

# Olympia 2045: Transportation

## Staff response to Planning Commission's comments

Thanks to the Planning Commission for its thorough review of the first draft of the Transportation Chapter for the Comprehensive Plan update.

This update is a “periodic” update, meaning it is focused on fine-tuning the existing plan to ensure we are making progress on achieving the overall vision for Olympia’s future. For transportation, that vision is “Complete streets that move people, not just cars.”

Below is a summary of the Planning Commission’s concerns and staff’s response. In several places where the Commission is requesting major policy shifts, we are suggesting prioritizing them in the next update to the Transportation Master Plan. We expect that to be between 2027-2029.

### Major policy issues

**The City should block off some neighborhoods and/or downtown to vehicle traffic and only allow local traffic.**

This is a significant change from current policy. It would require significant study to understand the broader implications, and we would need to have a thorough community engagement process. For example, would vehicle emissions and miles traveled increase if people had to drive around rather than directly to their destinations? If so, this would undermine the City’s vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals, and it could compromise our ability to meet the goal of becoming a net-zero carbon emissions city by 2040.

Therefore, we are suggesting that this be studied. The Transportation Master Plan is where the City recommends future studies, which is why we suggest that this study be prioritized with the next TMP update. That will allow it to be prioritized relative to the other big topics the City should consider for transportation. Studies also include public outreach and community dialog around the issue being studied.

Staff has added *PT6.14 Consider a study of 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.*

**New street connections should only carry pedestrian and bike traffic, not vehicles.**

This is also a significant change from current policy. The City is already planning to study street connections after this plan is updated. As part of that study, staff supports researching whether street connections should only allow pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Some members of the Planning Commission have suggested that building street connections induces demand for driving, or that people will drive more because there are more streets to drive

on. Induced demand has been documented for highway expansions, but to staff's knowledge it has not been studied in an urban street system. In fact, we have seen compelling evidence that people who live in places with well-connected street grids generate fewer VMT and GHG emissions and walk, roll, or take transit more than those who live in more suburban sprawl-type street systems.

The question of how to reshape a 20th century, vehicle-centric street system into a 21st century, human-centric street system is far from settled. Therefore, staff has added *PT 9.22 Study the additional street connections Olympia needs in order to build a complete street network that serves everyone, whether walking, rolling, biking, taking transit, or driving. As part of the study, consider the impacts of building only pedestrian and bicycle connections instead of full streets.*

### **Convert 4th Avenue and State Avenue to two-way streets.**

This would be a major project to balance with the City's other major transportation projects. Therefore, we recommend it also be studied, and the study be prioritized with the next update to the Transportation Master Plan. Staff has added *PT6.12 Consider a study to convert 4th and State Avenues to two-way streets. Prioritize the study relative to other projects during the next update of the Transportation Master Plan.*

At first glance, converting one-way streets to two-way streets may seem simple. However, a conversion would be a major capital investment, and it would require staff to do significant scoping and design work beforehand which would impact the City's ability to deliver other capital projects that are also priorities. In addition to extensive public outreach, the City would need to:

- Model lane and intersection configurations, traffic patterns, and impacts to nearby streets and the region's system.
- Configure signal timing and coordination, plan and design signal replacements and ADA improvements.
- Study impacts to pedestrian safety of more complex turning movements.
- Study the feasibility of through-town bike lanes.
- Review impacts to transit routing and stops, fire/emergency services routes and response times.
- Consider streetscape, parking, public spaces, signs, and markings.

Given the scope of this project, we believe weighing it against the City's other transportation priorities when the master plan is updated is the responsible approach.

### **Don't allow streets wider than three lanes.**

Olympia's widest streets are also the hardest places to comfortably walk, roll, bike, take transit, and drive. Building a street grid will be a key part of being able to reduce lanes and retrofit the wide streets to be more safe and inviting to everyone. As above, we are suggesting a study in the next update to the Transportation Master Plan.

