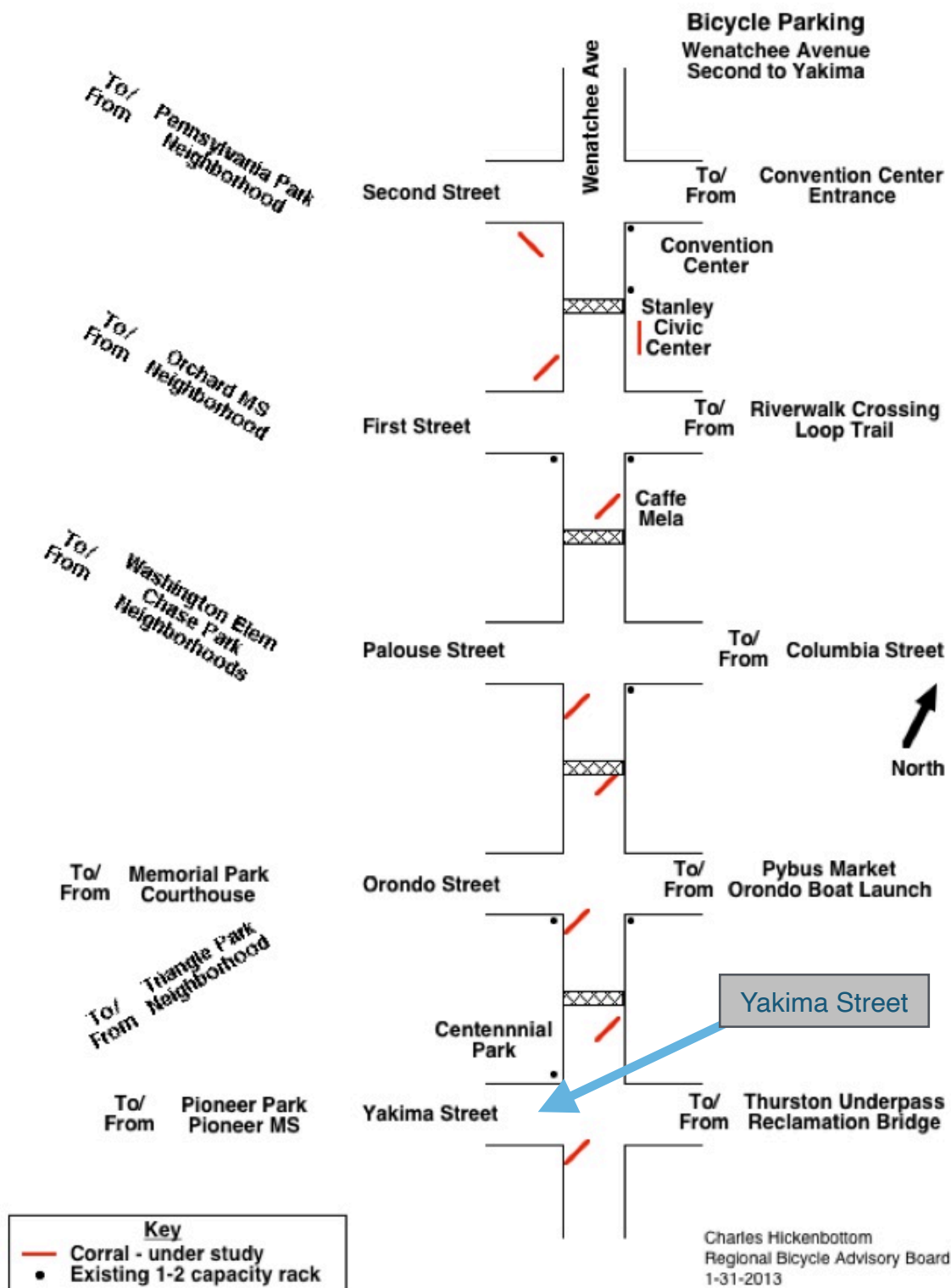
In 1998 the City of Wenatchee added several new signed bike routes. Pertinent to a discussion of Yakima St was the addition of the Kittitas-Fuller route, which connected Central Washington Hospital (now Confluence Health) to the Loop Trail, pictured below from the 1998 City of Wenatchee bicycle map. The portion of the route on Kittitas St parallels Yakima Street one block away. It's easy to see that anyone bicycling towards downtown Wenatchee on the Kittitas/Fuller route can easily move over one block via Methow St to access destinations on Yakima St. During peak traffic it is difficult to cross Chelan Ave on Kittitas St, with no controlled signal there. Savvy bicyclists use the controlled signal at nearby Yakima St as an alternative for an easy crossing of Chelan Ave.



