



# The value of a street grid

Olympia's Comprehensive Plan includes policies about street connections to create a better street grid.

This is crucial for reducing driving and emissions in Olympia.

Here's why.

# Growth in cities curbs sprawl

- Concentrating growth in cities puts less pressure on developing rural areas.
- We can take action to make a city's built environment more sustainable.
- For transportation, the most effective way we can do that is by building a network of small streets in a grid pattern.



Photo: [pedbikeimages.org/Laura Sandt](http://pedbikeimages.org/Laura_Sandt)

*Suburban development patterns can contribute to long trips that can only be made by car, habitat degradation and fragmentation, and the conversion of farm or resource land.*



*Concentrating growth in cities helps prevent sprawl.*



# Example: in a car-centric street system...

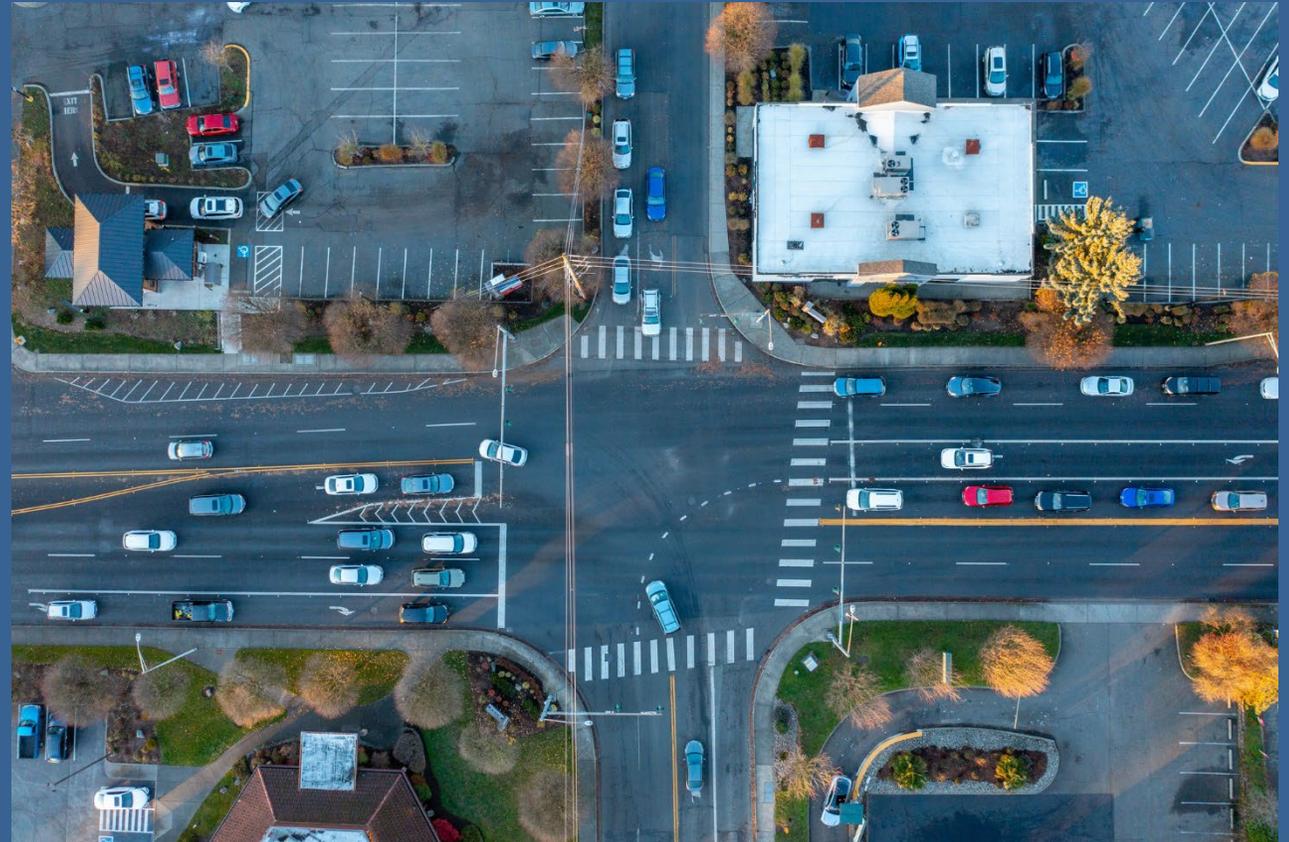
- Traffic gets concentrated onto a few streets. This makes traffic congestion worse.
- People are less likely to walk, roll in a wheelchair, or ride a bike, because
  - The distance you have to go is much farther.
  - Wide streets with lots of traffic are unpleasant places to be, even when they have sidewalks, curb ramps, and bike lanes.



