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BICYCLISTS, PEDESTRIANS TO ASSEMBLE AT RICK SNYDER CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS, SEEKING CLARIFICATION ON BIKE/PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

This Friday, Oct. 15, at 1 pm, bicyclists and pedestrians are gathering at Republican governor candidate Rick Snyder's downtown Ann Arbor campaign office to ask for clarification regarding his criticism of a local bicycle and pedestrian bridge project in last Sunday's debate.

Asked whether he supported an increase in the Michigan gas tax, Snyder cited a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over US-23 at Geddes, near his Ann Arbor home, as an example of inefficient state transportation spending.

"They just built a bike and pedestrian bridge across US-23 at the cost of millions of dollars," Snyder said. "What they didn't bother to tell us is a quarter mile south that there's a bridge over the Huron River and there's a bike and pedestrian path there. So let's get efficient about where we're deploying these dollars."

Bicycling and walking advocates found Snyder's comments perplexing, given the candidate's previously stated support for "walkable cities" and "green infrastructure." Led by the Washtenaw Bicycling and Walking Coalition, University of Michigan Bicycle Coalition, League of Michigan Bicyclists, and Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance, they are assembling to seek answers to the apparent discrepancy.

"The statement was surprising more than anything else," said the U-M Bicycle Coalition's Joel Batterman, a first-year urban planning student from Ann Arbor. "Snyder's platform makes it clear that he favors improving the quality of life in Michigan cities, and he specifically mentions walkability in his policy statement on retaining young people. We're confused on how the statement in the debate relates to that position. We hope it's just a misunderstanding about the bridge's location and funding." While an existing bicycle and pedestrian path passes under US-23 on the south side of the Huron River, no crossing exists to the north between the river and Earhart Road, isolating Concordia College and northeast Ann Arbor from that path system. "Connections like this bridge and the emerging Detroit greenway network are building a sustainable, just, and prosperous future for all Michiganders."

In an attempt to clarify Snyder's position, area pedestrians and bicyclists will gather on the U-M Diag this Friday, October 15, at 12:30 pm. At 12:45, they will depart for Snyder's downtown office, arriving at 1 pm to present a letter inviting Snyder to tour the new bridge by bike and attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony next week. As a matter of fairness, or "bikepartisanship," the groups will also extend an invitation to Democratic candidate Virg Bernero.

"While bike and pedestrian facilities are valuable amenities for Michigan cities, they're also a vital part of a healthy and safe transit network," said U-M Bicycle Coalition member Jeri Stroupe, a student at the U-M School of Public Health. "They reduce carbon emissions, encourage physical activity, prevent injuries, and save lives. No matter who's elected, a safe bicycle and pedestrian network will help move our state forward."