

Olympia Planning Commission

February 24, 2025

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967 Olympia
WA 98507-1967

SUBJECT: Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan Transportation Chapter

Dear Mayor Payne and Councilmembers:

The Planning Commission appreciates the effort and time that City of Olympia Staff have invested in engaging with the Planning Commission and incorporating our suggestions into the Transportation Chapter of the Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan. The Commission had briefings on the Chapter on June 3, 2024, and September 16, 2024. The Commission held a study session regarding this chapter on October 24, 2024. The Social Justice and Equity Commission also received a brief on July 22, 2024. A public hearing was conducted on February 3, 2025. Planning Commission deliberations took place starting on February 3, 2025, and concluded on February 24, 2025.

The Planning Commission believes that the chapter has been improved through multiple rounds of engagement and recommends approval of the Transportation Chapter of the Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan contingent upon the following modifications and revisions. Both Contingent Modifications and Other Considerations are detailed in two sections at the end of this letter. Here we would like to highlight and discuss our recommendation to expand the vision statement of the Transportation Chapter of the Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan.

The vision statement for the Transportation Chapter of the Olympia Comprehensive Plan currently reads:

Complete streets that move people, not just cars.

And has been modified in the current version after discussion with the Planning Commission to create a system level vision statement to read:

A complete transportation system that moves people, not just vehicles

The planning commission supports the goal of “moving people, not just vehicles” through retrofitting or designing streets to support multiple modes of transportation (i.e. “complete streets”). However, we believe that the vision for Olympia’s transportation system, and thus the vision statement, should prioritize modes of transportation beyond single occupancy vehicles and enumerate more aspects of the transportation system than movement. Our proposed vision statement:

A sustainable, equitable, and resilient transportation system that prioritizes public transit, walking, rolling, and biking over single-occupancy vehicles. We aim to create vibrant, connected neighborhoods where people of all ages, abilities, and incomes can move safely and efficiently, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building a stronger, more inclusive community.

Olympia's transportation system falls at the nexus of so many other Comprehensive plan goals: access to the city, building community, supporting the economy, equity, the environment, and the City's response to climate change. Transforming our transportation system to be less car dependent through more transportation choices is urgently needed climate action, environmental policy, and critical to building a more inclusive community that keeps everyone moving in a safe and inviting way while the city grows. It is both important that this transformation happens quickly to match Olympia's population growth and climate goals, and that the transformation must not leave anyone behind, including people that can't drive a vehicle and people that need to be able to drive a vehicle. This transformation will take increased investment, new strategies, and community engagement to achieve, each of which will require the city to maintain capacity to plan and execute changes.

As part of this transformation, the Planning Commission would also like to highlight a policy added in the preset draft of the chapter:

PT1.4 The City has proactive maintenance and asset management programs for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

This policy supports actions that the City has already begun towards improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure with investments in maintenance and the evaluation of conditions city wide. During our discussions of this policy, much of the focus was on the equity of the previous policy that required below standard infrastructure to be reported by community members. This previous policy put the reporting responsibility on community members that may be most dependent on the infrastructure and/or have barriers to reporting. Numerous updates like these, big and small, have improved the chapter.

After completing deliberations, the motion to recommend approval of the chapter includes the modification of the vision statement detailed above and the following suggestions or modifications:

Contingent Modifications:

- Vision statement as detailed above.
- Regularize the use of definitive language in policy statements to make clear the practical difference between, for example, a policy that would "consider" something versus a policy that "will study" something. In the current updates this is particularly relevant to PT6.12, PT6.13, PT6.14, PT6.18, examples:

*PT6.12 **Study** converting 4th and State Avenues to two-way streets. Prioritize the study relative to other projects during the next update of the Transportation Master Plan.*

And

*PT6.13 **Consider** modified street design to enhance the function of a street for a particular mode, such as bicycling, or to support the unique identity of a street, such as a historic district.*

And

*PT6.14 **Study** the impacts of closing some neighborhood and downtown streets to vehicle traffic. Prioritize the study relative to other projects during the next update of the Transportation Master Plan.*

