

TECHNICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE #3

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), June 1, 2022

Bellingham, WA

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Introductions and Meeting Aims

- In this meeting we'll focus on pedestrian planning but planning we're also willing to discuss bike planning as it relates to WTA's work.
- The meeting will be open-ended and will start with communications from WTA.

Priorities for WTA and Key Meeting Learnings

- For the Plan, the criteria to use for selection includes access to transit centers.
 - It includes all transit routes, and priority networks are especially areas with transit.
- WTA is interested in first mile / last mile access.
- WTA is initiating an annual local "Access to Transit" grant fund of up to \$100,000 per project. Cities in WTA's service area may apply for these funds beginning later this year.
- How does it normally work between WTA and the City to make these improvements (e.g. pedestrian access to bus stops)?
 - WTA identified cost for ADA upgrades to 200 bus stops within Bellingham (\$700,000) over 10 years, City agreed to fund half of this (\$350,000) in 6-Year TIP to provide WTA \$75,000 per year for 5 years to support these ADA upgrades in half the amount of time
 - Another way of improving pedestrian access is that all new capital improvement projects require ADA compliance.
 - WTA contributed (\$167,000) to the City's Telegraph Road capital project, for covered bus shelters placed at flashing crosswalks for the Gold GO Line (Route 331)
- Regarding the pedestrian prioritization process, WTA transit access is already an important criteria and the City will be considering new criteria and weighting for prioritizing sidewalk on at least one side of streets currently without sidewalks.

Transit Stops and Sidewalk Conditions

- The City is interested in the relationship between transit stops and sidewalks
- This is one of the biggest challenges for WTA.

- An example of this is Meridian, where WTA struggled with stop location [in relation to crossings] and people were running across the street.
 - Other examples include Lakeway, Old Woburn.
- WTA recommends to at least have a safe crossing at the stop so that people can get across safely when dropped on the other side of the street.
- Constructing crossing at WTA bus stops between existing traffic signals or HAWK signals is not possible on some of Bellingham's busier streets, such as Meridian (SR 539), Sunset (SR 542), Lakeway Drive, etc.

Cleanup and Ground Truthing

- One of the aims of the Plan updates is "cleanup" and ground truthing, including reviewing the feasibility and cost, and importance of all of the projects listed. Ex: Sidewalk listed for west side of Woburn St between Fraser and Old Woburn is not physically or financially feasible and should be removed from plan. The City is interested in areas with greatest need and access to transit.
- The City is asking "Where can we align our greatest priorities with the recommended improvements?"
- Kellogg Rd - no shoulder, partial sidewalk, multi-family
- Hannegan - blind corner, 2' shoulder, power wheelchairs in vehicle lanes, steep slope, guardrail

Alternative Options

- The Plan updates are looking into alternative options rather than standard sidewalks e.g. paved pathways along existing roadways with a cast-in-place curb.
 - There is a lot of that in the Birchwood neighborhood.
 - These alternative options need to be ADA accessible.
- WTA asks if the Plan updates can say anything about tactical/quick-build projects for high-need areas in absence of funding
 - The City will provide policy direction on this in the plan updates.
 - Maintenance can be an issue.

Data Collection and Overlays

- Resources from WTA that will be shared/used as a layer of analysis to inform the plan include:
 - Ramp deployments
 - Locations where bikes get on the bus
 - Collection of paratransit origins-destinations (e.g., top 50)
 - Collection of stops - top boarding stations
 - First-last mile tie-ins
 - Walking routes to bus stops
 - Prioritized stop access improvements

Bike Compatibility

- Bikes on buses
 - Currently each WTA bus has capacity for three bikes at a time.
 - It was a contentious issue and wasn't productive trying to change this.
- Bikes at transit stations

- WTA is instead aiming to allow people to store bikes safely at a stop – through bikeshare, scooter or secure bike parking.
 - City released an RFP for bikeshare but had to cancel due to COVID-19. There is still interest in bike share, but it would likely also incorporate scooter share because that is cheaper for companies to run.
- There is interest in adding bike parking to transit stations.

Paratransit

- Paratransit is supposed to be door to door service but has trouble accessing a location or a building.
- Street frontage improvements, curb space, on site are in conflict with paratransit access: the yellow curb is not long enough to park a 27-foot bus, or sometimes planters/pole/utility box are too close to curb and in the way, preventing a ramp from being deployed.
 - There are several new locations downtown with that problem
 - BHA buildings including Samish Commons and 112 Otis have this problem including planters in the way.
 - It is not just apartments, it is also grocery stores e.g. in Barkley.

Equity and Inclusion

- There's an opportunity to engage with Aging Well Whatcom.
- Chris Comeau worked with Aging Well Whatcom in Spring 2022 on the Blueprint and is working with Lara Welker at Aging Well Whatcom at a June 17 workshop.

Universal Wayfinding for Bus Stops

- WTA is making an effort to have better accessibility for sight impairment and signage, and they are working on putting in signage that can be compatible on an app.
 - There is a QR code for navigation and give information – can change the function of signs and can be updated accordingly (traffic, after improvements). Currently, it is only at the station but WTA would like to see them at bus stops.
 - Another initiative is to use audible signals.
- WTA asks if the Plan updates will include wayfinding for street crossing upgrades.
 - Some pedestrian wayfinding exists in downtown, but not in other parts of town.
 - A [2016 Bicycle Wayfinding Plan](#) exists, but only three recommended routes have been implemented.

Bathrooms

- WTA asked if there have been efforts to make public restrooms available? But people are concerned about safety/security.
- The City explains that this is not in the scope but would make the biking/walking experience more useful and would be classified as a pedestrian-oriented amenity e.g. bathrooms, benches.