We have added *PT12.3 Seek ways to retrofit existing major streets to be more human scale, including studying the implications of reducing five-lane streets to three lanes. Prioritize the study relative to other projects during the next update of the Transportation Master Plan.*

**Vehicles are over-prioritized in the plan, and the support for EVs perpetuates the urban form we need to move away from to be a more pedestrian-, bicyclist-, and transit-friendly city.**

The City has pledged to be a net-zero emissions city by 2040, 16 years from now. Last year, the City had a [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Strategy Analysis](#) done, and the City Council directed that the “aggressive scenario” from that analysis be incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan update. That scenario will require:

- A VMT reduction of 20% between 2024 and 2040 for gas-powered vehicles.
- 100% of light-duty vehicles be electric by 2040.
- 75% of heavy-duty vehicles be electric or fueled by green hydrogen.

Those goals have been incorporated into the draft Transportation Chapter.

In response to the Commission’s comments, we have added language to the chapter introduction to say, “We will build streets that are human scale, or designed for people first and vehicles second.” In the next paragraph, we added, “By prioritizing pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users over single-occupancy vehicles, we will ensure that more people will be able to safely get around using the best mode of transportation for them.”

## **Language rewrites, policy refinement suggestions, and questions**

**The vision should be rewritten.**

This plan’s vision was developed in partnership with the community and reflects the input of hundreds of Olympians. A periodic update does not allow the time for a thoughtful revisioning process. The next update, which will be a full update, will be the best time to work with the community on a new vision.

**We need better bike parking downtown that doesn’t interfere with pedestrians using sidewalks.**

*Added PT 27.7 Consider public bicycle lockers or other secure bike parking downtown, particularly in City-owned parking lots or on-street vehicle spots.*

**We need a specific approach to improve bike mobility through downtown.**

*Added PT27.2 Consider a strategy to support bicycling to and through the downtown core with the next update to the Transportation Master Plan.*

**Can we consider automatic enforcement of traffic laws?**

*Added PT6.16 Consider automatic traffic enforcement in key locations, such as near schools, to encourage safe driver behavior.*

**Consider the needs of cargo bike delivery.**

Added PT8.3 *As the viability of cargo delivery by bicycle approaches, ensure that street design supports it.*

**There is no mention of transit in the chapter.**

There is a four-page section about transit that includes a one-page introduction, four goals, and 20 policies. Transit is also mentioned in several other places of the chapter.

**Are there any plans to build separated bike lanes?**

Yes. They are outlined in the Transportation Master Plan.

**GT4 is a land use goal and is awkward with no policies to support it.**

Removed and replaced with language about the urban heat island effect, which is a better fit for this section.

**Emphasize designing for safety.**

The policies prioritizing narrow lanes, fewer lanes, and roundabouts are just a few of the policies that encourage slower speeds, which is correlated to increased safety. Please see PT6.2, PT6.7, and 7.6 for a few examples.

**Current street light standards do not appear to be well designed to avoid upward light pollution.**

Please see PT6.14, *Provide adequate and safe street and pathway lighting in a way that reduces light pollution.* Many of the existing streetlights were built to a previous standard and will be upgraded over time.

**Don't build new arterials or widen existing ones.**

The only new arterials planned are part of the [US 101/West Olympia Access Project](#). All other planned street connections are either Major Collectors or Neighborhood Collectors. We also require Local Access streets be built with new development, but they are not shown on the maps in Appendix A. Instead, the requirements are listed in the Engineering Design & Development Standards.

With this update we are removing all planned street widening projects from this plan, which reflects policy developed in the [Transportation Master Plan](#).

**De-emphasize language about traffic congestion in GT15 *The transportation system provides attractive walking, rolling, biking, and transit options, so that land use densities can increase without creating more traffic congestion.***

Traffic congestion introduces uncertainty and frustration into people's daily lives, and it impacts essential City functions such as emergency response and solid waste removal. There are many reasons to make Olympia a better city for walking, rolling, biking, and taking transit, and reducing vehicle traffic impacts as the city becomes more populated and dense is one.