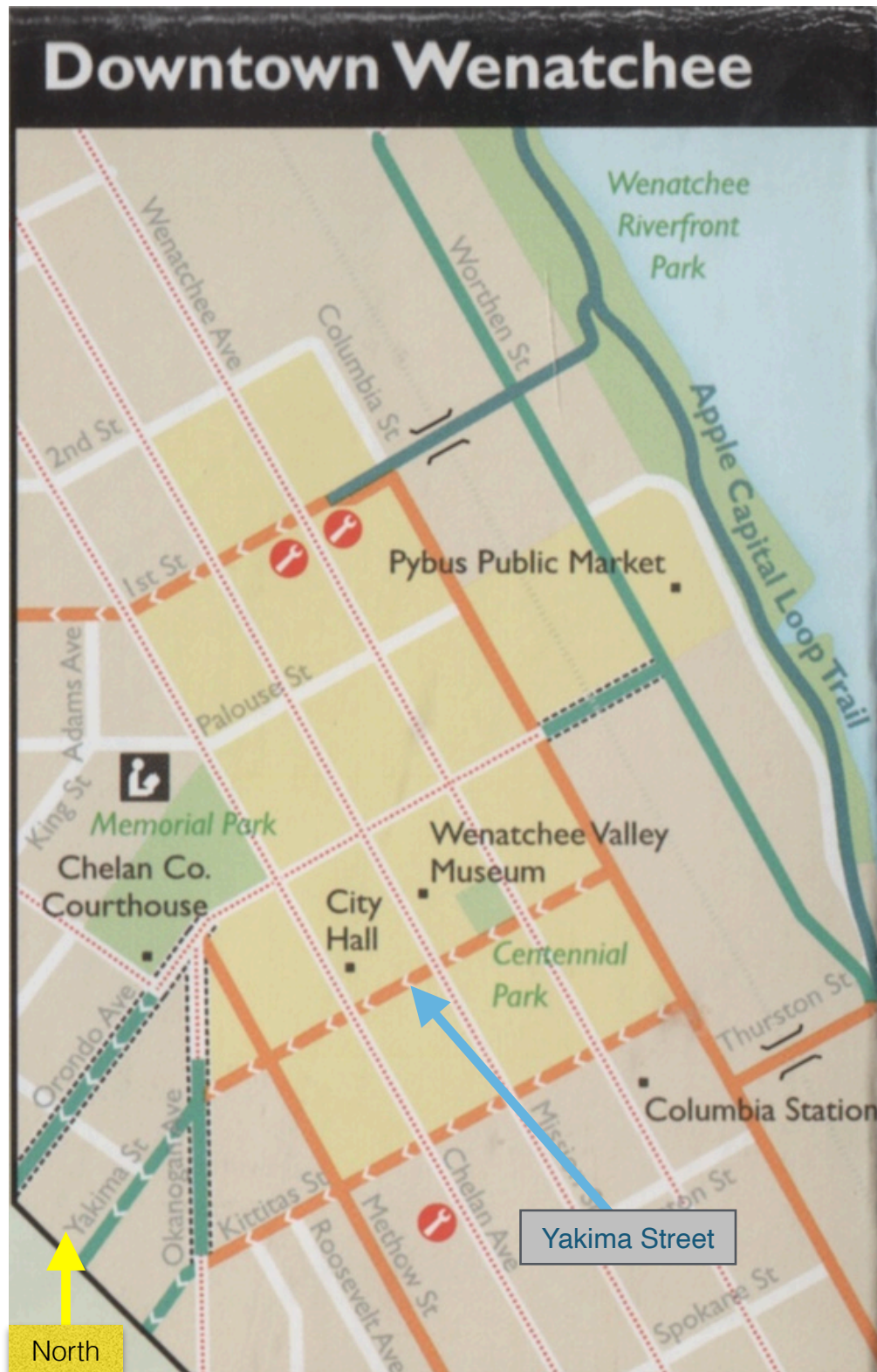
The 2005 City of Wenatchee bike map (below) used a dashed purple line as a map symbol for "possible routes." Yakima Street's entire length was portrayed in this way, formally documenting Yakima Street's utility for bicyclists.



In 2013 Regional Bicycle Advisory Committee (RBAC) was collaborating with the City of Wenatchee and the Wenatchee Downtown Association, exploring ways to bicycle into downtown and possible locations to place bike racks. The graphic (below) illustrates that Yakima St was integral to the plans to encourage bicycle traffic into the downtown core.



The 2017 Wenatchee Valley Bike Map included a detailed insert of downtown Wenatchee (below). The utility of Yakima St to bicyclists was shown with additional detail, with an orange line on Yakima St between Columbia St and Okanogan Ave denoting a "somewhat comfortable" route due to riding a bicycle in city traffic. Its uphill grade was denoted using a series of arrows pointing in the uphill direction.



Changes in 2021 to streets surrounding City Hall have been dramatic as part of a complete remake of the property from the former use as a federal site. The image (below) shows the new configuration. The single lane of one-way traffic westbound between Chelan Ave and Methow St was clearly a tradeoff, providing additional motor vehicle parking for City Hall use at the expense of the convenience of traffic in both directions in front of City Hall. Eastbound bicycling towards the Police Station, Museum, and Centennial Park has been significantly impacted.



Bicyclists heading eastbound on Yakima St towards downtown still have options: bicycle on the sidewalk on either the north or south side of Yakima St between Methow St and Chelan Ave. If using the south sidewalk, there is an awkward mix with the additional pedestrian use on the sidewalk associated with access to City Hall. Bicyclists may use this sidewalk, but need to yield to pedestrians. A bicyclist using the sidewalk on the north side of Yakima St will encounter few pedestrians between Methow St and Chelan Ave. A bicyclist continuing east on Yakima St downhill towards Mission Ave must navigate roadway and/or crosswalk to reestablish normal use of the traveled lane of roadway.

In 2022 the bike lanes on Orondo Ave were extended east as far as Chelan Ave. This improves bicycle access to Chelan Courthouse, Memorial Park, Wenatchee Library, and the YMCA. Also, it's now easier for a bicyclist to transition from the Orondo bike lanes to Yakima St. The best way is to ride the sidewalk on the east side of Methow St between Orondo Ave and Yakima St (below). Methow St in this section is north-bound only, and right-turn only to eastbound Orondo St.



Charles Hickenbottom is the author of *Greater Wenatchee Bicycle Routes, A History Told Through Maps, Drawings, and Pictures*, available for checkout at the local library or for sale at the museum. 4-3-2023