

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

Bellingham is a city of distinct neighborhoods, revered institutions, innovative businesses, and passionate community members. It prides itself on supporting a diverse mix of transportation choices and considers the needs of all residents when making policy and planning decisions. The result of this commitment is a community that is abundantly livable with a non-motorized transportation mode-share rivaling all other cities in the State of Washington. As Bellingham continues to develop, the planning and implementation of bicycle infrastructure will be important in continuing to develop a livable and vibrant community. The incorporation of quality on-street bicycle facilities will connect neighborhoods, and link the City's economic, cultural, and natural resources. Development of the bicycle facilities recommended in the Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan (the Plan) will give community members and visitors alike a viable alternative to motor vehicle travel. Improvements to bicycling infrastructure will help meet Bellingham's goals of reduced congestion, improved air and water quality, enhanced public health and increased livability.

Bellingham aims to provide its residents and visitors with safe and well-connected bicycle facilities that enable bicycling by both experienced and less experienced bicyclists. The community has actively made decisions to support bicycling through investments in bicycling infrastructure. The Plan was developed to further this support through the provision of a recommended network of bicycle facilities, prioritization of recommended facilities, design guidance, and program recommendations. The Plan focuses primarily on the on-street bicycling network, while identifying off-street connections that provide key linkages in the overall system. The primary discussion of off-street facilities may be found in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Chapter of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan.

Ultimately, the implementation of the Plan will provide community members of all ages and abilities the means to safely access the entire city by bicycle. The recommendations in the Plan build on previous bicycle planning processes including the Comprehensive Plan and Urban Village Plans. Calling for over 134 miles of on-street facilities over the next 20 years, the Plan recommends over 50 miles of new bike boulevards and 45 miles of new bike lanes.

Plan Vision and Goals

The Plan vision and goals reflect input received from the public, focus groups, and the project Steering Committee. They also build on the Transportation Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, Urban Village Plans, Neighborhood Plans, and Subarea Plans. Each of the goals supports the vision.

Plan Vision

Bicyclists of all ages and abilities have access to a safe, well-connected network linking all areas of Bellingham.



Plan Goals

Safety: Improve safety of bicyclists by promoting safe bicycling, driving, and walking behaviors and building appropriate, well-designed facilities.

Connectivity: Complete a connected network of bikeways linking and providing access to all neighborhoods and key destinations.

Equity: Provide bicycling access for all through equity in public engagement, service delivery and capital investment.

Livability: Build a vibrant and healthy community by creating a welcoming environment for bicycle riding.

Public and Environmental Health: Develop a bicycle network that enables active, healthy lifestyles and sustains a healthy environment.

Choice: Develop infrastructure that creates viable transportation choices, and accommodates multimodal trips.

Education: Provide education on the rights and responsibilities of the users of all transportation modes.

Mode shift: Increase the number and percent of bicycle trips citywide.

Economy: Enhance economic vibrancy by creating a bicycle friendly community that is an attractive place to live and work.

Public Benefits of Bicycling

The City of Bellingham, like many U.S. cities, is faced with challenges related to economic development, repair and maintenance of infrastructure, local environmental issues, and equitable distribution of basic services. In addition, individuals and families are feeling the pressure of rising transportation costs.

The bicycle is increasingly seen as a key component of a multimodal transportation system and a means to achieving multiple objectives, including maximizing transportation investments, reducing maintenance costs, improving public health, promoting economic development, addressing transportation equity, and reducing environmental impacts. These trends, as well as growing public demand for more transportation choices, point to the need for implementing this Plan.

Maximizing Transportation Investments

Dollar for dollar, bicycling is one of the most cost-effective transportation modes to support. On-street bicycle facilities can maximize the use of existing roadway space, and typically require relatively low-cost pavement markings or signage once installed. A well-connected bicycle network provides opportunities for individuals to bicycle rather than drive, thereby optimizing roadway capacity and deferring or eliminating the need for costly new road construction projects.

Economic Development

In many industries, the competition for workers is on a national or global scale, and people are choosing employers not just based on salary and traditional benefits, but also on external criteria such as lifestyle and quality of life. Many employers have come to realize that their ability to recruit top employees depends significantly on local culture and amenities. Cities that are making investments to become more bicycle friendly are seeing dividends in the form of attracting new residents and employers.

Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity every week—which is equivalent to ten minutes of brisk walking, three times a day, five days a week. Providing opportunities for people to integrate biking into their daily routines can help them meet these guidelines and stay healthy. Community design that incorporates safe and convenient bicycle infrastructure makes it easy for people to make healthy transportation choices and develop positive lifelong habits.

Equity

Providing the community with viable and affordable transportation choices that include transit, bicycling and walking is a key component of an equitable transportation system. Bicycling is a low-cost transportation mode that can broaden opportunities for employment and education, increase access to services, and reduce household spending on transportation.

Environmental

Approximately eighteen percent of Bellingham residents commute to work by means other than driving. Eight percent walk, six percent ride transit, and four percent bicycle to work.¹ Many more residents

¹ U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2008-2012.

bicycle for utilitarian and recreational purposes. Each trip made by bicycle that would otherwise be made using a car has a positive environmental benefit.

Within the community of Bellingham, the largest contributor to carbon dioxide emissions is the combustion of gasoline and diesel by motor vehicles (48%).² Bellingham's Climate Action Plan identified a number of strategies to reduce its carbon footprint, including setting vehicle emission reduction targets and reducing vehicle miles traveled by promoting development of a multimodal transportation system. The City aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent between 2000 and 2020. Reducing motor vehicle use and associated emissions is a major component of reaching this goal. Providing transportation choices that are safe and convenient, and offer other benefits (e.g. health, cost savings) is a key strategy for shifting people away from using their cars, consistent with the City's mode shift goals.

The City's Comprehensive Plan identifies roadway run-off containing heavy metals and oil from motor vehicles as a contributing factor to the diminished water quality of urban streams, Bellingham Bay and Lake Whatcom, the City's water source.

Considering that non-motorized transportation modes essentially have zero impact on air and water quality, promoting their use is an effective strategy for improving air and water quality.

Plan Components

This Plan includes the following components:

Chapter 1 Introduction: Presents the vision and goals for the plan and the benefits of bicycling. It also summarizes the planning process undertaken in the development of the Plan including a review of policies and programs, public input, and existing conditions.

Chapter 2 Policy Recommendations: Provides specific policy guidance for bicycle facilities and priorities.

Chapter 3 Bicycle Network Recommendations: Provides an analysis of network connectivity and needs. In addition, the chapter outlines the process of developing the recommended network and presents the network. Lastly, it breaks down the recommended network into projects that are prioritized based on a data-driven methodology.

Chapter 4 Design Guidelines/Toolbox: Reviews best practices for bicycle facility design and identifies resources to support the development of the recommended bicycle network.

Chapter 5 Program Recommendations: Provides recommended education, encouragement, and enforcement programs to support bicycling within Bellingham.

² Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, Exhibit 3. p. EE-15.

Chapter 6 Implementation: Includes performance measures, funding and resource opportunities, and a cost estimation tool to project the cost of implementing bicycle facilities in the recommended network.

The Planning Process

The Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan was developed over a two-year period in 2013-2014. Initial steps included developing an understanding of the current state of bicycling in Bellingham, ascertaining safety and access concerns, and identifying ideas for creating a more bicycle friendly Bellingham. This understanding was established through focus groups, a public open house, interactive online tools, and a review of pertinent background documents. Information gathered was used to create a draft bicycle network using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. The resulting network was analyzed to assess connectivity and address any missing links. The project team conducted extensive field work to assess existing conditions, identify improvement needs and refine the network. Facility recommendations were developed for each street segment, and projects were prioritized using a GIS-based, data-driven methodology. Feedback from stakeholders and the community was solicited throughout the development of the Plan, and was used to guide the planning process.

Project Team

City of Bellingham staff worked to ensure the Plan is coordinated with existing transportation policies and reflects the infrastructure needs of the city. The project team ensured that all relevant city departments were kept abreast as the Plan developed and that their feedback was integrated.

Technical Advisory Committee

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was created to review and assist in the development of the Plan. The TAC had representation from the Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Planning departments. The TAC met twice with the project team; and individual members participated in weekly conference calls on an as-needed basis.

Trainings

The Plan consultant, Toole Design Group (TDG), provided city staff and other stakeholders a training session on the 2012 AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials) and NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials) bike guides along with other best practices. Additionally, TDG facilitated a half-day "hands-on" training session on bicycle facility design for city engineers, operations staff, and planners as a follow-up to the best practices training. Examples of recommended facilities in the Plan were used as examples for the design exercises.

