



To: Mayor Selby and Members of the Olympia City Council
From: Bethany Roth, Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)
Date: October 4, 2023
Subject: 2024-2029 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (CFP); Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

The Olympia Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) would like to thank the City Council for the opportunity to provide input on Olympia's Capital Facilities Plan (CFP). Along with the equity, health, and other extensive supporting rationale for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the Committee notes the alarming national and statewide trends in roadway safety. Injuries and fatalities on US roads have markedly increased over recent years¹. The BPAC encourages the Council to frame funding for walking, rolling, and biking as a keystone of, rather than an adjunct to, the health and success of our community. The increasing risks of vehicular conflict, a growing population, and the impacts of unattained climate goals require unprecedented investment in bike and pedestrian facilities.

Unfortunately, the draft CFP does not fully incorporate Olympia's commitment to the safety of all road users, integration of walking, rolling, and biking into city and regional planning, and financial prioritization of projects that facilitate low stress bike and pedestrian access. The BPAC supports more extensive alignment of the CFP with the priorities presented in the Transportation Master Plan, the ADA Transition Plan, the Street Safety Plan, and the strategies of the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan.

We support a sales tax increase for pedestrian and bike projects

We are excited that the City Council is considering a sales tax increase to better fund the pedestrian and bicycle projects outlined in the Transportation Master Plan. We strongly support this and encourage you to reserve all the new tax revenue for pedestrian and bicycle projects.

We also note that revenue from the voted utility tax has remained stagnant for several years, even as our population has increased. Since part of that revenue funds sidewalks and pathways, we support finding additional revenue that will replace what is being lost over time, due to the lack of growth in the voted utility tax.

Walking, rolling, and biking is essential

Bicycle and pedestrian access improves the safety, health, resiliency, and livability of all residents. The BPAC stresses the importance of the CFP to these efforts. Shifting the focus of transportation funding toward walking, rolling, and biking supports the city's long-term vision and addresses many of the challenges identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Cultural adoption of more environmentally friendly and healthy forms of transportation

¹ Please review data and trends from the WA Traffic Safety Commission <https://wtsc.wa.gov/>. A recent Seattle Times article calls attention to the alarming (and unabating) traffic death trend in WA: <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/after-setting-sad-record-last-year-wa-traffic-deaths-trending-higher-now/>. National data is summarized here: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/04/26/opinion/road-deaths-racial-gap.html> and <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/26/1184034017/us-pedestrian-deaths-high-traffic-car>

hinges on a critical mass of adopters. Those considering their transportation options need to see more walkers, rollers, and cyclists to realize the possibility. The BPAC supports Olympia in embracing transportation equity and choice. Continuous progress towards a community that prioritizes walking, rolling, and biking will help alleviate inequity, concrete, noise, pollution, and congestion. While the BPAC appreciates the transportation infrastructure included in the CFP, it does not seriously engage with the impediment that a reliance on automobiles poses to Olympia's vision. Hopefully, new funding will address this.

Here is an example of how we have recently fallen short. The Village at Cain Road cleared a large area of dense trees and replaced it with single family detached homes, each with a large garage. The changes to Cain Road added a turn lane, which lengthened the crosswalk and increased pedestrians' exposure to vehicles. It is also more intimidating for cyclists – especially those turning left onto 22nd. What transportation priorities does this reconfigured intersection communicate to the residents of these new homes? How accessible do shopping and other destinations "feel" to individuals who need or want to engage in walking, rolling, or biking?



Recommendations

The BPAC would like to bring the Council's attention to the following items identified in – or substantially related to – the CFP.

