

Bicycle Advisory Committee Meeting
6-8:00pm | April 28th, 2020

BAC Members Present: Alexandra Zimmerman, David Stein, Kerry Aszklar, Ellen Ballantine, Clint Culpepper, Victor Duong, Reza Farhoodi, Catherine Gould, Kelly Hansen, Sarah Iannarone, Iain MacKenzie, Phil Richman, Katherine Sheie, Nicholas Swanson, Yashar Vasef, Korrin Weldon
BAC Members Absent: Christopher Achterman, Alexa Jakusovsky, Rithy Khut

BAC members began with a discussion of how they had been experiencing Portland's streets in current COVID conditions. Common issues raised included increased pedestrian traffic and the resultant cramped sidewalks, huddling around restaurants and cafes, and an uptick in aggressive and unsafe driving.

Roger Geller, PBOT bicycle coordinator, presented to the BAC on travel activity under current conditions. Geller showed statistics that all modes of travel have seen significant reductions. Traffic congestion is down, as is citywide parking revenue. Traffic speeds are generally up.

Geller added that inner neighborhoods have seen an approximate 50 to 60 percent reduction in traffic volumes, where in East Portland, traffic volumes have seen a lesser reduction of approximately 30 percent. Commercial routes have seen traffic reductions ranging from 10 to 40 percent. Across the entirety of Multnomah County, total daily vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has decreased from 20 million miles to less than 5 million miles from pre-COVID to the first week of April. Geller noted that 85th percentile automobile speeds have increased by 5 miles per hour on average.

Portland Fire and Rescue have been called to respond to fewer weekly crash incidents on average. A BAC member noted that their orthopedic surgeon claimed to have seen more victims of bike-related crashes. Geller noted that volumes are lower on average, but this trend is hard to see everywhere.

Geller mentioned that transit boardings and estimated ridership are down approximately 70 percent. TriMet is not accepting cash payments, nor are they enforcing fares. Buses are restricted to 10-15 passengers. Streetcar ridership is down approximately 80 percent, and the tram is only serving OHSU employees and patients.

Art Pearce, PBOT policy, planning, and projects section manager, noted that the PBOT planning team has been tracking best practices from other cities to work on organizing a specific response for Portland and the lasting impacts of COVID. Nick Falbo, PBOT planner, described the phased approach the bureau is taking to combating COVID and its residual effects, particularly how the city's transportation network will look in the future. Falbo noted that PBOT's current objective is to provide essential transportation services and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable community members. Strategies include participating in the city's Emergency Coordination Center, supporting open streets through parks, working with community organizations on food security through Portland in the Streets, lowering costs for shared micromobility, modifying streetcars to protect riders and operators, lowering parking costs for essential workers, and prioritizing maintenance of essential assets and quick build projects. Pearce noted that the City has a rare opportunity to change the world that people come back to post-COVID, but PBOT is anticipating that main streets and small businesses will be struggling for a while after the stay-at-home order winds down. PBOT also anticipates real and perceived public health

and safety concerns for transit and ride share as well as the continued need for physical distancing on streets not built for it.

Pearce described PBOT's strategies to meet these concerns. These include communicating and collaborating with the public about responses and implementation, rolling out a business support tool kit and street interventions to help main streets adapt to a physically distant future, providing space for physical distancing on busy streets, and encouraging active transportation and telework.

Catherine Ciarlo, PBOT active transportation and safety division manager, spoke about the city's greenway network. She mentioned the system is working well in the current circumstances and seeing high levels of use. PBOT is working on improving the system in order to protect greenways as car traffic levels come back up. This includes installing temporary barricades to create spaces for safe walking and bicycling and gathering data to illustrate where barricades are working well and communicate their importance. Ciarlo noted that gathering public support for street changes is the biggest challenge PBOT faces with greenways. She added that PBOT is working on rolling out Biketown 2.0, an expansion of Biketown to a larger part of the city and a conversion to all electric bikes. In tandem with this, Sunday Parkways will move to a digital platform, including activities like exercise programs, art and music showcases, and local business spotlights.

A BAC member asked that given the Biketown fleet's move toward electrification, would there be any possibility to keep the old bikes around in any capacity. They also asked how prices would change as a result of the fleet conversion. Ciarlo answered that the responses PBOT received to its Biketown 2.0 RFP both were based around 100% e-bikes. She added that the old fleet would not interface well with the new system, and that while the system will likely have a slight cost increase, PBOT is working to preserve the equity elements of the current system, including the Biketown for All program.

Jamey Duhamel from Commissioner Eudaly's office updated the BAC on projects in the commissioner's hopper. The office is scheduling the advisory group for Rose Lanes 2, a few months later than initially anticipated, but Duhamel mentioned the office wants to make sure the corridors are developed enough to take advantage of any available resources. She added that plans are still on to go to City Council with the bike report, albeit delayed. In addition, Commissioner Eudaly directed PBOT to move forward on council-approved projects to take advantage of the low traffic volumes. One effort involves laying the foundation for filling in gaps in the city's greenway network.

A BAC member asked whether there were more specific timelines for PBOT's COVID response phases; Art Pearce responded that the plan was oriented toward phases because of the degree of uncertainty on how quickly things might move, and so there are no specific timelines right now.

The member also noted that they were seeing people use the greenway system that they had not seen out and about before. Catherine Ciarlo responded that PBOT has noticed that people are understanding streets are for them, not just for bicyclists riding through. This is a moment PBOT is attempting to capture through temporary diversion. Part of this involves creating a story map to convey the purpose and importance of the greenway system and diversion.