Public Engagement

The public was involved in all phases of Plan development. The public engagement process was structured to involve novice and more experienced bicyclists from all areas of the City. A range of strategies were employed in order to maximize outreach efforts, which are described below.



Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was formed to provide guidance on plan development and to ensure that the Plan content reflected the values, needs and goals of the Bellingham community. The 8-member committee represented constituents from the following sectors: bicycle advocacy, public health, major employers, schools, homeless advocacy, and the City Transportation Commission. The committee met six times throughout the planning process.

Public Meetings

Two open house public meetings were held during the project. The first open house provided an opportunity to present the draft vision and goals to the public, solicit comments, receive input on barriers and opportunities for bicycling in Bellingham, and garner broad public support for the project. Over 120 people attended the first open house and 418 comments were collected.



Information was presented on a series of maps and boards, as well as in a brief presentation. Data from the public meeting was used to develop the bicycle network, identify problem intersections, and to develop Plan goals, policies and actions.

The second open house was used to present the draft plan and solicit feedback, prioritize recommended actions, and confirm a roadmap for implementation. Information was presented on a series of maps and boards, as well as in a brief presentation. There were 98 attendees at the meeting.

Online Survey

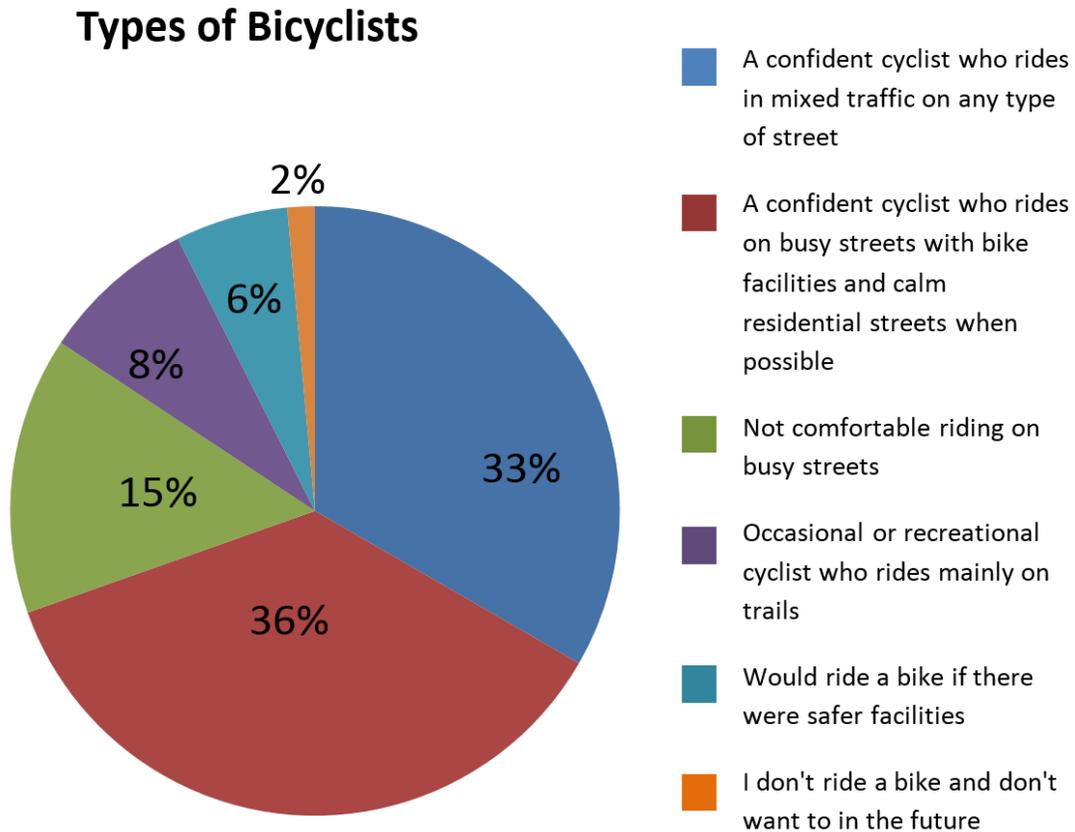
An online survey was employed to solicit further information from the public regarding bicycling in Bellingham. The survey was comprised of 30 questions and solicited 832 responses over a two month period (April-May 2013).

