



To: Mayor Selby and Members of the Olympia City Council
From: Brittany Yunker Carlson, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)
Date: October 6, 2020
Subject: 2021-2026 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (CFP); Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the 2021-2026 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (CFP).

The CFP continues to propose projects to incorporate alternate forms of transportation and address the multi-modal needs of a growing population. We appreciate the focus on walking and biking facilities in addition to vehicular infrastructure. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have given us a new perspective about the way Olympians find safe recreation options close to home. In addition, with the Olympia School District primarily offering online learning and limited afterschool activities, families more frequently seek safe and accessible outdoor opportunities to maintain mental and physical health. Many of them have turned to biking, walking or hiking. Therefore, we believe the CFP's emphasis should continue to focus on safe and inviting streets, sidewalks and pathways to leverage new interest in car-free travel and make it safe for years to come.

In addition to the community and economic impacts of the pandemic, 2020 brought important social change. BPAC recommends that the City adapt the CFP to prioritize projects in alignment with racial and social equity goals.

The following are our suggestions to the City based on our review of the CFP:

Equity

We believe that equity needs to be integrated into the City's entire decision-making framework, although we acknowledge that is a big, daunting challenge. As we looked at the Comprehensive Plan, the forthcoming Transportation Master Plan, and this year's CFP, we saw a significant need to integrate equity into all of them. We look forward to hearing how you will respond to this need.

Additionally, information specifying how projects support racial equity was notably absent from the CFP. BPAC recommends that City staff clearly define and integrate socioeconomic and racial equity considerations and metrics into all aspects of the CFP. To achieve this, BPAC recommends the City align with other cities including Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland in utilizing a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) and an equity index to inform the CFP.

An equity index identifies areas of opportunity in the community, and the RET integrates explicit consideration of racial equity into decisions. Examples of both of these tools can be found at the end of this letter. If the City does not currently have the dataset available to publish an equity index, BPAC recommends that the City invest in the timely development of one. In addition, BPAC

recommends that the forthcoming commission that will help address systemic inequity be invited to review and comment on the CFP in the future.

There is also an opportunity to increase equity and foster transparency in the CFP process. As a committee, we wonder how we can influence the projects in this year's CFP when the projects are due from staff in May and our review is not until late summer, early fall. At what point do our comments affect the projects? Including earlier opportunities for feedback from a wide range of groups and individuals would help the CFP be a more flexible and equitable plan.

TMP and CFP

We are disappointed that the CFP projects do not mirror those in the draft Transportation Master Plan. There are some legacy projects that the City is committed to build that do not rank highly according to TMP criteria. We recommend a clear indication of which CFP projects are legacy projects and which ones come directly from the TMP. Noting in the CFP how a project ranked in the TMP would increase transparency. Moving forward, we hope to see better alignment between the TMP and the CFP.

Sidewalk Projects

Sidewalks provide a safe, comfortable space for people walking, using walkers or those using wheelchairs. We strongly support the 22nd Avenue/Eastside Street sidewalk project, as it is a main corridor between downtown and several southeast neighborhoods. It will provide safe walking routes for families and individuals, offer safe access to bus stops and make important connections to the I-5 Trail and Karen Fraser Woodland Trail. This will strengthen our community and support people's health and well-being.

While it is important to add sidewalks to streets that do not have them, there are many existing sidewalks in Olympia that are damaged and unusable. The eastern side of Percival Street Southwest is an example of a sidewalk that is cracked, uneven and unsuitable for pedestrians who use a wheelchair or have limited mobility. We need maintenance and good stewardship of existing sidewalks, particularly for vulnerable users.

Bike Corridors

Given the popularity of biking in recent months, continuing to complete and connect bike corridors throughout the City remains a top priority for BPAC. Bike corridors offer a low-stress option for families and bikers of all abilities to reach common destinations, such as downtown businesses, the Farmers Market, the library or local parks. We support the top three bike corridor projects in the CFP.

Current and future bike corridors should have clear signs and traffic calming measures to encourage drivers to be more vigilant. An example of this is the segment of the eastside bike corridor along 7th Avenue and Edison Street. This area has increased traffic because it is a shortcut around the intersection of Boulevard Road and Pacific Avenue. The route 60 bus stop and Lions Park both draw pedestrians. There are large sections without sidewalks, and many of the sharrows have worn away, creating a dangerous situation for vulnerable road users.

Even with these steps towards a connected bike corridor network, there are still many unsafe areas that are frequent biking routes across town. One example is the bike lane on the 4th Avenue Bridge and the Isthmus. People on bikes riding towards downtown on the 4th Avenue Bridge are

immediately greeted with a disappearing bike lane leading straight into a vehicular lane riddled with potholes. There is often heavy traffic and log trucks on this street during rush hour, creating an unsafe situation for people on bikes. This is next to the brand-new apartments constructed on the Isthmus, begging the question of what the effect of impact fees from that development had on bike infrastructure on the adjacent streets. Revenue from impact fees should provide value and safety for all road users, especially those most vulnerable: people walking, biking, and people with disabilities.

Intersection Safety Improvements

As an adjunct to bicycle corridors and an additional safety measure for pedestrians, BPAC supports the City's plans to prioritize pedestrian improvements, including roundabouts, at key locations such as Cain Road and North Street, or Division Street and Elliott Avenue. Priority should be given to locations where more people travel by public transit, walking or biking, since they may be among the more economically disadvantaged and have no other transportation options.

Pathways

Pathways provide pedestrians a safe way to access major walking paths such as the Chehalis Western Trail or allow school children a comfortable and safe path to school through their neighborhood, such as the proposed pathway from Vista Avenue to Washington Middle School. We wholeheartedly support the pathways planned in the CFP and urge their swift completion.

Land Acquisition

We also support the acquisition and development of Kaiser Woods for mountain bike and walking trails, as well as development of the Grass Lake Nature Trail. Both can serve recreational and commuting purposes. We note the need for better wayfinding signs, both for people walking and biking to find their way to the parks, and for them to find their way within the parks. Providing better pedestrian and bike access to the parks could mitigate concerns from nearby residents about parking. People should be able to safely get to parks by walking and biking and not be in danger on their way to these great destinations.

Motor Traffic Congestion

In conclusion, BPAC would like to encourage the City of Olympia to endorse non-construction-related programs that help reduce motor vehicle traffic, often called "travel demand management." Flex scheduling, telecommuting and incentives for alternative commuting methods has great potential for reducing traffic burdens brought about by a growing population, aging infrastructure, and uncertainties about transit during a time of pandemic. All of these can be part of a long-term strategy intended to decrease rush-hour congestion, degradation of costly vehicle facilities and create a more comfortable street for all users, including those walking and biking.

Sincerely,



Brittany Yunker Carlson
Chair
Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

References:

Racial Equity Tool Kit: Portland

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/article/592297>

Equity Index: Tacoma:

<https://www.cityoftacoma.org/cms/One.aspx?portalId=169&pageId=175030>

US Dept of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Equity Resources:

<http://pedbikeinfo.org/topics/equity.cfm>

Seattle Bike Master Plan - Excellent example of transparent equity goal integration:

https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/SDOT/About/DocumentLibrary/BicycleMasterPlan/190613_BMP_Imp_Plan_FINAL.pdf