

# BPAC Review Draft – Not Final

## *City of Olympia Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee*

September 6, 2013

Dear Councilmembers:

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee is designated in City ordinance to advise the council on the encouragement and facilitation of non-motorized transportation. As you review the *2014-2019 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan*, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) urges you to consider re-prioritizing some of the projects that you fund. This letter celebrates the pedestrian improvements built in the past year, notes some of our concerns, and tells you about some of our planned projects for the coming years. We have identified the following critical changes that are needed:

1. Restore the annual CIP funding to the bicycle facilities program beginning with a minimum of \$100,000 in 2014;
2. Include development of bicycle boulevards as a means to achieve goals for non-motorized transportation, by installing diagonal diverters and other improvements on existing through streets;
3. Change the proposed sidewalk facilities in the Phoenix / State area to better meet pedestrian needs;
4. Remove the Herman Road bicycle lane from the list of projects to be funded with bicycle funds, and specify it to be constructed with developer funding;
5. Redirect transportation funding from the peripheral parts of the City to the urban corridors where our comprehensive plan specifies that growth should be concentrated.

### **First, we celebrate that pedestrian facilities are being built in our city!**

This coming year (2014) we look forward to the construction of the 22nd Avenue sidewalk between Cain and Boulevard roads, and for the West Bay Drive sidewalk. These projects are both funded from voter - approved *Parks and Pathways* funding and are significant investments in pedestrian facilities. We will be there to celebrate!

We are also excited about other pedestrian projects, which support higher density development areas, such as work on Capitol Way between the Capitol Campus and our downtown. Also, State Avenue resurfacing will include the addition of pedestrian bulb-outs which should help to manage traffic speed, and make it easier for pedestrians to cross this street. We concur with the addition of future crossing projects in this year's CFP, and we appreciate the opportunity to work with staff to recommend timing and priority of these projects. (page 55)

### **Pedestrian Pathways project coming along:**

The pedestrian pathways project we proposed and that Council approved last year resulted in several projects that appear to be good options to improve connectivity in Olympia for pedestrians and cyclists. We think there may be opportunities to continue to improve this program to develop a smoother process and take advantages of opportunities for partnerships. We will be reviewing this

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program over the next year.

## **Next, we want to take a fresh look at bicycle and pedestrian priorities:**

This is our highest priority. We appreciate the opportunity to work with staff and review the priorities we recommend to council for funding. With our newly updated comprehensive plan, this is an ideal opportunity to review the plan for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, which will implement our comprehensive plan. BPAC thinks it is very important to fund facilities in our core areas, to encourage walking where higher density development exists or is planned. We also want to be sure to invest scarce funds in environments where transit service exists, and where pedestrians want to walk. We want to help inform decisions to make the wisest investments.

## **Bicycle boulevards are a cost-effective way to expand the cycling network:**

What we heard very strongly throughout the "Imagine Olympia" process is that our citizens want corridors where they can bicycle with their families and feel safe. We know that a great number of people want to bike more, but do not feel safe on a bike lane on an arterial. Our system of trails is excellent, but hardly offers opportunities to ride where most people want to go. Bicycle boulevards, or community greenways can offer that opportunity, a concept with which the cities of Portland and Vancouver BC have had great success. Our committee is excited about exploring options for smaller streets that could be slightly modified to encourage cyclists. We plan to put it on our work plan for 2014. We hope to develop a pilot plan for this type of facility, and ask for capital funding in 2015.

## **Currently listed sidewalk priorities don't serve comprehensive plan priorities:**

The sidewalk priorities listed on page 57 of the CFP are the same ones we expressed concerns about last year. As an example, Phoenix Street, scheduled for a sidewalk, already has a rolled curb and wide shoulder. South Bay Road as it becomes State Avenue already has a bike lane, but it has high speeds and high volumes of traffic. Olympia Avenue, one street to the north, has virtually no traffic, and Martin Way on the other side has bus service every 15 minutes. In order to make highest and best use of limited funds, we recommend revisions to the sidewalk on Martin Way. This type of targeted investment would support our comprehensive plan vision for a dense urban corridor, supported by sidewalk connections. In the coming year, we plan to review the prioritized list of pedestrian facilities with neighborhood groups to develop revised lists of priorities.

## **Currently-listed bicycle projects do not represent bicycle priorities:**

In the recent past, bike facilities have generally occurred as other major automobile street projects happen, and indeed, the current list of priorities is directly aligned with automobile-based projects. While we appreciate that bike lines are being incrementally developed in our city, we are very frustrated about lack of predictable progress. The bike projects listed in the CFP are the same ones we objected to last year because of costs that greatly exceed foreseeable funding. As you might imagine, we are losing our enthusiasm for reviewing the list of bicycle related projects, which continue to be pushed back by about twelve months each year. For example, we understand that improvements to Herman road are needed! ( Page 75) Development on the Lacey end of the street brings urban standards such as bike lanes and sidewalks to the edge of our city. However, the bicycle fund is proposed as the fund to pay for roadway expansion for a bike lane and additional stormwater management.<sup>1</sup> Given our recent history of funding bicycle facilities, (\$0 per year),

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This project was originally identified in the 1997 Bicycle Facilities Program as being development-driven and developer-funded. That was a plausible funding mechanism at the time, but with the adoption of the Chambers Basin rezone to address stormwater concerns, there is no longer an expectation of development along Herman Road, but development east and west of there has created unacceptable cycling conditions.