All respondents were asked to provide demographic information. Most respondents were between the ages of 25-64 (84.3%, 701). There were a balanced number of responses from females (50.8%, 413) and males (49.2%, 410). Geographically, the respondents were well dispersed across (as well as outside of) the City. For complete survey results, see Appendix A.

Key Findings

- While 33% (274) of respondents indicated that they were confident cyclists and would ride in mixed traffic, 51% (419) of respondents stated that they prefer calm residential streets over busier streets, or do not feel comfortable riding on busy streets.

Figure 1.1: Survey responses to the question regarding how survey participants would describe themselves as bicyclists.



- 6% (49) responded that they would bicycle if safer facilities existed.
- The top preferences for types of bicycle facilities were:
 - Designated striped bicycle lanes
 - Neighborhood streets with minimal traffic and slow speeds
 - Off-street, multiuse trails
- The following street or trail improvements were identified as being most likely to encourage respondents to bicycle more often:
 - Bike lanes on busy streets
 - On-street facilities that are separated from traffic
 - Improved accommodations for bicyclists at intersections

- The following support facilities were identified as being most likely to encourage respondents to bicycle more often:
 - Increased maintenance of roads, trails and paths
 - More on-road bike signage
 - Better bicycle parking/storage
- 11.6% (92) of respondents stated that they never or very rarely wear a helmet.
- 29.6% (234) reported having been involved in a crash while bicycling in Bellingham. Of those crashes, 43.8% (105) were reported to involve a motor vehicle.

Interactive Online Map

Using an interactive online map the public was invited to provide location-specific comments on informal connections, desirable routes, streets of concern, bikeway gaps, maintenance issues, and challenging crossings of major roadways. This approach helped draw participation from all areas of Bellingham. The mapping exercise was advertised through the City’s website, blogs, newspaper articles, email list serves, and bicycle advocacy groups. The online map link was also promoted at libraries and other locations for individuals without internet access at home.

Over a two-month period (April-May 2013), 388 spot comments and 246 linear route comments were identified by the public. Information collected from the interactive map was used to develop a study network for field evaluation (see Study Network map, Chapter 3).

Focus Groups

Focus group sessions were conducted to develop a deeper understanding of bicycling needs and concerns within the Bellingham community. The project team worked with City staff to identify key community members and groups to interview. A summary of each focus group meeting is provided below.

Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department

The Parks Department expressed the need for a unified system of signage for both on- and off-road bike routes regardless of jurisdiction. “Use bell or voice when passing,” “share the trail,” and wayfinding signage were recommended to decrease bicycle-pedestrian conflicts. The Department stressed the need for quality connections between on-street facilities and off-road trails which may require the paving of some trail connections. Finally, the group brought attention to the need for a high quality, on-street connection along the waterfront for bicyclists, since the Whatcom Waterway Trail is expected to have heavy pedestrian use and may not fully connect through the site.

Western Washington University

Western Washington University (WWU) worked with the project team to identify key ingress/egress points to WWU, including 21st Street, 25th Street (to Arboretum then through Fairhaven College), Sehome Trail to East College Way, and Indian Street. Of particular concern was High Street, which is primarily a transit mall (no cars). While bicycles are allowed, there are conflicts due to bicyclists riding downhill at high speeds, particularly at the intersection of High and Oak streets. There was tentative interest in improving the bicycle route on the 21st Street extension and continuing it along the backside of Carver Gym to connect to High Street. Members of the Focus Group stated a preference for the use of Quick Response (QR) codes to provide route information on directory signs and suggested the practice be further considered for implementation by the City.

Bellingham Police Department

The Bellingham Police Department expressed concerns about prevailing bicyclist and motorist attitudes and behaviors. For bicyclists, this included wrong-way riding, sidewalk riding in downtown, and running stop signs and red lights. For motorists, concerns included failing to yield to bicyclists, inattention, speeding and unsafe passing. The Department suggested that the Plan include recommendations for education campaigns and “emphasis patrols” that target specific unsafe behaviors on the part of bicyclists and motorists.

Bellingham Fire Department

The Fire Department agreed that the implementation of traffic calming devices that fire trucks can drive over (i.e. traffic circle aprons) are acceptable as long they do not restrict access or divert traffic to other city streets. While the Department does not have designated fire routes, it does use arterial streets as much as possible and residential streets for local access.