- We recommend greater coherence in stated transportation priorities and actual capital expenditures. This requires elevating walkers, rollers, and cyclists to at least parity with private vehicle drivers in budgetary reality. The Committee is concerned that many CFP projects assume a baseline of roadway civility and driver attentiveness that left us during the pandemic. We encourage a shift toward projects that acknowledge this change. There are costs involved in injuries and fatalities, and there should be commensurate budgetary attention paid to preventing them. We hope new tax revenue will support these necessary changes.
- The BPAC recommends leveraging green pavement paint to promote low-stress network and visibly signaling the city's priorities. The BPAC is unclear why low-cost green paint was not utilized in the Cain Road intersection (see above). Inexpensive visual traffic calming should be installed preventively, not reactively. Driver awareness and lower speeds foster a low stress transportation network. Green paint and adequate signage help create awareness. Bright green paint should be widely applied and maintained.

The BPAC also calls attention to a lack of safe left turning opportunities for cyclists. BPAC supports installing signs and green bike boxes until more substantial improvements can be made².

- The BPAC recommends funding infrastructure that addresses vehicle speeding in Olympia. The BPAC has critical concerns over the issue of speeding in Olympia. The city's Street Safety Plan supports these concerns. Speeding threatens the safety of community members, discourages voluntary use of walking, rolling, and biking, and encourages the purchase of larger vehicles due to the perception they are 'safer.' The impacts of speeding on noise, safety, and carbon emissions are in direct conflict with the Comprehensive Plan. Speeding is countered through enforcement efforts and traffic calming infrastructure. Though traffic calming measures are included in the CFP, the BPAC strongly recommends allocating additional funding for traffic calming.

The BPAC also urges the City Council to reduce barriers to the installation of speed tables and speed humps³.

- The BPAC recommends an actionable, data-driven, equity-focused approach to transportation improvements for walkers, rollers, and cyclists. The term "equity" only appears once in the CFP. It is not visibly integrated into the document. This continues to be a missed opportunity to show how the CFP supports and speaks to furthering Olympia's equity goals. Clearly identifying how each CFP project connects to equity goals is an important way to demonstrate that creating a more equitable community is a financial priority⁴. This deficiency has been raised by the BPAC in our letter for the past three years with no identifiable change in the CFP.
- The BPAC recommends a more holistic alignment between Comprehensive Plan goals and policies in the CFP and projects. We note that all the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies referenced in the Transportation section of the CFP came from the Transportation section of the Comprehensive Plan, yet there are goals and policies in other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan that might be implemented by a transportation project. For example, if it is a goal that people have regular access to nature, then a trail or a pathway project could meet that goal. If the CFP took a less siloed approach and better integrated the goals and policies from every chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, we might see more pedestrian and bicycle projects emerging as a higher priority. This could also support our interest in seeing equity woven into the CFP, because we could see more connections between the different sections of the documents.
- The BPAC recommends more metrics that measure the right things. We support measuring the system's completeness and encourage wider adoption of this metric in the CFP. What gets measured is what gets managed.

² <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-bikeway-design-guide/bikeway-signing-marking/colored-bike-facilities/>

³ <https://ctre.iastate.edu/research-synthesis/rural-speed-management/vertical-displacement/speed-humps-tables/> and <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/speed-management/traffic-calming-eprimer/module-4-effects-traffic-calming-measures-motor>

⁴ The Seattle Bicycle Master Plan incorporates icons to specify the benefits and challenges of each project, it includes equity indicators. <https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/document-library/citywide-plans/modal-plans/bicycle-master-plan>

The BPAC recognizes the difficult balance of interests represented in the CFP. We applaud the CFP projects related to sidewalks and bicycle improvements, but more needs to be done. Continuation of the transportation status quo will not adequately support Olympia's growth, livability, or resiliency. As our population grows, the CFP offers an opportunity to drive the changes envisioned in the Transportation Master Plan.

The Olympia BPAC would like to thank the Council for the opportunity to review and comment on Olympia's CFP. Solicitation and incorporation of community input is the surest way toward a more just Olympia for all. We appreciate your consideration of these comments and suggestions.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bethany Roth", written in a cursive style.

Bethany Roth

Chair

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Cc: Michelle Swanson, AICP, Senior Planner, Public Works | Transportation
BPAC Members

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