



Transportation Report on Annual Mobility



Published annually in support of Bellingham's:

- Comprehensive Plan Multimodal Transportation Chapter;
- Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Program;
- Pedestrian Master Plan;
- Bicycle Master Plan;
- Transportation Benefit District No. 1;
- Whatcom Transportation Authority Strategic Plan;
- Multimodal Transportation Impact Fee Program;
- Urban Village TIF Reduction Program; and
- Waterfront Biennial Monitoring Program.

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Executive Summary	1
1. Observations, Implications, and Recommendations of the 2021 TRAM	2
2. Bellingham’s Multimodal Transportation Planning Approach (Complete Networks, Modal Hierarchy) (Observations about 2015-2019 Mode Shares, Mode Shift Goals, and City Policy Options)	4
Notes on COVID-19 Effects on Multimodal Transportation System as of March 2021	15
3. Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Program	16
4. Primary Pedestrian Network Completeness	20
5. Primary Bicycle Network Completeness	29
6. Bellingham Transportation Benefit District No. 1 Annual Report	38
7. Off-Street Greenways Multiuse Recreation Trails	49
8. Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) Primary Transit Network Includes charts on COVID-19 Effects on WTA ridership March 2020 to March 2021	53
9. Automobile and Freight Truck Arterial Networks	59
10. Urban Village Transportation Impact Fee Reduction Program	67
11. Waterfront District Biennial Transportation Monitoring Program	71

Executive Summary

Since 2006, the Transportation Report on Annual Mobility (TRAM) has provided an annual assessment of Bellingham's multimodal transportation system in terms of its ability to accommodate the amount of growth and development planned for in the Land Use Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. This is done by measuring the multimodal transportation needs of new growth and development against the adopted "Level of Service (LOS) Standard" in the [Multimodal Transportation Chapter of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan](#), as required by the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). As detailed in the Multimodal Transportation Chapter, **Bellingham's adopted LOS citywide is Person Trips Available (PTA) by Concurrency Service Area (CSA)**, which includes metrics for people walking, biking, riding transit, driving vehicles, and using regional trails.

The TRAM provides an opportunity to identify '**over the horizon**' concurrency issues proactively and offer recommendations for changes to the program, when and where necessary. In addition to tracking transportation impacts from new development, the TRAM provides an assessment of the existing multimodal transportation system to help Public Works, the Transportation Commission, and City Council plan future transportation infrastructure investments for the City's annual [6-Year Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#). RCW 35.77.010 requires that the City adopt the 6-Year TIP by July 1 each year and the TIP must be consistent with the Transportation Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. The TRAM documents annual improvements to, and completeness of, Bellingham's pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and vehicle networks as well as recognizing that the multiuse Greenways trails provide a secondary transportation function in some parts of Bellingham. The TRAM serves as an annual progress report on how Bellingham provides mobility for people, goods, and services.

The 2021 TRAM is consistent with the [2016 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan](#) and reflects Bellingham's "Complete Networks" transportation planning policies, hierarchy of transportation modal priorities, as well as transportation mode share trends and mode shift goals. The TRAM includes chapters on Bellingham's pedestrian, bicycle, transit, automobile, and freight truck networks, as well as a chapter on the Bellingham Transportation Fund (T-Fund), which serves as the annual T-Fund Report to the City Council. The last chapter in the 2021 TRAM is the 2021 Waterfront District Biennial Transportation Monitoring Report, completed in accordance with the Planned Action Ordinance (PAO) for the Waterfront District Master Plan. The Port of Bellingham is required to produce a full Biennial Monitoring Report every two years (*next update at end of 2023; to be included in 2024 TRAM*) to monitor transportation impacts and mode shares entering and exiting the Waterfront District as redevelopment occurs, which will lead to various transportation infrastructure mitigation measures agreed to by the Port and the City. Explanation of Bellingham's multimodal transportation planning programs and resources are available on the City of Bellingham [Transportation Planning](#) web page.

COVID-19: The City of Bellingham has been dealing with the unprecedented circumstances from the COVID-19 global pandemic and its effect on transportation, the local economy, and public health. The long-term effects on individual mobility and the multimodal transportation system are still unknown, but **Chapter 2 (p 15) includes some discussion of transportation impacts resulting from COVID-19 global pandemic, March 2020 to March 2022. Chapter 8 includes charts showing the dramatic decrease in transit ridership that WTA has experienced.**

Questions about the TRAM and Bellingham's multimodal transportation planning should be directed to:

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Chapter 1: Observations and Implications of the 2022 TRAM

Urban Villages (Green): As **Table 3.1** shows, there are more Person Trips Available (PTA) [10,600] in the central urban core **CSA #7**, which includes the Downtown, Old Town, Samish, and Fountain Urban Villages, than in any other part of the City. This is due to the high degree of completeness of the primary pedestrian network (**90%**), availability of bicycle facilities planned in the Bicycle Master Plan (**62%**), the presence of multiuse recreational trail connections relative to the planned bicycle facilities (**14%**), and the prevalence of high-frequency transit routes running through the core urban villages to the downtown WTA transit station on Railroad Avenue.