The Opportunity Council

Homeless housing case managers noted that transportation is an issue for many clients and having a bicycle would enhance mobility and make it easier to access employment. Managers expressed concern that there is a lack of knowledge about safe riding skills and rules of the road, and that it is difficult for clients to maintain and secure bicycles. The group advocated that the Plan recommend extra resources for low-income residents to acquire bicycles, lights, and locks, and access low-cost bicycle repair and on-site bicycle safety classes.

Opportunity Council clients would like to see more bike lanes and trails, bicycle wayfinding signs, and additional Bellingham Police Department bicycle patrol officers. They recommend additional resources for low-income residents to purchase and maintain bikes and equipment, in addition to education about rules of the road for bicyclists and motorists.

Sterling Meadows Affordable Housing

Parents in this session indicated that they do not feel safe letting their children ride their bicycles due to children’s lack of awareness of safe riding skills, high volumes of vehicular traffic, and a lack of bicycle facilities on key streets. They also noted that many children do not wear bicycle helmets. Several parents expressed the desire for more neighborhood parks where children could ride their bikes.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

Short and long term strategies to improve bicycle safety at I-5 crossings were identified and discussed with WSDOT. The Washington State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan provide overall guidance for WSDOT participation in the development of local bicycle facilities. In the short term, WSDOT is open to improving wayfinding and regulatory signage, street sweeping, replacement of sidewalks and curb ramps, and striping. In the long term, the WSDOT Fairhaven to Slater I-5 Master Plan provides a broader vision for crossing improvements. A full description of recommended I-5 crossing improvements is in Chapter 3, pages 22-26.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Classroom Surveys

PTA members were surveyed to gain an understanding of parent concerns and issues related to children riding bicycles. Students were surveyed about where they ride, what would make it safer/easier for them to ride, and what might help their parents feel more comfortable letting them ride bikes. Parents were concerned about children riding on streets with high traffic volumes and speeds, crossing busy streets, and not having an adult to ride with them. They would feel more comfortable if there were

more roadways with bicycle facilities, safer intersection crossings, low-volume/low-speed streets to ride on, and bicycle safety education classes in school. Students reported that they rode to school, friends' houses, the grocery store, and parks. They said their parents were most concerned about them riding alone, outside their neighborhood, and on busy streets. Students felt it would be safer and easier to ride if there were more routes on neighborhood streets, more trails and sidewalks, safer crossings, and bicycle racks at school.

Review of Background Documents

Bellingham is a community with a rich history of planning and significant public involvement. This history has established a vital starting point for the Plan. The City has adopted several planning documents that address multimodal transportation, infrastructure, and land use. Following is a brief summary of each of these relevant documents that highlights the goals, objectives, policies, development regulations and guidelines that inform this Plan.

While each document reviewed provides a different focus, all cite bicycling as an integral part of the future of the City. These planning documents emphasize the importance of increased bicycle use for improving the health, economic vitality, sustainability, and quality of life in Bellingham.

Bellingham Comprehensive Plan

The Bellingham Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year guide for how the City will accommodate projected population growth and development. The first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1995 after Washington State adopted the Growth Management Act (1990). The current version was adopted in 2006 and will be updated by 2016. While the Comprehensive Plan contains a number of elements, three are particularly relevant to the Bicycle Master Plan: Chapter 2 - Land Use, Chapter 3 - Transportation, and Chapter 7 - Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.

Chapter 2 - Land Use

The Land Use Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan establishes land use goals and policies, many of which relate to transportation. Included are the following strategies to help achieve the City's objective of connecting land uses with an efficient bicycle network:

- Encourage "infill" land use inside the City limits to prevent outward urban sprawl.
- Promote higher density, mixed-use "Urban Villages" where transportation infrastructure is already in place.
- Encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation.
- Maintain and extend a coordinated system of open space, parks and trails, and neighborhood parks within a short bicycle ride.
- Create street design standards that promote narrow, tree-lined streets with sidewalks to make walking, bicycling, and transit use appealing.

- Increase mobility by providing convenient bicycle routes to and from the city center.
- Where possible, establish bikeways and appropriate buffers between urban centers and adjacent neighborhoods.
- Encourage city center employees to use bicycles and other forms of alternative transportation that free-up parking spaces for customer parking.

