

# Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

*Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland*

1001 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 1300  
Portland OR 97204



March 10, 2021

Director Chris Warner  
Portland Bureau of Transportation

Director Warner,

While we appreciate that the Hawthorne Pave & Paint project aims to provide a better bus experience and increased safety and accessibility at crossings, the Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) is profoundly disappointed by both the lack of proactive engagement with the committee and the decision to proceed with Alternative 2.

First, we are very concerned about the narrative put forth by the survey and alternatives analysis that bike lanes negatively impact equity and climate change and are responsible for traffic delays. We need to be clear that single-occupancy vehicles are at the root of these impacts, “as the least efficient use of valuable road capacity.”<sup>1</sup> While transportation demand and parking management should be at the forefront of these decisions, all too often it is the most efficient modes that must compete for leftover right of way space. We are disappointed that no plan for future bike facilities, not even a long-term one, was identified through this work.

Before our initial briefing on this project, PBOT published a report detailing extensive transit delay with Alternative 3. These are exactly the type of issues the members of the BAC would like to find solutions for in collaboration with the City. However, it was not understood until the September BAC meeting why the decision was made to extend the bike lane through the intersection with César Chávez Blvd rather than the more conventional, albeit less safe, mixing zone for transit and right turning vehicles given the severely negative impacts. It was additional follow-up by the committee that clarified these details, and it should be noted that as of this date the BAC has still not received an updated analysis of Alternative 3 with the mixing zone at this location. These relevant details were also not included in the final report.

The BAC unequivocally supports enhancements to pedestrian and transit facilities in the corridor and throughout the city, but there was still much room for enhancement. None of the alternatives definitively improved transit speed compared to today. We agree that Alternative 2 is safer than what exists today and the improvements need to go much further. Our main concerns are:

- Increasing the vehicle travel lanes to 13 feet wide will promote higher speeds, contributing to other safety issues on the corridor.
- Fallon Smart was killed in a three lane cross section without a median island. As detailed in the final report, seven locations in Alternative 2 will continue to have this same condition with another seven designated as medium- or low-priority when funding is identified. We know that “street design is critical in eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries”<sup>2</sup> and that means installing median islands at all crossings.

One of the three key strategies in the Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030 was to “provide direct access to common destinations”.<sup>3</sup> This strategy was meant to explicitly address the failure of the bikeway network to provide access to most commercial areas, and why bicycling classifications were added to main streets in the Transportation System Plan (TSP) even when no facility currently existed. A major theme of the Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030 is that the City must “plan and design for people who are not yet riding, and must create conditions that make bicycling more attractive than driving for short trips.”<sup>4</sup> The strategy adopted by the City in this repaving project fails to create any new facilities for people not yet biking.

<sup>1</sup> City of Portland 2015 Climate Action Plan page 86

<sup>2</sup> City of Portland Vision Zero Traffic Crash Report 2020, page 3

<sup>3</sup> Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030 Section 3.1.4 <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/289122>

<sup>4</sup> Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030 Figure 1-2, page 37

The greenway network is not a substitute for the type of access provided on commercial main streets. Destinations are not visible from the neighboring greenways, there are few bike-friendly “spokes” into the Hawthorne commercial district, and travelling from one store to another along Hawthorne could require over a quarter-mile of out of direction travel to use low stress bicycle routes. The “potential bikeway connection” strategy between Salmon-Taylor and Harrison-Lincoln Greenways was unclear to the BAC, as this was a new element introduced in the Final Decision Report without BAC input. Bicycling for short trips around Hawthorne will not be more attractive than driving given the lack of bike facilities.

This is not the first road reconstruction project where PBOT has failed to provide bicycle facilities designated in the TSP. Due to our budgeting practices, bicycle infrastructure is often out of scope of the project and sidelined to an undetermined date in the future. Utilizing repaving projects can be a cost-effective way to adapt our transportation system to be more equitable, safe, and climate-ready. Given the state of our increasing transportation emissions, we should never miss an opportunity to build the transportation system that has been envisioned by our community and adopted by our City leaders. “Systemic change at every level, from planning and zoning to the reallocation of the right-of-way, will be required.”<sup>5</sup> Reconfiguring our right of way for the city we aspire to be rather than the one we are is challenging and requires a resolve not yet seen by our current processes or politics. Certainly, we need a more robust process to ensure that even routine roadwork can support the implementation of a complete bicycling network.

It is our understanding that we are in a recognized and declared Climate Emergency. The high target for bicycle transportation, 25 percent of all trips by 2030 (only nine years away and at a rate four times that of existing trips) originated in the first City-County Climate Action Plan in 2009 and retained in the 2015 update. The 2030 Bicycling Master Plan adopted similar goals for bicycling and policies to support those changes. In reality, bicycle mode share has declined and transportation emissions have risen for several years. It is confounding that with a “blank slate” PBOT ended up with a design that fails to reliably speed up transit or provide any safe access for bicycling. There exists a continued chasm between our publicly-stated goals and the outcomes that are achieved.

Adhering to the 7th generation principle<sup>6</sup>, which states that “[i]n our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations” means looking beyond current conditions. The decision to proceed with Alternative 2 was a safe decision as it aligned cleanly with precedent and led to a familiar result. A safe outcome when presented with an opportunity to substantially transform an iconic Portland commercial street such as Hawthorne is not enough for future generations. We have nine years remaining to transition from being a net carbon emitter if the 7th generation is going to live in a world remotely familiar to the one we currently inhabit. Safe decisions created our current environment; they will not create the change we so urgently need to meet our goals.

We are hopeful that the next project will set a better precedent in anticipation of that 7th generation and we look forward to working together with PBOT to achieve that.

It is in that spirit that we send this letter.

Respectfully,



David Stein, Chairperson  
Bicycle Advisory Committee



Alexandra Holmqvist, Vice-Chairperson  
Bicycle Advisory Committee

Cc: Kristin Hull, PBOT  
Mauricio Leclerc, PBOT  
Karla Kingsley, PBOT  
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<sup>5</sup> City of Portland 2030 Bicycling Master Plan page 21

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.7genfoundation.org/7th-generation/>