



## City of Bellingham Public Works Engineering

104 W. Magnolia Street, Bellingham, WA 98225

### Frequently Asked Questions – 6-Year Transportation Improvement Program

Answers to commonly asked questions about the 6-Year TIP and who to contact for further information.

#### **Q. What is the 6-Year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)?**

**A.** Bellingham's 6-Year Transportation Improvement Program is the funding mechanism for expensive capital improvements to Bellingham's multimodal transportation network. Cities ([RCW 35.77.010](#)) and counties ([RCW 36.81.121](#)) are required to prepare and adopt a comprehensive transportation program for the ensuing six calendar years, after one or more public hearings, that is to be filed with the Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation after adoption. These six-year TIPs are to be consistent with the city or county comprehensive plan transportation element. Bellingham's 6-Year TIP must be adopted by the City Council before July 1st of each year.

#### **Q. What kind of transportation projects are appropriate for inclusion on the 6-Year TIP?**

**A.** The [Transportation Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan](#) (adopted November 2016), Section IV, contains a project list (Tables A – D; pp 32 - 35) of major transportation needs for the 20-year planning period (2016-2036), based on travel demand forecast modeling done by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). The [Pedestrian Master Plan \(PMP\)](#) includes over 350 individual sidewalk and crossing improvement projects and the [Bicycle Master Plan \(BMP\)](#) includes 215 individual bicycle facility projects and both the PMP and BMP are adopted in the 2016 Transportation Element. While sidewalks, bicycle lanes, enhanced crosswalks, and arterial street improvements are appropriate for inclusion on the 6-Year TIP, off-street capital improvements, such as a multimodal trail projects, must include off-street (Parks) funding and a very clear *transportation* benefit to be included on the 6-Year TIP.

#### **Q. What is the public process for updating the 6-Year TIP each year?**

**A.** During the course of each year, Bellingham's Transportation Planning staff monitors safety, congestion, and multimodal mobility issues on the citywide transportation network, as well as emerging opportunities for grant funding and even public-private partnerships. The primary source of major transportation improvements is from the identified project list in the Transportation Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, for consistency with State law ([RCW 35.77.010](#)). Transportation improvement projects not listed in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan may not be eligible for grant funding. All project recommendations are considered for, commonalities, costs and benefits, grant eligibility, engineering staff resources available, and where possible, projects are combined with other capital improvement and maintenance opportunities (sewer/water main replacements, asphalt overlays, re-channelization, etc.) to maximize cost savings.

Public Works staff coordinates with the City Transportation Commission and produces a DRAFT 6-Year TIP in early May, which is the professional staff recommendation for transportation investment priorities, for public and City Council review. The Transportation Commission provides a recommendation to the City Council regarding the DRAFT TIP. A public hearing before the City Council occurs in mid-to-late May and additional Council work sessions occur as deemed necessary by the City Council. The annual 6-Year TIP must be adopted by a majority vote of the City Council prior to July 1<sup>st</sup> and the City must submit the adopted 6-Year TIP to the State within 30 days of adoption.

**Q. Is the 6-Year TIP fulfilling Bellingham’s multimodal and alternative transportation goals?**

**A.** Yes. The projects funded in Bellingham’s 6-Year TIP are primarily from the Transportation Element, the PMP, and the BMP, all of which have a very clear multimodal emphasis. In fact, all of the transportation improvements listed in the DRAFT 2022-2027 TIP are multimodal, meaning that they include transportation facilities for multiple transportation modes, including the WTA transit routes that are served by the improvement. Each year, Public Works staff monitors multimodal transportation mode shares published by the U.S. Census and publishes the [Transportation Report on Annual Mobility \(TRAM\)](#) to document progress toward achieving the City’s long-term transportation mode shift goals adopted in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Q. How many projects are normally added to the 6-Year TIP each year?**

**A.** Usually only two or three new projects are added to the 6-year TIP each year. Public Works must prioritize among public safety, multimodal improvements, traffic congestion, Transportation Concurrency needs, high-growth areas, and other issues. All of this must be balanced with economic realities and the amount of local money and grant funding that is available to plan, engineer, and construct transportation infrastructure. There are always more transportation needs and requests than there is funding to allocate for transportation improvement projects. This means that the 6-Year TIP is a highly competitive process.

**Q. What are the priorities that Public Works uses to recommend additions to the 6-Year TIP?**

**A.** All project requests must be evaluated for citywide transportation benefit and must be feasible with available staff resources and funding sources. The 6-Year TIP is a funding mechanism, not a wish list. Including more projects on the 6-Year TIP each year than is actually feasible would raise community expectations that could not realistically be met due to lack of funding, staff resources, or project complications, such as right-of-way acquisition, environmental impacts, mitigation, and permitting delays.

Public Works staff looks for commonality that may exist among project priorities to determine what is possible, fundable, buildable, and, most importantly, projects that will compete well for grant money available from State and federal agencies, which is typically required for the more expensive 6-Year TIP projects. Public Works also looks for opportunities to combine project requests with other capital improvement and maintenance needs (storm/sewer/water main replacements, asphalt overlays, re-channelization, etc.) to maximize both funding sources and project cost savings.