**Remove "spontaneously" from introduction to transit section that reads, "*Olympia envisions***

**service of at least 15-minute frequency along urban corridors (see GT 17), where people can use transit more spontaneously.”**

15-minute transit frequency is widely recognized as the minimum frequency needed to allow people to get around without having to plan their trips around a transit schedule. This allows people to change plans and still get where they need to go, when they need to get there. In other words, to travel spontaneously.

**In reference to PT9.21 *If stub-outs exist for a future street connection, bicycle and pedestrian access should be provided in the public right-of-way as an interim measure: are sidewalks and bike lanes already in the public right-of-way?***

Yes, unless they're on private streets.

**All Neighborhood Collectors should have bike facilities.**

Neighborhood Collectors do not typically carry high volumes of vehicles that require specific bicycle infrastructure, although some Neighborhood Collectors are part of the low-stress bike network identified in the [Transportation Master Plan](#) and are planned to have some bike infrastructure. The type of infrastructure will depend on the context of the street and be determined when the project is built.

**GT18 should be rewritten to be *Streets are safe and inviting public spaces, where people want to be.***

Agreed. Rewrote.

**Add a policy to explore rapid deployment of street rechanneling and temporary safety measures to create a safe and inviting network for people walking, rolling, and biking.**

Cities that have done this have been able to re-engineer the streets in-house and had the work done with their maintenance staff. This requires significant in-house resources, which is why it is almost exclusively large cities that have done this.

Olympia did experiment with this approach when we built a pilot project of a bike corridor, which is the existing route between Lions Park and Sylvester Park downtown. Because we had to hire a contractor to do the work with semi-permanent materials for the pilot project, and then hire a contractor again to fill it in with permanent materials after the pilot project was determined a success, the project costs were higher than if we had built it once with permanent materials.

We do not have the staff nor the budget for the materials to do this with our existing resources.

**Add a policy to require that all new streets have infrastructure for pedestrians, such as sidewalks on both sides and curb ramps at intersections.**

The City's street standards are in the [Engineering Design and Development Standards](#), and they require sidewalks on both sides of the street and ADA-compliant curb ramps at every intersection. These standards are in effect with all new infrastructure, whether built by the City or private developers.

**Page 1: Adjust Olympia Values to “limits environmental impact”. Unclear how our inclusive transportation system would “support” the environment.**

Agreed. Rewrote.

**Instead of “our future streets” use “our future transportation network” to reflect that our transportation system is more than just streets.**

This is an interesting point. Thank you for raising it. “Streets” is a more specific word whereas “transportation network” is a broader concept, which can make it hard for people to connect a concrete meaning to. We also have some policies centered around making streets more human-centric places. Additionally, asserting that streets belong to all modes is an important policy statement when so many of them are currently vehicle-centric.

We will consider this change for the next update.

**Add a policy which addresses the need for expanded neighborhood pathways.**

Please see the [Transportation Master Plan's section on pathways](#), where we have identified where new ones are needed.

**For GT2, add policy language that addresses retrofitting streets in addition to building new ones.**

Added.

**PT3.1 looks like it inaccurately states state law about new vehicles being electric.**

Thank you! Yes, it was wrong. Rewrote it.

**GT5: what does “seamlessly” mean?**

Removed.

**PT5.2 which addresses prioritizing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure “near” certain destinations: what does “near” mean?**

Rewrote to be *Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure investments are prioritized so that people can get to parks, schools, medical facilities, grocery stores, public buildings, dense employment centers, dense residential areas, and they connect to transit.*

To be more specific, the definition of “near” is covered in the Transportation Master Plan for each type of infrastructure, from crosswalks, curb ramps, and sidewalks to the low-stress bike network.

**Modify GT18 and policies to consider best use of street/sidewalk space.**

Unsure what this means.

**For GT23, add consideration of obstructions in sidewalk space and how that inhibits movement (e.g. sandwich boards, street cafe tables).**

We have code requirements that pedestrians be able to get around sandwich board signs and street café tables. If you see any violations, [please report them](#).