Chapter 3 - Transportation

The Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan is the guiding transportation policy document for the City's transportation priorities, projects, and multimodal improvement requirements. It incorporates goals and polices that support the creation of a safe, well-connected, and convenient bicycle network throughout Bellingham. Included are the following strategies to help achieve the City's objective of developing bicycle infrastructure, facilities, and programs that will reduce automobile dependence while also accommodating future growth:

- Set target goals to increase the mode share of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit trips.
- Encourage public education and funding for bicycle safety enforcement.
- Encourage employers to provide incentives for their employees to use transit and non-motorized transportation.
- All new, reconstructed, or retrofitted arterial streets should provide walking and bicycling facilities.
- Develop bicycle and pedestrian facilities within urban growth areas.
- Provide safe, convenient, and protected bicycle parking at activity centers.
- Provide convenient auto and bicycle access to park-and-ride facilities on regional routes where warranted and cost effective.
- Provide development incentives when amenities for transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians are included and being implemented.
- Integrate public transit with other modes of transportation including auto, bicycle, and pedestrian travel.

Chapter 7 - Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces Chapter includes goals, policies, and strategies that support the City's intent of providing a connected multimodal network of trails, paths, and other recreation facilities.

- Develop bicycle trails and paths. While not always appropriate, multiuse trails are preferred.
- Develop and improve trails that minimize conflicts between the various activities.
- Connect community members to greenways and trails: link residential neighborhoods to

community facilities, expand trail systems into growing neighborhoods, and promote links to neighboring communities.

- Expand multimodal transportation options: connect trails with transit stops, bike routes, and sidewalks to create a comprehensive network of non-motorized transportation throughout Bellingham.
- Provide trail amenities (e.g., bike racks, benches, and signage).

Urban Village Plans

Urban village planning furthers Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan goals of accommodating growth primarily in compact, mixed-use "urban centers" or "villages" that promote walking and biking. The current Urban Village Subarea Plans (City Center, Fairhaven, Fountain District, Old Town, Samish Way, and Waterfront District) include policy language and identify area-specific improvements to encourage and facilitate bicycling. The plans recommend expanding and enhancing bicycle infrastructure, improving safety and access to services, providing bicycle parking facilities, and installing wayfinding signage.

Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan

The 2012 Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan (PMP) provides recommendations to supplement and help achieve the Comprehensive Plan's vision of a pedestrian friendly community. The PMP seeks to develop 77 miles of sidewalks, 58 improved crossings, and an assortment of City programs to encourage and enhance Bellingham's pedestrian culture over the next 20 years. While the PMP was developed separately, a number of its policies help inform this Plan:

- Promote a diverse transportation system that provides equitable mobility and complete connectivity for all modes.
- Continue and expand Safe Routes to School programming, such as assemblies and in-classroom safety education, to all schools in the Bellingham School District.
- Increase the number of children walking and bicycling to school, and improve safety for children who walk and bicycle.
- Improve air and water quality and reduce energy consumption by encouraging non-motorized trips.
- Provide appropriate separation from motor vehicle traffic and design elements that reduce the speed differential between modes of transportation.

City Council Legacies and Strategic Commitments

In 2009, the Bellingham City Council adopted a set of 20 to 50 year goals or "Legacy" statements. The "Legacies" are supported by 6 to 20 year "Strategic Commitments", several of which relate to bicycling and other modes:

- Provide safe, well-connected mobility options for all users.
- Maintain and improve streets, trails, and other infrastructure.

- Limit sprawl.
- Increase infrastructure for bicycles, pedestrians, and non-single occupancy vehicle modes of transportation.
- Reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicles.
- Ensure convenient access to, and availability of, parks and trails citywide.

Bellingham Transportation Commission Bicycle and Pedestrian Project List

When the City's Transportation Commission was formed in 2009, it inherited a project list from the former Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The list was developed from committee member and neighborhood association input to identify gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian network and recommend improvements. Transportation Commission members expanded the list and used it to make initial project recommendations to the Transportation Benefit District Board in 2011.

Greenstreets Committee

In August 2008, the Greenstreets Committee was formed to identify gaps in the City's existing street/trail network, make recommendations for a wayfinding and route signage system, and develop a list of recommended improvements to connect the bicycle and pedestrian street/trail network. The majority of projects identified are for improving or installing crosswalks and adding sidewalks. The Committee recommended wayfinding and route signage for four specific street/trail corridors as part of a citywide network. Greenstreets Committee project recommendations were incorporated in the Transportation Commission's Bicycle and Pedestrian Project List.

