

**Summary Notes from**  
**Walk-N-Roll Bellingham Technical Review Committee (TRC)**

**April 26, 2022; 6:30-8:00pm**

Over the past two years, City of Bellingham staff has been working with Board members of the local pedestrian and bicycle advocacy group “Walk-Roll-Bellingham” to educate members and to facilitate an on-going conversation regarding issues that affect pedestrians and bicyclists throughout Bellingham.

On December 1, 2020, City Transportation Planner Chris Comeau provided a full online presentation to Walk-N-Roll Bellingham members titled [“Creation, Implementation, and Update of Bellingham’s 2012 Pedestrian Master Plan and 2014 Bicycle Master Plan.”](#)

In 2021, Chris Comeau led small groups of Walk-N-Roll members on a few bike tours of roundabouts, intersections, corridors, and bikeways throughout the City.

On April 26, 2022, City Transportation Planner Chris Comeau provided a brief presentation on how and when the City is proposing to update the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans in 2022-2023. Chris Comeau introduced Michael Hintze and Sofia Gulaid from Toole Design Group as the consulting firm that is assisting Bellingham in the effort to update these plans.

General questions and discussion following the presentation and introduction included American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Bellingham’s 2021 ADA Transition Plan titled “Mobility for All,” prioritization of projects in pedestrian and bicycle master plans, and the speed of vehicles in relation to other user groups.

Walk-N-Roll Bellingham had organized some working groups and had each Board member ask a specific question to City and consultant staff, as follows:

- 1.) **Q.** Rhys Faler asked if the City was familiar with the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) and if the City would consider adopting the NACTO guidelines since he finds that the AASHTO is more highway focused.
  - A. Chris Comeau explained that the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans were already based on NACTO guidelines, as well as other guidance manuals, such as the U.S. Department of Transportation Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Design Guidelines. City planners and engineers reference NACTO and all of these other guidance manuals on an on-going basis. Michael Hintze provided a much more detailed answer regarding the efficacy of ‘adopting’ NACTO guidelines vs. making use of all guidance in the interest of pursuing best practices and recommendations.
  - B. Laura also asked if there are times that the City has seen NACTO conflict with MUTCD or state guidelines, and Chris explained that there are occasionally conflicts, but best practices are employed when possible.
- 2.) **Q.** Robin Thomas asked if the City could consider reducing posted speed limits to 25 mph on all arterial streets and to 20 mph on all residential streets.
  - A. Chris Comeau answered that the City could consider something like this, but as documented on pages 4 and 5 of the [2022 Local Road Safety Plan](#), currently 78% of all City arterial streets

are currently posted at 25 mph, 13% are posted at 30 mph or 35 mph, and only 8% are posted at speeds higher than 35 mph and only at the outer edges of the City. Chris also pointed out that while the numbers on signs can be changed, this does not necessarily mean that people will choose to drive at the posted speed, especially if the street has been designed for a speed higher than the posted speed limit. Without a law enforcement presence and consequence, local neighborhood drivers may soon learn that there is not a dis-incentive to driving above the posted speed limit. Michael Hintze also clarified that 25 mph is the lowest speed allowed for arterial streets in Washington State.

- 3.) **Q.** Sonja Max asked if the City would support the use of non-traditional walkways or sidewalks to save on costs, as well as consideration of narrower travel lanes and streets (traffic diverters and berms) and she showed an image of a narrow alleyway. Sonja and Rhys also asked about the possible use of Lead Pedestrian Interval (LPI) at intersections with Rhys specifically interested in whether these could be used ubiquitously in Urban Village areas.
  - A. Chris Comeau answered that the City will definitely consider alternative and less expensive ways to provide safe walking pathways and facilities, but that we still have to comply with ADA and stormwater requirements. There are some innovative things being done in other places and we will explore those options. Regarding narrower travel lanes and streets, the City has very clear arterial street standards with required dimensions for public right-of-way (60-feet minimum), sidewalk widths, bike lanes widths, and vehicle lane widths. Wider sidewalks are required in Urban Village areas where there is more pedestrian demand. The City has and will consider installing physical traffic calming devices (speed humps, traffic circles, chicanes, etc.) on designated Bike Boulevards where there is a documented problem with vehicle speeds or cut-through traffic on a residential street. The City does not install physical traffic calming devices on arterial streets due to interference with emergency medical response, WTA transit buses, school buses, garbage/recycle collection trucks, etc. Regarding LPI, Chris answered that many Urban Village intersections may already have curb extensions, better visibility, and shorter crosswalks whereas intersections outside of Urban Villages may not have these features and may be better candidates for LPI for pedestrian safety. Pages 14-19 of the [2022 Local Road Safety Plan](#) make recommendations for LPI at several intersections where injury collisions have occurred.
- 4.) **Q.** Laura Weiss and Jenny Tennessen asked about Safe Routes to School and maps depicting safe walking and biking routes to schools.
  - A. Chris Comeau answered that the Bellingham School District is required by State law to map walk and bike routes to local public schools, but that the City works with the School District to seek Safe Route to School grant funding administered by WSDOT once every two years. Schools are one of the many high-demand destinations for walking and biking in Bellingham and are one of the many important criteria used in developing the pedestrian and bicycle networks and recommended projects, and Chris explained that pointing out schools as high-demand locations can also be used in funding applications.
- 5.) **Q.** A Board member asked if there could be flexibility in between the 10-year cycles for plan updates.
  - A. Chris Comeau answered that the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans are adopted under the umbrella of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, which is updated every 10 years. The City has been implementing these plans for almost 10 years now with 20% of the pedestrian

projects completed and 52% of the bicycle projects completed. Updating these plans is a huge effort and commitment of staff time and resources and doing this in the middle of a 10-year Comprehensive Plan cycle would also require amending the Comprehensive Plan.

- B. There was also some concern from board members that there might be some people advocating to remove bike lanes rather than advocate for the improvement of bicycle infrastructure.

**6.)** In the chat, committee members also shared thoughts and suggestions including the following:

- Darcy Allen asked about encroachment on pedestrian areas from restaurants and businesses that compress the sidewalks in urban village and central business district, stating that it does not seem accessible for crowds or people with disabilities.
- Another board member mentioned that it would be useful to focus engagement on “where people want to go” and stated that with new neighborhoods, a higher population, and changes in behavior, people may want new pedestrian corridors in places where they didn’t make sense to the community 10 years ago.
- Brian Estes suggested that engagement methods include meetings on Saturday and extra effort to include renters in engagement.