Institutional Master Planned Areas (Blue): There are 3 Institutional Master Plan areas in Bellingham, which have distinct mixed-use characteristics and special populations that they are serving: Western Washington University; St. Joseph's Hospital; and Whatcom Community College.

Transition Areas (Yellow): Prior to 2020, the Bellingham Waterfront District **CSA #6** had the lowest number of PTA for any of the Type 2 transition areas in Bellingham, but in July 2019, the City opened the Granary-Laurel arterial street, sidewalk, and off-street cycle track from Roeder Avenue to Cornwall Avenue. While this has added significant multimodal capacity, CSA #6 cannot evolve to a Type 1 CSA merging with the 4 core urban villages in CSA #7 until WTA high-frequency transit service is available. A transit ridership base will not develop in the Waterfront District until there is significant new development, which is not expected for many years to come.

Suburban Areas (Red): In 2018, the City annexed CSA #19 "Airport Industrial," which has fewer PTA than other CSAs as it is heavily auto-oriented. WTA did initiate transit service to the Airport, however. It should also be noted that the 2012 Pedestrian Master Plan (PMP) did not include the Bellingham UGA and annexations completed after 2012 are not part of the primary pedestrian network. This will need to be addressed as the PMP and BMPs are updated in 2022-2023.

Citywide: Over time, private development will continue to contribute toward the completion of sidewalks on public streets and bicycle facilities along arterial streets. This occurs through private funding and construction of street frontage improvements and through the payment of multimodal transportation impact fees. All these future improvements will add PTA to CSA's, but if there are not enough PTA to serve new development at the time of concurrency evaluation, then developers may need to earn PTA through **concurrency mitigation** in order for the City to issue a Certificate of Concurrency. Concurrency mitigation can include off-site construction of sidewalk or bicycle facilities identified in the Primary Pedestrian and Bicycle Networks in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans.

Over time, the City will continue to construct capital street improvements, adding sidewalks, bicycle facilities, streets, and transit connections, but much of this depends on grant funding available from state and federal agencies. We do not yet know how significantly the COVID-19 pandemic will impact local transportation behavior and trends. [See Chapter 2 \(p 15\) and Chapter 8 discussion of known transportation impacts from March 2020 to March 2022 as a result COVID-19 global pandemic.](#)

The most important ingredient of the significant progress that Bellingham has made in completing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure has been the [Bellingham Transportation Fund \(T-Fund\)](#) [See Chapter 6], which was renewed by voters in November 2020 with 82% approval. The T-Fund will continue to provide dedicated local sales tax funding for street resurfacing, non-motorized transportation, transit-supportive capital improvements, and transportation-related climate change initiatives through December 2030.

General Conclusion: The 2022 TRAM demonstrates that Bellingham's Multimodal Transportation Concurrency methodology is integrating multimodal transportation system capacity within various land use contexts. This helps to promote the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan and GMA goals to direct new development toward compact, mixed use urban areas where adequate multimodal transportation services and facilities are most available.

TRAM Recommendations Completed and Moving Forward

Each year, the TRAM reports on what was accomplished over the past year and what type of transportation planning is recommended for staff to focus on in the year ahead.

A. Actions Taken, Considered, or Recommended from 2021 TRAM

1) Maintain and Update the Concurrency Evaluation Tracking Tool with new data

- No new traffic counts or WTA transit data were included in the 2021 TRAM due to COVID-19
- See Chapter 2 (p 15) and Chapter 8 discussion of known transportation impacts from March 2020 to March 2022 as a result COVID-19 global pandemic.

2) Monitor Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Methodology for Effectiveness

- Continue to publish TRAM and annually report observations of system effectiveness
- *This is an on-going and annual procedure. All TRAC/TRAM documents 2006 - 2021 are available at <http://www.cob.org/services/planning/transportation/Pages/multi-modal-trac.aspx>*

B. 2022 recommendations

1) Update Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans

In March 2022, the City will:

- Begin a 16-month public process to update the 2012 Pedestrian Master Plan and 2014 Bellingham Master Plan to incorporate the 2021 ADA Transition Plan and the entire Bellingham Urban Growth Area (UGA).
- Announce a wide spectrum of opportunities for the public to participate in the plan update process.

2) Update Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA) for Development Review

- *Bellingham's TIA guidelines are in need of revision and will be updated in 2022-2023.*
- *Policy direction included in adopted Transportation Chapter of the 2016 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan:*

Policy T-25

Develop innovative new methodology to measure, forecast, and mitigate negative impacts that new vehicle traffic may have on pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit bus service when Transportation Impact Analyses are completed for new development.

3) Simplify Concurrency Tracking and Monitoring System and Consolidation of CSA's

- Simplify the automobile and transit inputs to the Concurrency Evaluation Tracking Tool to reduce the amount of time required to collect, analyze, and prepare the TRAM document each year.
- Reduce the overall number of CSAs from 20 to 15 by combining some of the CSA's that are of similar typology and are unlikely to experience noticeable changes from year-to-year. Examples: Retain the 3 Type 1 CSAs and the 3 Type 1a CSAs, but consolidate Type 2 CSAs into just 4 and Type 3 into just 5, for a total of 15 CSAs citywide.