A BAC member noted that they had trouble navigating the narrow sidewalks along Broadway when they were going downtown and asked if PBOT had engaged the county to provide extra lanes for

walking and biking across the bridge. Pearce responded that PBOT is engaging with the County through the Emergency Coordination Center, but he is not aware of deeper conversations around bridges.

Another member mentioned that there is already an extensive network of lower-traffic streets with lots of residential space. However, they noted they are finding neighborhood greenways to be quite congested, asking how easy it would be to identify quick build pilot projects for testing based around the 2030 Bike Plan. Pearce responded that PBOT invites this sort of idea moving forward and is looking at creating more pedestrian space on greenways or creating space on other streets, combining the strategies into a network that works well.

Noting an uptick in numbers of pedestrians and bicyclists, a member asked if there was any way to encourage traffic patterns like walking on the right with temporary signage. Ciarlo said that she would put that request under consideration; there are lots of things lined up to go on temporary signs, but traffic patterns could certainly be part of the information pushed out about greenways.

Another member asked if there was a good way to maintain space for pedestrians and bicyclists around construction zones, which often restrict the amount of space available for distancing. Pearce responded that he would pass that comment onto the permitting side.

The member also noted that some businesses are shifting toward a drive-through model, which seldom works well for people on bikes. They worried that this could put pressure on people to use cars instead of their bikes. Nick Falbo responded that PBOT has noticed that people are changing how they get around, especially as some people have said driving is easier when picking up large items. He added that PBOT does not want to reinforce driving over bicycling, but is hoping to help businesses reopen in whichever ways they are able.

Catherine Ciarlo answered that many people share the fear that things may be worse than before, and so PBOT is using tools like the transportation wallet to incentivize bike share and transit use as well as looking for more tools to help with transportation demand management. Art Pearce added that PBOT is also looking at a business toolkit and discussing safe queueing, pickup, and drop-off spaces.

A member commented that they would not recommend 823-SAFE for people in crisis because of the long response times. Pearce responded that PBOT is staffing the line with more people and adding a COVID tag within the tracking system to make it more responsive.

Another member mentioned they had not heard anything about PBOT reallocating resources while other cities are building out miles of bike networks, asking how people could help something similar happen in Portland. They asked if there were any date estimates on the COVID-related projects. Pearce answered that PBOT is operating under a strong imperative not to create any new costs, so it is looking at expensive elements that could be made cheaper. The new framework, based around social distancing, looks to make better and stronger use of the city's streets. As for dates, Pearce mentioned that greenway work would begin in the next few weeks while additional elements have no specific timelines as PBOT Maintenance Operations is still running at half staff.

A member asked how the City could help mobilize the community more effectively. Pearce mentioned that in a PBOT conversation with Bike Loud, several people expressed interest in helping with maintenance. Volunteer support helps with the organizational fear of maintenance of all the facilities.

The member also asked how the messaging and relationship with police around East Portland works. Ciarlo answered that PBOT interfaces most closely with police around Vision Zero, describing it as a partnership of two bureaus that see the world differently. She mentioned that PBOT's goal is to ensure that people behave safely when driving while recognizing that the justice system is inequitable and is not always applied fairly. Ciarlo added that PBOT is focusing on automated safety cameras in order to remove bias from the equation and provide a community education tool. PBOT is upfront about the tools it is using and wants to make sure people know where cameras are located. She mentioned that even now, she hears from people who would like to go out and walk or bike but do not feel safe doing so. PBOT is constantly looking to educate on traffic safety, good neighborhood, and community and is partnering with the Office of Community and Civic life to bring these issues to the fore.

A member stated that it is important to remind people that they are guests on greenways, feeling that that message is not being emphasized. Pearce responded that pedestrians are feeling startled and alarmed by bicyclists traveling quickly on neighborhood greenways.

Another member asked whether the new neighborhood greenway signage changes the legal standing of a pedestrian in the street. Ciarlo answered that signage alone will not change legal standing, but it will emphasize watching for users in the street and going slowly. The member also asked whether there was any thought of setting up bike counters in different locations, as people are not traveling over bridges as frequently. Roger Geller answered that there are a number of hoses that can be moved to obtain relatively short-term data, and he would be open to placement suggestions. The member commented that having sidewalks function as one-way can be hard as not all sidewalks have curb ramps.

As for next steps, Geller suggested the BAC work with Nick Falbo, who welcomed thoughts on specific locations. He added that the big piece is connecting with community groups and is open to feedback for evaluation.

A member mentioned they would like to see a map of the greenway work being considered and would like more specific data and information on tools like pick-up zones. They mentioned they had seen the press release discussing one hundred miles of greenway work. Geller responded that he is not sure how advanced thinking is about criteria for identifying spaces along commercial corridors and transit stops. Falbo responded that there is a working list of key criteria for identifying corridors and streets that will be sensitive to the needs of businesses in the area, adding that he would be willing to share a map and prepare materials to further the discussion.

A member asked whether approved or in-process area plans could be used to fast-track work as a lot of the equity and planning considerations have already been completed. Falbo responded that they could help inform quick responses.

Another member commented that it might be a good idea to extend parking areas to charge more broadly around the city if there is an increase in driving.

The BAC did not move to draft a letter, noting that they would like more data and talking points to shape into a letter or recommendation.

Meeting adjourned.