**Q. What happens when a project does get added to the 6-Year TIP?**

**A.** Transportation projects that are added to the 6-Year TIP are typically listed in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> years of the TIP to establish that they are City priority transportation projects, but do not have full funding available. Projects cannot be listed in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> years of the 6-Year TIP unless they are fully funded. However, sometimes opportunities for “low-cost, high-value” projects emerge unexpectedly and are added as funded projects, which can be made ready for the next construction cycle. These are infrequent, but relatively inexpensive projects that add great transportation benefit to the citywide system.

**Q. Why do some transportation projects stay on the 6-Year TIP for more than 6 years?**

**A.** Some transportation improvements are so expensive and/or complex due to engineering, topography, right-of-way, environmental impacts, etc., that it can take more than 6 years to secure enough funding to complete the project. Many of the largest and most expensive projects face this possibility. State and federal funding agencies require full funding for projects listed in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> years of the TIP and projects without full funding must be listed in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> years of the TIP until they do have full funding. When it is difficult to secure funding for large transportation projects, then they may be included on the 6-year TIP for far longer than just 6 years. Inclusion on the 6-Year TIP is often one of the important scoring criteria for many transportation grant funding agencies.

## Q. Are Transportation Impact Fees (TIFs) used to fund projects on the 6-Year TIP?

A. Yes. However, Transportation Impact Fees may only be spent for transportation projects that are needed to accommodate the projected growth adopted in the Comprehensive Plan and not for maintenance and operations, such as asphalt resurfacing projects.

## Q. What are the main funding sources for projects on the 6-Year TIP?

A. Transportation funding comes from a variety of local, regional, state, federal, and sometimes private funding sources. An extensive list and definition of funding sources is provided below.

**NOTE:** All funding sources listed below are affected by frequent changes in economic conditions, funding levels, and eligibility and funding criteria.

### Local Funding Sources

- **Bellingham Street Fund (Street):** Public Works Street Fund comprised of motor vehicle gas tax and **39%** of the total sales tax collected by the City of Bellingham.
- **Bellingham Real Estate Excise Tax (REET):** Comprised of **1/2 of 1%** of the total real estate revenue for a given year. REET funding is divided into first quarter (¼) and second quarter (¼) and can be used for limited types of transportation projects.
- **Bellingham Transportation Fund (T-Fund):** Comprised of **2/10ths of 1%** of annual sales tax receipts collected within City limits to fund the following specific transportation investments: street resurfacing; non-motorized transportation; and clean energy (WTA and Climate). The Bellingham Transportation Fund was approved by voters in November 2020 and is effective January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2030.
- **Bellingham Multimodal Transportation Impact Fees (MTIF):** The proportional share contribution from private developments for annual transportation investments citywide per BMC 19.06.

### Washington State Funding Sources

- **State:** Includes State-funded educational institutions such as Western Washington University (WWU), Whatcom Community College (WCC), and Bellingham Technical College (BTC).
- **Transportation Improvement Board (TIB):** State grant funding for urban arterials and sidewalks. Includes biennial "Complete Streets" grant awards.
- **WSDOT:** State administered grant funding programs, such as WSDOT Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety grants (**PBS**) or State-funded Safe Routes to School (**SR2S**) grants.
- **WSDOT Connecting Washington (CW):** Washington state gas tax 15-year funding package (2015).

### Federal Funding Sources

- **Federal:** Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), or U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) administered grant funding programs, including federal Safe Routes to School (SR2S) and Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) funding.
- **Highway Bridge Program (HBP):** Provides federal funds for structural repair or replacement administered by Washington State Bridge Replacement Advisory Committee (BRAC).
- **STBG (formerly STP & MAP-21):** Surface Transportation Block Grant provides federal funds to construct, maintain, and expand eligible regionally important arterial street systems.
- **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP):** Provides federal funds to construct and enhance facilities for non-motorized transportation modes.

### Private and Other Partnerships

- Transportation Impact Fees (TIF), Whatcom County, Economic Development Investment (EDI), Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), Port of Bellingham (Port), Bellingham School District (BSD), private business investment, private mitigation (SEPA), etc.

# City of Bellingham Web Site Resources

The 2022-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is required by [RCW 35.77.010](#) and is informed by the transportation, transit, climate, and land use planning documents listed below, which are available on the City of Bellingham web site by clicking on the links

[2021 Transportation Report on Annual Mobility \(TRAM\)](#)

[2020 Local Road Safety Plan for Multimodal Transportation Improvements](#)

[2018 Climate Protection Action Plan](#)

[2016 Multimodal Transportation Chapter, Bellingham Comprehensive Plan](#)

[2014 Bicycle Master Plan](#)

[2012 Pedestrian Master Plan](#)

[Whatcom Transportation Authority \(WTA\) Strategic Transit Plan](#)

[Various Urban Village Master Plans](#)

Please contact the City Transportation Planner if you have questions about the TIP or any other transportation planning information.

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