Transportation Improvement Program

Washington State law requires cities to submit a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) annually that identifies costs and sources of funding for transportation improvement projects planned for the upcoming six-year period. Projects included on a TIP are primarily from the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan and are eligible for state and federal grant funding. Bellingham's emphasis on constructing multimodal transportation facilities is reflected in the large number of bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects included in the TIP. In addition, bicycle and pedestrian projects have a dedicated funding source through 2020 via a 2010 voter approved Transportation Benefit District, which allocates specific funding for non-motorized improvements. Local funding allocated to TIP projects makes up an important part of the equation to establish the annual Transportation Impact Fee (TIF) base rate, as per BMC 19.06.

Bellingham Municipal Code

Chapter 11.48 of the City of Bellingham Municipal Code contains provisions for bicycles, including traffic regulations; riding on roadways and bicycle paths; bicycles on sidewalks; equipment; parking; and penalties for infractions. Section 11.48.070 subsection (a) states, "every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable and may utilize the shoulder of the roadway or any specially designated bicycle lane if such exists." Subsection (c) states, "wherever a usable path for bicycles has been provided adjacent to a roadway, bicycle riders shall use such path and

shall not use the roadway.”³

Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Program

Bellingham’s Multimodal Transportation Concurrency Program integrates transportation and land use to determine whether the transportation network is adequate to accommodate development allowed by zoning and regulations. The Program establishes citywide level of service standards and multimodal performance measures for sidewalks, bike lanes, transit, multiuse recreation trails, and automobiles. It is designed to aid in achieving the Comprehensive Plan’s transportation and land use goals which include reducing reliance on the automobile and encouraging walking, biking and transit trips, while emphasizing compact, mixed-use Urban Villages. Transportation Goal 19 states "increase mode share of bicycle and pedestrian trips by providing a safe, well-connected and convenient bicycle and pedestrian circulation network throughout the City.”

Washington State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan

The Washington State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan outlines policy recommendations and project implementation strategies to improve conditions for bicycling and walking statewide. The Plan identifies and prioritizes facility needs with a goal to increase bicycling and walking while reducing injuries and deaths. Funding opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian projects are also presented. The State reviewed local Transportation Improvement Program project lists to help identify needs. Bellingham's Bicycle Master Plan will be included in the appendix of the Washington State Plan.

WSDOT Safe and Complete Streets Policy

The State of Washington has adopted a Safe and Complete Streets Policy. The policy applies to a complete streets grant program that, if funded by the State legislature, may allocate transportation funding to support the goals of designing urban main streets for safe access for all users including bicyclists. The following are key goals of the policy:

- Promote healthy communities by encouraging walking, bicycling, and using public transportation.
- Improve safety by designing major arterials to include features such as wider sidewalks, dedicated bicycle facilities, medians and pedestrian streetscape features, including trees where appropriate.
- Eligible projects are those that retrofit a local street or state highway, make repairs to pedestrian, bicycle, transit facilities, or make streetscape improvements.

Bellingham Policy Approach to "Complete Streets"

Bellingham's multimodal transportation programs and policies have been implementing a "complete streets" approach to transportation planning since 2006. Information on how Bellingham's transportation policies meet the principles of the "Complete Streets" movement, are on the City's website.⁴

³ Note - The City should remove this provision as it is not in line with state law, conflicts with Section 11.48.140, and does not support the City's goal to develop a comprehensive bicycle network to accommodate all skill levels and trip purposes – see Chapter 2. Section 11.48.140 subsection (b) states, "a person may ride a bicycle on any other sidewalk or any roadway unless restricted or prohibited by traffic-control devices."

⁴ <http://www.cob.org/services/planning/transportation/long-range-planning.aspx>

Public Works Development Guidelines and Improvement Standards

Section 4-13.30 of the Bellingham Public Works Development Guidelines and Improvements Standards contains provisions for development and improvement of bicycle facilities including standards for signs, signals, pavement markings, roadway facilities, bicycle lanes, and bicycle parking. It includes the following reference documents: the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), the Washington State Department of Transportation Design Manual and RCW 35.75.060.⁵

Section 4-2, Street Design Standards, and Section 4-3, Lane Widths, should be updated to reflect current national guidelines that facilitate the inclusion of bicycle facilities on a variety of roadway configurations. See Chapter 2, Policies and Actions, page 1.