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development of the Herman Road bicycle lane with bicycle facility funding is not likely to occur soon. If this road is indeed a priority, we suggest that a clearer and more realistic financial strategy be considered for this road section. We recommend impact fees, developer contributions and stormwater funding, and save the tiny amounts of bicycle funding available for a project scaled to match available resources. We will be revisiting this list this year, and asking for a list of smaller bicycle facility projects that are independently programmed to represent bicycle priorities, in coordination with other aspects of the CFP.

## **Education and encouragement are important:**

As a committee, we have discussed that education and encouragement programs are important parts of encouraging a healthy and more sustainable transportation system. Olympia is relatively unique and very fortunate to have a public works department that thinks beyond infrastructure, and understands, shares and supports this need. We think more effort from the city or from the region to support safety education and encouragement will go a long way to our goal of having more people walk and ride more often. We encourage the city to partner with regional entities to support encouragement and education efforts.

## **Finally, we have some big picture requests:**

### **Street repair and replacement should be more transparent:**

Seven million dollars are programmed in this CFP for street repair and reconstruction, in addition to an approximately equal amount contained in the operating budget. We are grateful that staff are able to use these funds to opportunistically create bicycle and pedestrian facilities. However, we think this represents a significant opportunity to think more holistically about aligning those street selections with priority routes for bicycle and pedestrian needs. This list (which is discussed on page 61 of the CFP) is developed in the fall of each year. We think it should be included in the CFP so people know when to expect city investments on their street.

### **We are concerned that this CFP is not realistic and makes false promises.**

We understand that the CFP list is the six-year list of projects, but that we do not have funds to build all that is represented in the CFP. Indeed, the executive summary states:

*It is important to understand that a multi-year Capital Facilities Plan does not represent a financial commitment. City Council approval does not automatically authorize funding. It does approve the program in concept and provides validity to the planning process. Appropriations are made in the Capital Budget, which is the first year of the capital program. Projects beyond the current year Capital Budget should not be viewed as a commitment to fund the project, but instead as an indication that given the information available at the time, the City plans to move forward with the project in the future.*

However, the CFP also states:

*The Comp Plan is our strategy for maintaining and enhancing our high quality of life and environment while accommodating the 20,000 people that are expected to join our community in the next two decades. The CFP is the element that brings the Comp Plan to life. By funding*

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This suggests that impact fees from these adjacent developments should contribute to restoring the level of service that previously existed, consistent with Comprehensive Plan Policy PT 8.3.

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*projects needed to maintain levels of service and for concurrency, the CFP helps shape the quality of life in Olympia. **The requirement to fully finance the CFP provides the reality check for the vision of the Comp Plan.***

It is difficult to have it both ways. We see the CFP as a promise to citizens as to the priority projects they should expect to see funded over the time frame of the plan. If we have no hope of funding either the 6-year CFP projects or the 20-year facilities lists, perhaps we should rethink our strategy and identify alternative ways to create a more affordable transportation system for all modes.

## **Capital spending should more closely align with comprehensive plan:**

We have a downtown CTR plan, a plan for a transportation-efficient downtown (GTEC), a mobility strategy, and bicycle and a pedestrian master plan. We think we should be working harder to bring these visions to reality. As policy guidance for these plans and our CFP spending plan, the following comprehensive plan goals and policies are important to us.

*T 1: Reduce dependence on auto use, especially drive-alone vehicle use.*

*T 1.1: Promote alternatives to driving alone.*

*T 1.12: In downtown and along High Density Corridors, priority shall be given to building pedestrian-friendly streets.*

*T 3.3: Give priority to Citywide alternative modes of transportation when transportation projects are proposed.*

We feel that traffic signals in the downtown may not be the best use of limited funds. Again, we feel that the hazard elimination projects on page 51, which include new signals in the downtown could use more imagination. We believe there are pedestrian and bicycle friendly alternatives to support our downtown and commute trip reduction goals, beyond building traffic signals.

## **We are spending most of our funding in the low-density suburban areas**

From our perspective, the bulk of the CFP spending appears to be that which is partially funded by impact fees, and otherwise matched with grants. While we understand there are rules around impact fees, we are still concerned that these impact fee funds, and the majority of the grants we can apply for, are spent primarily to develop streets in suburban areas. We think the comprehensive plan priorities call for in-fill development in our main corridors where we want to encourage sustainable growth, and high-frequency bus service is already prioritized. We think that that a fresh look at CFP criteria used to select projects may be helpful.

In conclusion, and as we said last year, BPAC acknowledges the difficulty of determining budget priorities in tight economic times. As the City continues to face the realities of limited resources, so do our residents in their private and household budgeting. Many Olympia residents are using lower-cost forms of transportation, including biking, walking and transit for both commute and non-commute trips. We think it is important to align our priorities with the economic realities of many of our residents, and with the policies in our comprehensive plan.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our recommendations in the course of your CFP review process. Please feel free to contact Clark Gilman at (360) 402-5101 or [clarkgilman@gmail.com](mailto:clarkgilman@gmail.com) or Anne Fritzel at (360) 753-9606 or [bicyclegoddess@gmail.com](mailto:bicyclegoddess@gmail.com) if you have questions or comments.

Sincerely,  
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Co-chairs, BPAC