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In our view: Cheers and Jeers

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Cheers: How many bike riders and walkers are there in Vancouver? Where and when do they roam? How far should the public go to accommodate their needs, and at what expense?

Those questions cannot be answered without meaningful statistics.

Fortunately, Vancouver is one of 17 cities statewide where volunteers will conduct a census that will yield valuable numbers. Two-wheelers and walkers will be counted at six Vancouver sites starting next week. Kudos to the Seattle-based Cascade Bicycle Club and the Washington Department of Transportation for co-sponsoring the census program.

After the information is compiled, key decisions can more accurately be made about safety issues; bike lanes and sidewalks; land-use planning; and improved connection of homes, parks, stores and offices.

Washington state already is ahead of the curve. The national League of American Bicyclists rates us the most bicycle-friendly state, with Oregon ranked fourth. And with this statewide census data, we can strengthen our role as a national leader.

Jeers: Times are tough for everyone in today's economy, right? Not exactly. Washington state's minimum-wage earners, already the highest paid in the nation, will receive a 5.9 percent boost on Jan. 1, it was announced this week by the state Department of Labor and Industries. The wage will go from \$8.07 per hour to \$8.55.

Our state's exorbitant minimum wage is forced by the antiquated, 10-year-old Initiative 688, which ties the minimum wage to the federal Consumer Price Index. The wage is recalculated every year.

The cruel irony that many people ignore is the double penalty of our state's minimum wage. Keeping the wage so high forces employers to hire fewer workers, which in turn penalizes workers who have a tougher time finding jobs. And that's not to mention consumers in general, whose purchasing power is diminished by the higher costs caused by the soaring minimum wage.

Cheers: To law enforcement officers, lawmakers and social services workers who are making valiant progress in the battle against the scourge of methamphetamine. At a summit in Tacoma this week, it was revealed that the number of meth labs found in Washington state has sharply dropped from 1,890 in 2001 to 237 in 2007.

Much work still remains in this crucial battle, but it's good to see progress in some areas.

Jeers: To members of both political parties for the disgustingly partisan rhetoric surrounding the hotly disputed \$700 billion economic relief bill. Here are just two examples, which are related: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was way out of line to unleash her mean, bitter denunciation of the Bush administration shortly before the House vote on Monday. That classless maneuver proved that Pelosi was more interested in bashing Bush, who'll be gone soon anyway, than solving the nation's severe economic crisis.

But those who criticized Pelosi's absurd soliloquy — and who complained that it poisoned the vote and led to the bill's defeat on Monday — were equally out of line. Her rant was irrelevant, and it's very likely that every single House member would loudly and proudly claim immunity to any influence by Pelosi. See how this useless partisan rhetoric resembles the frenzy and futility of a dog chasing its tail?