

Bellingham, WA, Adopts Multimodal Method of Measuring Traffic Impacts

Includes Person Trip Accounting Method

The City of Bellingham, Washington is considering a unique way to measure the impacts of new development on transportation infrastructure by adopting a multimodal transportation concurrency system.

The Bellingham Public Works Department developed the new multimodal concurrency methodology that will replace the current system which only measures automobile trips on arterial streets. This new method expands upon arterial volume-to-capacity measurements and includes transit, bicycle and pedestrian elements.

By providing a framework in which all four transportation modes are considered, the new system would help to further implement the infill land use strategies and promote urban villages as outlined in the Land Use Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan.

Since 1990, the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) has required cities and counties to develop comprehensive plans with 20-year growth forecasts. Mandated plans must include land use and transportation elements, with an emphasis on high-density, mixed-use areas, and multimodal transportation facilities.

GMA requires cities to adopt Level of Service (LOS) standards and transportation concurrency ordinances to monitor, maintain, and enforce LOS standards. State law prohibits issuance of permits for new development with impacts that exceed

adopted LOS standards. This requires developers to forecast the impact on the level of service needed for any new

development.

As part of the 20-year growth plan, the

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San Diego to Connect Separate Bike Paths to Create A 500-Mile Network

Working Towards Unified Regional Bike System

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), a regional planning agency, is developing an extensive regional bicycle plan for the county.

The purpose of the San Diego Regional Bicycle Plan is to encourage the development of a unified, regional bicycle system to serve the needs of all bicyclists in the area. The plan will connect centers of local and regional activity, transit facilities and

trail systems for commuters, casual cyclists and recreational bikers.

As part of a wider regional transportation plan, the bicycle plan not only will develop bicycle facilities but will provide assistance to local jurisdictions in promoting safety, education, and a greater awareness of bicycling.

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A bicycle facility in San Diego. (Photo: Courtesy of SANDAG)

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city wants to promote bicycle and pedestrian as well as transit facilities as part of its infrastructure development and in response to projected growth. City officials hope that, if the multimodal facilities are there, people will take advantage of them and this in turn will lower the rate of increase in annual vehicle miles traveled as the city population grows over time.

Bellingham's focus on integrating land use and transportation planning led city transportation planners and Kirkland-based consultants, The Transpo Group, to develop the new methodology to address the shortcomings of the current system. Transportation planners began working in the summer of 2007 and the Bellingham City Council is expected to adopt the new multimodal approach at the end of November.

The new multimodal transportation concurrency method should enable the city to apply transportation policy to direct growth into urban villages, which are identified as the most appropriate for higher density, mixed-use infill development within the Bellingham community.

Bellingham publishes a Transportation Report on Annual Concurrency (TRAC), which is a status report on the LOS standards for the citywide surface transportation network. The TRAC will now also report how many "person trips" are available for developers to draw on in the coming year. City transportation planners divided the city into 14 concurrency service areas, each of which has unique land use patterns and transportation facilities and services available, which influences the transportation choices that people make.

For example, under the new system, the downtown area would have more person trips available due to easy access and availability of transit, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and small block grid streets compared to an outlying suburban area heavily dependent on cars with little to no access to pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities and services.

Chris Comeau, transportation planner for the city of Bellingham Public Works Department, explains that the system

works something like a checking account. The account balance for each of the 14 concurrency service areas is established in the TRAC each year, new development withdraws person trips from the account, and the city, transit agency, or private sector can deposit person trips into accounts through capital projects and transportation mitigation.

Public Works won't allow new development to overdraw the account. If there are not enough person trips available to serve a new development, person-trip credits would have to be earned through multimodal mitigation methods such as the addition of sidewalk and bicycle lanes identified for that area in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

The city will continue to measure arterial capacity by conducting traffic counts and will work directly with Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA), the regional transit agency, to measure seated transit capacity and actual transit ridership. Earlier this year, WTA was recognized as having the greatest transit ridership increase (20.7%) within the 150 largest transit service areas of the United States from June 2007 to June 2008.

While measuring road and transit capacity is relatively straight forward, it is much more difficult to measure the capacity of bike paths and sidewalks. Rather than measuring capacity, Bellingham will measure the degree of completeness of the bicycle and pedestrian facilities in each concurrency service area.

The City keeps a citywide inventory of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in a GIS database and will measure the existing inventory against the total bicycle and pedestrian facilities needed to serve growth as adopted in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan. Bicycle or pedestrian facilities must be a minimum of 50% complete in a concurrency service area to be credited with person trips available. For every 1% complete over 50%, the City will deposit 20 person trip credits into the concurrency service area account.

Public Works presents the TRAC to the Planning Commission and the City Council at the beginning of each year. This allows

staff to make recommendations for changes when necessary, alert decision makers about concurrency issues, and to seek direction from the City Council. If and when changes to the system are necessary, they must be approved by both the Planning Commission and City Council through an open public process.

The Bellingham Planning Commission held public hearings on August 7 and September 4, 2008 and voted 6-1 to submit a recommendation to the City Council approving the new system. The City Council held a public hearing on November 3, 2008 and voted 6-0 to direct staff to bring forward an ordinance approving the new system.

A final City Council vote will be held on November 24, 2008 and Bellingham's new multimodal transportation concurrency requirements are scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2009.

For more information, contact Chris Comeau, AICP, transportation planner, City of Bellingham Public Works Department, at (360) 778-7900 or ccomeau@cob.org.

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Arkansas Studies CFI Flow Intersections

section with displaced left turns on all approaches found that average delay was reduced 48 to 85 percent and queue lengths were reduced 62 to 88 percent, compared to a conventional intersection. Other studies have found that the use of CFIs can improve safety as well as congestion. According to the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD), the use of a continuous flow intersection between May 2006 and June 2007 resulted in about a 40 percent reduction in the annual total number of crashes based on one year of crash data.

For more information, visit <http://www.abmb.com/cfi.html> or contact Randy Orr at tel. (501) 569-2239 or Jessie Jones at tel. (501) 569-2029.