



TO: Mayor Payne and Members of the Olympia City Council
FROM: Tom Dillon, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)
DATE: October 10, 2024
SUBJECT: 2025-2030 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (CFP); Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

First, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee would like to express our appreciation for the approach the City is taking to transportation in this year's Capital Facilities Plan and the opportunity to provide feedback on it. We recognize that Olympia is now able to spend more on pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects thanks to the new TBD sales tax, and that the City is going to great lengths to incorporate complete streets into transportation spending (such as with the Fones Road project). However, we do have two areas where we believe that the CFP could be improved.

First, we are concerned that, with the exception of the Street Repair and Reconstruction program, most transportation projects listed in the CFP do not have metrics or outcomes defined. We are not asking for metrics to be attached to projects simply for the sake of checking a box on a "best practices" list, but rather for the City to have the information it needs to make prudent decisions. As our current transportation system results in far too many injuries and deaths and is also one of the biggest sources of pollution and greenhouse gases, we believe that there is too much at stake to risk pursuing interventions that don't move us in the right direction as quickly as possible. In addition, it is clear that there will need to be large changes to our transportation system over the coming years and decades, and we believe that high-quality metrics are an essential tool for guiding our community through that change.

Second, we are asking for more transparency as to how projects are chosen. In the CFP, each project is aligned with a goal or goals from its chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, but if this is one of the key criteria by which projects are selected it gives us concern that the process of developing the CFP is "siloeed," with departments focused only on their area. This approach is concerning for all areas, but especially for transportation, which is by definition something that touches almost every aspect of the lives of Olympia's community. Furthermore, we believe that many of the City's goals will be difficult or impossible to achieve if the transportation component is not addressed. For example, we believe that the following non-transportation goals would likely be best supported by transportation interventions:

- **GR9: Olympians enjoy lifelong happiness and wellness.** Research shows that an active lifestyle has a major impact on health, to the point that a recent study¹ found that people who commute by bike have a 47% lower risk of early death than the general population. No intervention by the City would have a bigger impact on health than making active transportation possible, practical, and attractive.
- **GN5: Ground and surface waters are protected from land uses and activities that harm water quality and quantity.** Any oil, grease, tire particles, or brake dust from a car will eventually end up in our ground

¹ Catherine Friel, David Walsh, Bruce Whyte, Chris Dibben, Zhiqiang Feng, Graham Baker, Paul Kelly, Evangelia Demou, Ruth Dundas, John Weller - Health benefits of pedestrian and cyclist commuting: evidence from the Scottish Longitudinal Study: BMJ Public Health 2024;2:e001295.

and surface water. Protecting those waters is essential, but so long as we have a transportation system that requires us to emit these pollutants to meet our basic needs, any work that we do will be limited to mitigation. Reducing the reliance on private automobiles is a way to address these threats to our water resources at the source rather than asking future generations to clean up after us.

- **GE3: A vital downtown provides a strong center for Olympia's economy.** The design of our streets downtown makes the area a place to travel through, not to. Although we recognize that the location of downtown requires a major through-route connecting the east and west sides of the city, we also note the vibrant city center that appears when parts of it are closed to automobile traffic, such as during Arts Walk. We believe there is no better investment that could be made to Olympia's downtown than to explore reducing the number of cars there through things like temporarily pedestrianizing streets. As the success of this sort of initiative is closely tied to the success of downtown businesses, this would likely require greater residential density downtown in the long run and a way to mitigate the reduction in parking in the short term, possibly using an approach similar to that of Lockport, IL².

One of the things that the committee noticed when reading through the CFP was that, even if all of the transportation projects slated for the next twenty years which were listed in the CFP were to be built tomorrow, we would still be left with a transportation system that overwhelmingly prioritizes the movement and storage of cars over the needs of the City's residents and visitors. Many of the issues that the city is facing, from climate change to budgets to housing, are inextricably linked to the state of car dependency in which we find ourselves. While the challenges we are discussing may be too big to solve with this CFP, we hope the comments that follow help inform future policy that will shape the investments in future CFPs.

We believe that for the City of Olympia to flourish, it cannot be through targeted interventions alone (as important and necessary as they are). In addition to the interventions covered by the CFP, there also needs to be systemic changes. For example:

- The Olympia Street Safety Plan clearly shows that there is a culture of speeding in Olympia. Given the relationship of excess speed to the likelihood and severity of crashes, it appears unlikely that Olympia will be able to achieve its safety goals, especially for vulnerable people who walk, roll, or bike on our streets, without changing the culture that makes exceeding the speed limit not only accepted but expected. In addition to addressing things like dangerous intersections, the City will also need to do things such as implement automated speed enforcement and ensure that the Engineering Design and Development Standards include traffic calming measures that will be implemented every time a street is restriped or reconstructed.
- Sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure in Olympia are in a disgraceful state that creates hazards for all pedestrians and limits the ability of people using mobility devices to participate in civic life or meet their daily needs. Although the City has started to take some steps to rectify this (such as the much-needed sidewalk condition inventory and recent sidewalk repairs), it is clear that the City does not think of sidewalks as essential infrastructure in the same way as roads. We would like to see things like a clear strategy and funding to address deficient sidewalks in a reasonable timeframe. We want to ensure accessible pedestrian connections to transit, things like striping all crosswalks (understandably, few

² <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2021/8/9/how-to-solve-a-parking-problem-without-breaking-the-bank>

people seem to be aware of unmarked crosswalks), and building “gold standard” pedestrian infrastructure included in the City’s Engineering Design and Development Standards.

- A clear strategy for how to transition from car dependency to transportation freedom. Our current built environment requires that people use private automobiles to get around (and excludes people who are unable to own or operate a private vehicle for various reasons). As a result, the City cannot just stop building and maintaining car infrastructure. Yet most of the City’s goals are unachievable without a major shift in our transportation system. A plan is needed for how to make this transition with a minimum of cost and difficulty. In short, the clearer and more intentional we can be now, the more successful we are likely to be in the future.

Again, we want to express our appreciation for the new funding and focus on projects that benefit all members of the Olympia community, not just those who drive. We believe that Olympia is headed in the right direction and that with continued good leadership it can be a truly great city.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Dillon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" being the most prominent.

Tom Dillon

Chair

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Cc: Max DeJarnatt, Associate Planner, Public Works | Transportation
BPAC Members

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