



To: Mayor Selby and Members of the Olympia City Council

From: Rebecca Brown, Vice Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

Date: October 1, 2021

Subject: 2022-2027 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (CFP); Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

Thank you for providing the BPAC the opportunity to review and comment on the Preliminary 2022-27 CFP. This letter is a result of a BPAC subcommittee's draft letter and the full BPAC's discussion. Our perspective is through the lens of individuals who use bicycle/pedestrian facilities frequently and have personally experienced the hostile environment of car-centric urban planning.

Safety and mobility

Safety for people walking and biking on our streets remains our biggest concern. There are many places in our city where pedestrians and bicyclists are forced to use busy streets that have no sidewalks or bike lanes. As new development occurs, we hope to see sidewalks and bike lanes being built to support the increased density that comes with that development. Pedestrian infrastructure can empower individuals to engage with our city without depending on dangerous, expensive, and polluting vehicles.

We are especially concerned about the safety of the people who will be moving into the old Quality Inn site. A higher percentage of our unhoused neighbors walk and bike places, and that site is very close to the Plum Street interchange. We want to ensure that these people have safe options to bike and walk, and we want to make sure that they are included in the metrics used to understand how people move around our city.

Equity

We note that there is no reference to equity in the CFP. We recommend including a section explaining how equity has informed the projects included in the CFP. We suggest adopting a tangible, specific tool that illustrates how the CFP projects will make Olympia more equitable. Those who are dealing with systemic oppression need to see accountability in all aspects of the City's processes.

We look forward to seeing the results of the efforts of the Social Justice and Equity Commission founding members. We hope next year's CFP will reflect some of that work.

Small projects

Our city has a number of gaps in the current bike system, such as the abrupt ends of the bike lanes on State Avenue by the railroad tracks and on 4th Avenue by the Martin Way Y. These gaps are often small but important for users. We would like to see a mechanism for low-cost fixes to improve navigation in places where bike lanes end. These fixes could include signs and other wayfinding tools, or changes to lane striping, for example. These small changes would make a big difference for people using the bike lanes.

Development

The city spends a lot of taxpayer dollars to correct development decisions made in previous generations. For example, many of the pathways listed in the CFP connect cul-de-sacs or neighborhoods that were not built with a gridded street system. We support development codes that encourage a street grid at the time of development and that consider future conditions and needs as our city grows.

When a full street cannot be built, we support making a pedestrian and bicycle connection at the time of development. For example, a new development being built on the westside has a street stub with a sign that says “Future Street Connection.” The BPAC recommends that this and other developments include a pedestrian and bicycle connection at the time of development, in anticipation that it will be replaced with the street connection later.

Similarly, we are aware of a new development planned near the intersection of 22nd Avenue and Cain Road, across the street from NOVA Middle School. There is no roundabout in the CFP for this intersection, but we believe one will be necessary with the new development that will result in more people walking and driving in the neighborhood. A roundabout here will help people cross both 22nd Avenue and Cain Road and improve traffic flow.

Eastside Street/22nd Avenue sidewalk

We also want to emphasize the importance of Policy 23.2 from the comprehensive plan, “Raise driver awareness of pedestrians at crosswalks on wide, high-volume streets using blinking lights, flags, signs, markings, and other techniques.” This is especially important for plans to extend a sidewalk on Eastside Street/22nd Avenue from Fir Street to I-5. According to the Street Safety Plan, drivers here regularly drive more than 10 mph over the speed limit. With a new, highly-needed sidewalk, we anticipate that more pedestrians will use this street. Signs, flags, markings, and other techniques may be required to remind drivers to slow down and anticipate people walking and potentially crossing the street.

Better integration with parks projects

The BPAC recognizes the importance of parks to the neighborhoods and the city at large. Olympia’s exciting improvements to Parks and Recreation areas will create greater traffic in the surrounding neighborhoods. These neighborhoods may already be experiencing parking scarcity. The Lions Park sprayground, the repurposed Legion Way Armory, and the Kaiser Woods Park are all examples of parks that will create more car, bike, and pedestrian traffic through neighborhoods. We recommend that the Parks and Recreation department coordinate with Public Works Transportation to prioritize bicycle and pedestrian access. This will serve two purposes: improve traffic safety and alleviate traffic congestion and parking demand in surrounding neighborhoods.

Metrics

We urge metrics for CFP programs that do not have them currently. Monitoring progress through clear metrics is crucial to ensuring desired outcomes. We noticed inconsistencies between the projects in this year’s CFP and those listed and prioritized in the Transportation Master Plan (TMP). We feel the prioritization score maps from the TMP are good and should be used to make our city safer for vulnerable walkers, cyclists and rollers. We recommend including the prioritization score for projects in the CFP. We request greater transparency for decisions that deviate from the TMP prioritization, such as recognizing which projects the city committed to before the TMP was finalized.

Let's realize our Comprehensive Plan

This year's CFP highlights the need for safe and functional mobility as Olympia's population continues to grow. We support the Comprehensive Plan's first goal, "All streets are safe and inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists. Streets are designed to be human scale, but also can accommodate motor vehicles, and encourage safe driving." Improving pedestrian infrastructure is one step towards addressing the socioeconomic and environmental challenges Olympia currently faces. Prioritizing alternative transportation options ensures that people who choose a healthier, greener, and cheaper form of transportation are supported, safe, and rewarded for their decision. Those without access to a car and those who use assisted mobility have a right to dignified and safe means of transportation.

We look forward to seeing these projects come to life and hope that our input can guide the City of Olympia toward meeting the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rebecca Brown
Vice Chair
Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

cc: Michelle Swanson, AICP, Associate Planner, Public Works | Transportation
BPAC Members