*Although Harrison Avenue has sidewalks and bike lanes, the noise and air pollution from vehicles makes it unpleasant to walk, roll in a wheelchair, or ride a bike on.*

# Car-centric street systems also

- Cause more greenhouse gas emissions, not only because people are more likely to drive but also because people have to drive farther.
- Result in bigger intersections, which
  - Need long signal cycles to get vehicles through, causing drivers and pedestrians to wait a long time for a green light.
  - Are less safe for pedestrians because the longer crosswalk distances increase exposure to vehicles.



*Pacific Avenue & Fones Road*

# For transit

- Car-centric street systems mean buses have no easy place to turn around, which makes providing transit service difficult.



*Martin Way is one of the few east-west arterials on the eastside.*

# In contrast, a street grid

- Shortens emergency response time because routes are more direct.
- Offers more route options when there are street closures due to construction or emergencies.
- Helps transit buses operate more efficiently, along with other types of service vehicles, such as garbage and delivery trucks.



# Street grids support walking & rolling

- Intersections can be smaller.
  - Pedestrians have shorter distances to cross and less exposure to vehicles.
  - Signals have shorter cycles, which means pedestrians and drivers don't have to wait long for a green light.
- Traffic is less intense.
  - Dispersing traffic across a network of small streets means less noise, air pollution, and fewer cars per street, which makes it more inviting for people.
  - Bicyclists have fewer interactions with vehicles.



# Street grids are also safer

- More intersections slow traffic.
- Smaller streets also encourage slower traffic.
- Slower traffic decreases the probability that a collision will happen. If it does, it is less likely to result in a fatal or serious injury.



# How this translates to Olympia

Parts of Olympia that developed between the 1940s and 1990s were built on a car-centric street system.



Photo: Robert Vanderpool

*The Black Lake Boulevard & Cooper Point Road intersection carries a lot of traffic because there is no street grid in this part of the westside.*

Parts that developed before and after then are on a more human-centric grid.

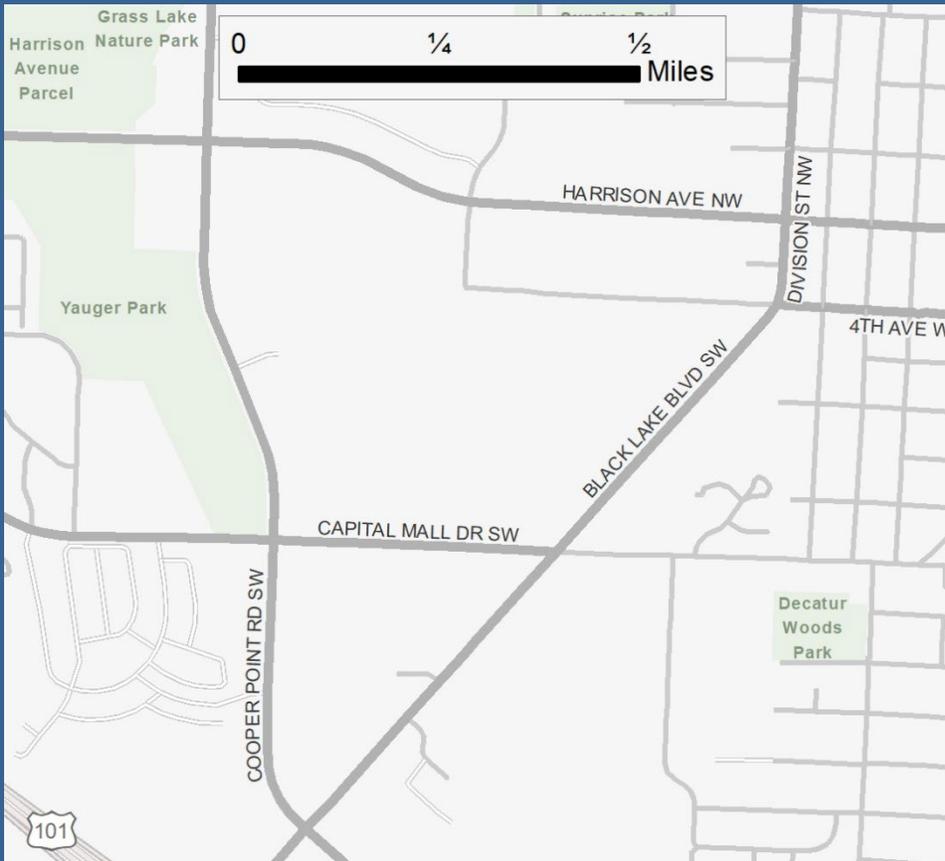


*The Legion Way and Washington Street intersection is typical of a human-centric street grid.*

