

Sam
Adams
Mayor

**North Williams Traffic Safety and Operations Project
Stakeholder Advisory Committee March 1st meeting notes**

Susan D.
Keil
Director

SAC members in attendance (in alphabetical order by first name)

Allan Rudwick, Eliot neighbor
Ben Foote, Sabin neighbor and Umbrella
Debora Leopold Hutchins, Sistas Weekend Cyclers
Diana Moosman, MOSI Architecture
Irek Wielgosz, King Neighborhood Association
Jerrell Waddell, Life Change Christian Center
Jorge Guerra, Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs
Jrdn Freeauf, Eddie Murphy Cabinets
Laurie Simpson, Eliot Neighborhood Association
Nathan Roll, Metropolis Cycle Repair
Pamela Weatherspoon, Legacy Emanuel Hospital
Paul Anthony, Humboldt Neighborhood Association
Stephanie Routh (sitting in for Steve Bozzone), Willamette Pedestrian Coalition
Steve Gemmell, Boise Neighborhood Association
Susan Peithman, Bicycle Transportation Alliance

SAC members absent

Bekah Cardwell, Port City Development
Martha McElligot, Jesuit Volunteer Corps
Shara Alexander, Eliot neighbor

Members of the public in attendance

Ted Gresh, Neighbor
Russ Willis
Mike Faden, Neighbor

Project Staff present

Michelle Poyourow, Public Involvement Consultant
Ellen Vanderslice, Portland Bureau of Transportation Project Manager
Rob Burchfield, Portland Traffic Engineer
Adrian Witte, Alta Planning + Design Consultant

1. Introductions

A few SAC members who could not attend the February meeting introduced themselves, as did members of the consulting team and City staff who had not before met the Committee.

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2. Committee Members' Concerns and Interests

Michelle asked the Committee to catalog their concerns with the way North Williams operates today, for the benefit of the project team, City staff and other Committee members.

Concerns described by Committee members – though not necessarily shared by all of them – were:

Safety and Perceived Safety

- The bike/bus leapfrogging that takes place at rush hour feels unsafe to people participating in it, or around it
- When cyclists pass one another or a stopped bus, especially when leaving the bike lane to do so, that feels unsafe to passing drivers
- People do not feel safe walking across North Williams, due to motor vehicle speeds, drivers' reluctance to stop and yield, and poor visibility around crosswalks; Committee members are particularly worried about pedestrians who are using mobility devices, have mental or physical handicaps, are elderly or are young (such as children walking to the Tubman or Humboldt schools)
- Even when driving at the speed limit (30 mph) on North Williams, it is hard to scan ahead for pedestrians and feel confident about stopping in time
- High motor vehicle speeds on certain sections of North Williams feel unsafe to people driving, biking and walking
- Hazards and disruptions in the bike lane (such as opening car doors, cars double-parked, wide vehicles exceeding the parking lane, and people pulling into or out of parking spaces) make bicycling feel dangerous and stressful on North Williams
- Turning right across the bike lane – either off of or on to North Williams – is scary and seems dangerous, especially at night when some people don't have lights on the front of their bikes
- The area around Graham feels “squeezed” and stressful
- Pedestrian crashes are underreported at North Williams and Killingsworth; the Humboldt Neighborhood Association is concerned about pedestrian safety there

Operations

- Traffic and parking demand have increased with recent development on North Williams, and even more development is coming; it is unclear how the street can or should accommodate these changes and the new transportation demands that come with them
- The way the stoplights are timed on North Williams causes people bicycling to catch most or all of the red lights, which is frustrating
- Between Beech and Failing, the sidewalks on North Williams feel congested – with pedestrians, street furniture, signs and bike parking
- The Elliot Neighborhood Association is concerned about North Williams being used for trips that don't start or end nearby, i.e. cut-through traffic

- Port City Development clients make heavy use of TriMet LIFT service, and at present the parked or idling vans sometimes encroach into the bike lane or block crosswalk visibility
- The bike lane on lower North Williams “just feels too narrow” for the volume of bike traffic it carries; in some sections there is no comfortable way for people bicycling to pass one another
- There are drainage and flooding problems around the Thompson and Fremont intersections, and the crosswalks and bike lane are sometimes underwater

Conflict

- Sometimes cyclists run red lights on North Williams, which is frustrating to the people dutifully waiting at the red lights
- It is not clear who has the right-of-way when motor vehicles need to cross the bike lane to make a turn, and this generates confusion and conflict
- Overflow parking from Rose Quarter events fills parking lanes on and around lower North Williams, as well as illegal parking spots

Community

- North Williams lacks visual “continuity” as a commercial and community street
- Barbed wire along lower North Williams makes for a discouraging entrance to the neighborhood

3. Committee Members’ Signs of Success for an Improved N Williams

Committee members described what interests they have in the street, and what characteristics they each hope to see in a “successful” North Williams in the future. These included:

