

Chapter 1: Observations and Implications of the 2023 TRAM

Urban Villages (Green): As **Table 3.1** shows, there are more Person Trips Available (PTA) [8,467] 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 (**91%**), availability of bicycle facilities planned in the Bicycle Master Plan (**67%**), 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 in process, but will take many years.

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 is currently being addressed in the updates to the PMP and BMP.

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 (Examples: Birchwood Avenue Extension under I-5 and Telegraph Road) – all of which adds person trip availability to the citywide multimodal transportation system, but much of this depends on grant funding available from state and federal agencies.

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 2023 TRAM demonstrates that Bellingham's [BMC 13.70 Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Management](#) program is integrating multimodal transportation system capacity within various land use contexts. This innovative program was designed to intentionally 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 2022 TRAM

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

- New citywide arterial street traffic counts have not been collected since 2018, but Public Works staff is scheduled to collect new traffic counts in 2023
- WTA ridership has been significantly reduced since COVID-19, but WTA is increasingly using technology to track and monitor transit ridership on buses and at bus stops.

2) Monitor Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Methodology for Effectiveness

- Continue to publish TRAM report with observations of system effectiveness. *All TRAM documents 2006 - 2023 are available at <http://www.cob.org/services/planning/transportation/Pages/multi-modal-trac.aspx>*

B. 2023 recommendations

1) Update Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans

- On-going: In March 2022, the City began 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). Completion of plan updates is expected in early 2024.

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

- *Bellingham's TIA guidelines are in need of revision and will be updated in 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.

- In January 2023, the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) published [*Multimodal Transportation Impact Analysis for Site Development \(MTIASD\) – an ITE Recommended Practice*](#), which includes state of the art methodology and best practices that the City should reference and incorporate

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.