# For example

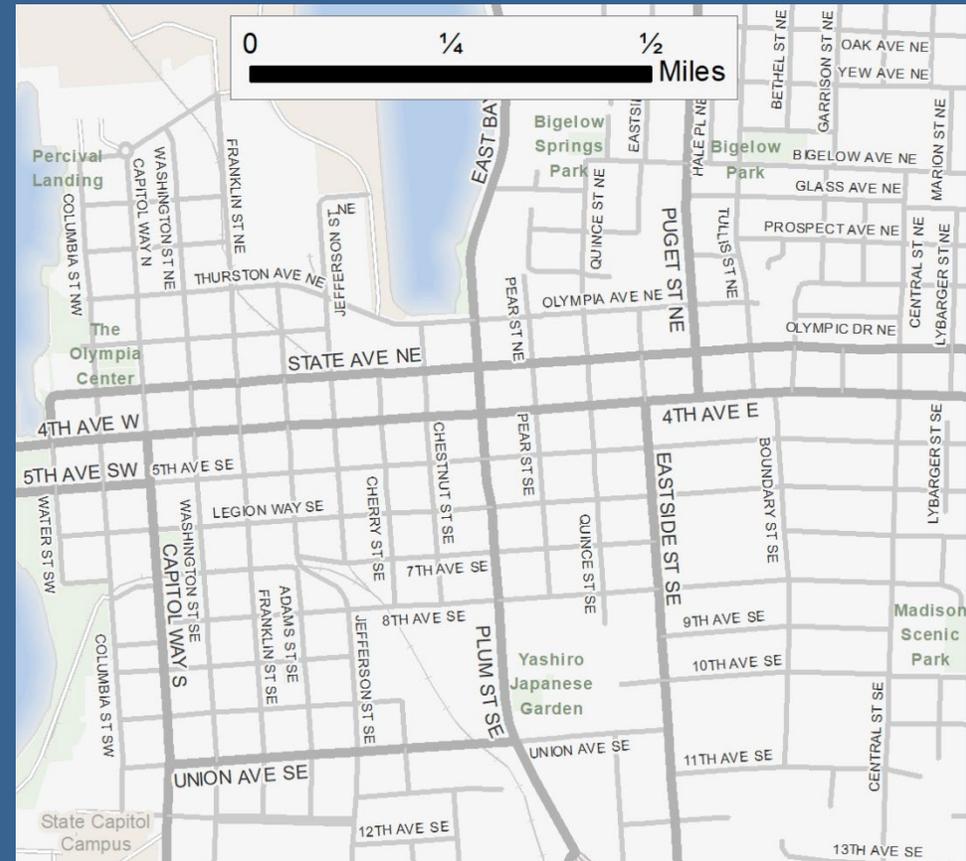
## Capital Mall area: car-centric streets

Developed in 1970s & 1980s



## Downtown: human-centric streets

Developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century



# New streets are built for everyone

As we build new streets to fill in the grid, we typically include:

- Sidewalks on both sides of every street.
- Street trees and planter strips separating travel lanes from sidewalks.
- Curb ramps at corners.
- Enhanced bike lanes on major streets.



*New street frontage on Martin Way at Intercity Transit's building*

# Street connections are vital for the future

- “More streets” may seem counterintuitive for sustainability.
- But a street grid is crucial to have a city in which people can easily walk, roll in a wheelchair, ride a bike, or take the bus.



# Street connections in the Comprehensive Plan update

- We are not proposing any changes to the street connections in the Comprehensive Plan update.
- After the Comprehensive Plan is updated, we want to update our understanding of where street connections are most needed in Olympia.
- We will likely study that in 2026-2028.





# Please share your thoughts

Thanks for reading this!

If you have questions or thoughts, please share them with:

**Michelle Swanson, AICP**

Senior Planner

Public Works Transportation

[mswanson@ci.olympia.wa.us](mailto:mswanson@ci.olympia.wa.us)

360.753.8575