Safety

- There are fewer crashes and close calls on North Williams
- Speeding (in excess of the legal limit) is reduced on North Williams
- Speeds (regardless of the legal limit) are reduced on North Williams
- When you are walking across North Williams, people driving and bicycling see you, stop and yield to you reliably at crosswalks
- The City receives fewer calls about North Williams to the safety hotline (823-SAFE)

Operations

- Biking on North Williams feels as comfortable and seamless as on North Vancouver; people of all ages feel comfortable biking on North Williams
- North Williams operates as the “bike freeway” it should be, given that the only other good northbound bike streets are far away to the east and the west

- North Williams is friendlier and more appealing to walk on; more people walk and linger in the neighborhood, visiting multiple destinations
- North Williams operates more like a “neighborhood collector” for motor vehicle traffic (typical nearby “neighborhood collectors,” according to Rob Burchfield, are NE 15th, and NE Fremont and NE Prescott west of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard)
- North Williams becomes a “showcase” that other neighborhoods and cities can learn from, a street that is a successful Neighborhood Collector, local business street, Major City Bikeway, and transit street all at the same time

Conflict

- North Williams balances motor vehicle traffic demand with the other traffic demands on the street, and different users interact gracefully in the limited space
- There is less confusion and conflict in traffic on North Williams, in part because users are more aware of how the street works, what the traffic laws are, and how they are to operate their various vehicles

Community

- Changes to North Williams are broadly supported by the people living, working, visiting, worshipping, and accessing businesses in the neighborhood
- Civic, community and church involvement grows around North Williams, as do local economic opportunities
- North Williams continues to host businesses that serve neighborhood needs

4. Committee Decision-Making and Charter

Ellen presented the Committee with a Charter document, describing what the City is hoping to achieve with this project, and what the role of the Committee will be in the project.

Ellen asked whether any Committee members wished to alter the Charter; she also asked whether people were happy with the open discussion format the Committee meetings had taken so far, or if they preferred to elect a Chair and add more formal decision-making structure. She noted that the possibility will remain open to make things more formal if the committee begins to feel that the open discussion format isn't working.

Ben Foote asked what the general framework of the remaining four SAC meetings will be. Ellen responded that we will be presenting alternatives at the next meeting and soliciting committee feedback, and that processing public comments at the workshops and arriving at a preferred alternative will likely take several iterations at the SAC meetings.

Susan Peithman and Debora Leopold-Hutchins both expressed a preference for continuing to have an open discussion and small choices made by consensus, facilitated by Ellen and Michelle, with votes held when necessary to make a decision. Other Committee members nodded their agreement.

Jerrell Waddell asked how much impact the Committee can really have on what the City decides to do on North Williams. Ellen said that the Committee's role is crucial, because the City will only move forward with an alternative that has broad public support.

Jerrell asked what "broad" support means in this context. Rob Burchfield, City Traffic Engineer, answered that we are unlikely to reach a point where everyone in the community is completely happy with an alternative. He hopes that through this process, the Committee will arrive at an alternative that most people on the Committee can support, and that most people in the community can support. He will also look to the Committee members to share their understanding with their communities and to speak publicly about the alternative (for example, if the project goes to City Council for endorsement).

5. Public Comment

Ted Gresh urged the Committee to think of North Williams as three distinct sections, with their own different challenges and possibly different solutions. Broadway to Fremont is the least safe section, where traffic moves quickly and bicyclists are traveling uphill. Parking removal might be OK there since it's lightly used. Fremont to Skidmore is the commercial area, with lots of pedestrian traffic, lots of parking demand, and potential for dooring for bicyclists. North of Skidmore, in Ted's opinion, there is no problem and no real need for any change to the cross-section.

Russ Willis pointed out that North Williams functions for the bike network as an arterial, whereas for the car network it is supposed to be a "neighborhood collector." But he wondered if cyclists should be encouraged to travel at 20 mph, which probably makes people walking across the street uncomfortable, and whether cyclists should be urged or trained to take their time in certain places.

6. Wrap-up

Ben reminded the group of his question from the February meeting regarding a Committee email list. Should the Committee maintain an email list in order to share information and have discussions between meetings? Most members expressed their preference that there not be an official Committee email list. However, Michelle agreed to include contact information on the Committee roster (at the discretion of each Committee member) so that members may contact one another as needed between meetings.

Michelle asked the Committee if they would be interested in participating in a Walking Tour on North Williams, to look at problem areas and envision possible solutions. By a show of hands, most Committee members said they would be interested in attending such a tour even if it were in addition to regularly scheduled Committee meetings.

The next SAC meeting will be held on April 5th, from noon to 1:30 pm, at the Red Cross in Training Room 11.

---Notes compiled and edited by Michelle Poyourow and Ellen Vanderslice