WSDOT: Guidelines for City Streets as Part of State Highways

This document allocates maintenance responsibilities between the Washington State Department of Transportation and Washington cities for city streets that are located on state highways. Bicycle lane marking is the responsibility of the City of Bellingham, as are crosswalks, roadway striping, regulatory signs and signals, street sweeping, and sidewalks. The State is responsible for curb and gutter maintenance as well as most bridges and underpasses.

For interchanges such as arterials over and under I-5, the City and State have agreements in place for the maintenance of pedestrian and bicycle facilities that may be included in the interchange.

WSDOT Design Manual, Chapter 1520: Roadway Bicycle Facilities

The WSDOT Design Manual outlines design guidance for bicycle facilities on state highways. For local roadways, jurisdictions are to use the latest edition of the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities.

General Observations Regarding Background Documents

- The Transportation Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan includes a list of future transportation projects that are incorporated into the recommended bicycle network.
- The goals, objectives, and policies in the plans described above inform Plan recommendations.
- Notable considerations in adopted plans, and incorporated into this Plan, include: bicycle comfort and safety, increased connectivity, recommendations for on and off-road facilities, acknowledgment of the importance of education and encouragement programs, promotion of bicycling downtown and in urban villages, and a commitment to multimodal transportation.
- As evidenced by public input and participation, the survey, and map exercises, there is significant community support for action to increase the comfort, convenience, and safety of bicycling in Bellingham.
- Plans call for, but do not define, a uniform guide for a wayfinding or signage route system.

⁵ Note: These references and standards should be updated to reflect the most current guidance available.

- The City's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan proposes new multiuse trails, adding to the already robust citywide trail network that provides off-street options for bicyclists.
- Missing is a carefully considered strategy for prioritizing improvements to the bicycle network.
- There is a need to develop new lane width guidelines to provide more flexibility in accommodating bicycle facilities on arterial streets.
- Current plans call for on-street bicycle facilities but often stop short of specific treatment recommendations.

Existing Facilities

Bellingham has taken significant steps to increase the comfort and safety of bicycling. It is one of only 68 American communities to receive silver level status or higher in the League of American Bicyclists' Bicycle Friendly Communities program. There is strong support for bicycling within the City and a variety of programs have been developed to encourage further use (see Chapter 5 for descriptions of existing and recommended programs). Bicycle counts (Appendix H) indicate a



significant presence of bicyclists throughout the City, with particularly high utilization of facilities in the City Center, the Fairhaven area and at Western Washington University. The City has an established off-street network and several robust bicycle facilities, particularly west of Interstate 5.

Bellingham currently has nearly 40 miles of on-street bicycle infrastructure, the majority of which are bike lanes. It is worth noting that many of Bellingham's neighborhood streets already serve as low stress connections and are good candidates for bicycle boulevards (assuming improvements are made at arterial street crossings). The table below depicts mileages of existing bicycle infrastructure.

Figure 1.2 Existing On-Street Bicycle Facilities

2013 Bellingham Network Mileage		
	Miles	Percent of On-Street Network
Facility Type		
Bike Boulevards	0	0%
Bike Lanes	31.9	82%
Buffered Bike Lanes	0	0%
Climbing Lanes	0.7	2%
Cycle Tracks	0	0%
Paved Shoulders	5.7	15%
Shared Lane Markings	0.4	1%
Total	38.7	100%

Trail System

Bellingham has a comprehensive trail system that has been developed over the past 35 years. While off-street facilities are generally not covered in this Plan (they are part of the City’s Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan), a few of the shorter trails are included in this Plan where they provide important connections around barriers and between on-street facilities. Longer trail segments such as the Railroad Trail have been incorporated as an alternative to on-street facilities, or where there is a lack of on-street bicycle facilities.



Figure 1.3: Existing On-Street and Trails Map



Conclusion

Bellingham is in an excellent position to significantly improve the quality of bicycling for its residents and visitors. Past planning efforts have laid a solid foundation of support for the Bicycle Master Plan, as well as a policy framework from which to build. Through this Plan, the City has established a vision and goals for bicycling that will guide implementation of a wide variety of projects and programs that will support and encourage future cyclists of all ages and abilities.