- In the upcoming update to the 1994 Gridded Streets plan, pay particular attention to the potential VMT reduction benefits of gridded streets and the possible benefits to VMT reduction that walking and biking connections provided by pathway or non-vehicle street connections could provide:

The City's commitment to building a well-connected street grid dates back to 1994, when we did a study that determined that instead of widening our streets, we should build a connected grid of smaller streets. This study led to the street connections shown on the maps in Appendix A and specific development requirements found in the Engineering Design and Development Standards. In the next few years, the City is planning to update that study.

- Consider how the word "incentivize" is used throughout the chapter. The planning commission found that "incentivize" brought to mind monetary approaches (e.g. Multifamily Tax Exemption), while a word like "encourage" might suggest a broader range of interventions (e.g. zoning changes, infrastructure investments or like streamline permitting) depending on the context. For example, PT16.2:

PT16.2 Continue to support incentives to redevelop in downtown, along urban corridors, and in focus areas such as the Capital Mall Triangle, the Lilly/Pacific area, and the Lilly/Martin area.

- Modify PT9.15:

Existing:

PT9.15 Allow cul-de-sacs only when topographic and environmental constraints permit no other option. Cul-de-sacs that are built will have a maximum length of 300 feet and be built with pedestrian and bike connections to adjacent streets or to destinations such as schools, parks, and trails wherever possible.

Proposal (change in bold):

*PT9.15 Allow cul-de-sacs only when topographic and environmental constraints permit no other option. Cul-de-sacs that are built will have a maximum length of 300 feet and be built with pedestrian and bike connections to adjacent streets or to destinations such as schools, parks, and trails **unless infeasible**.*

- Modify PT10.2:

Existing:

PT10.2 Require new developments to provide direct bicycle and pedestrian pathways that connect to adjacent developed properties. These will be at the same interval spacing as street spacing requirements or at closer intervals.

Proposed (change in bold):

*PT10.2 Require new developments to provide direct bicycle and pedestrian pathways that connect to adjacent developed properties **and create rights-of-way and pathway stubs to ensure future connections to undeveloped properties.** These will be at the same interval spacing as street spacing requirements or at closer intervals, **unless environmental or topographical constraints make this infeasible. Rights-of-way and stubs will be recorded as part of the subdivision process to guarantee long-term connectivity.***

- Consider the hierarchy of statements occurring the Transportation Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, the Transportation Master Plan, and the Olympia Engineering Design & Development Standards (EDDS). In the planning commissions reading of the comprehensive plan, they found that there was some circularity and locations where either the comprehensive plan contained technical details better left to the Master Plan or EDDS or where the Master Plan or EDDS contained the more aspirational policy better suited to the Comprehensive Plan. Continuing to improve consistency in these documents would benefit the readability of the comprehensive plan. For example, in public comment the following change to PT7.12 was suggested that the planning commission supports:

Existing:

PT7.12 Use Olympia's regularly updated Engineering Design and Development Standards to ensure that transportation-related facilities constructed in Olympia and its Growth Area are safe, well-constructed, durable, and can be maintained.

Proposed (change in bold):

*PT7.12 **Regularly update** Olympia's Engineering Design and Development Standards **to ensure they reflect the Comprehensive Plan and** that transportation-related facilities constructed in Olympia and its Growth Area are safe, well-constructed, durable, and can be maintained.*

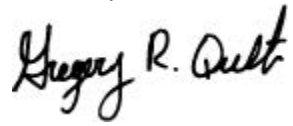
Other Considerations:

- Consider further examples in PT 7.11 in regard to street treatments for safe crossing, such as signals.

We understand this update work is being completed in a phased manner, with each chapter being considered individually. We also understand that final adoption will not occur until the entire draft is reviewed for internal consistency as well.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the proposed chapter and provide a recommendation for moving this portion of the periodic update forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gregory R. Quetin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "G" and "Q".

Greg Quetin
Chair