

# **APPENDIX D:**

## “Walking While Black” Focus Group Report

# PedPDX

**PBOT WALKING WHILE BLACK FOCUS GROUP REPORT**  
**BLACK COMMUNITY INPUT ON PEDPDX AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR**  
**TRANSPORTATION POLICY AND INVESTMENTS**





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# Executive Summary

In 2017 the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) launched a community-informed process to update PedPDX, Portland's Citywide Pedestrian Plan. PedPDX will prioritize sidewalk and crossing improvements and other investments to make walking safer and more comfortable across the city. A key element of the early PedPDX public involvement strategy included a survey asking Portlanders to tell PBOT their priorities for making Portland a more walkable city. The PedPDX survey distribution and engagement strategies focused on online survey, language-based engagement, public events and youth engagement activities.

Initial demographic analysis revealed challenges garnering survey responses from communities of color, and in particular, Black (African American African immigrant and/or of African decent) communities. As a result, PBOT hosted two focus groups to more intentionally elevate the voice of Black Portlanders in PedPDX. Facilitators provided a space for Black Portlanders to speak candidly about their Walking While Black experience in Portland.

Based on the themes of the focus group discussions, follow-up conversations and feedback provided

during other PBOT outreach and engagement efforts in the Black community, the following general recommendations are being put forward to address the input and concerns that were elevated:

1. **Ensure that PedPDX investments and strategies address the infrastructure concerns raised by Black Portlanders**
2. **Strengthen Black community partnerships + leadership development opportunities**
3. **Further research focused on understanding the Black experience in Portland**
4. **Collaborate with City and regional partners to address hate and racially-motivated behavior as a transportation issue**
5. **Develop tools that evaluate and address community impacts, promote community benefits and mitigate unintended outcomes**



The following report discusses PedPDX and the Walking While Black focus group findings in more detail, including:

**I. Introduction: About PedPDX and Early Engagement Results**

**II. Background: Resilience Despite a Tumultuous History**

**III. Methodology: Empowering Black Voices in PedPDX**

**IV. Registrant Demographics: Diversity Within the Black Experience**

**V. Focus Group Findings Part I: Priorities Survey**

**VI. Focus Group Findings Part II: Insights Into The Black Pedestrian Experience**

**VII. Moving Forward: Recommendations for PBOT Policy, Initiatives and Investments**

This report will be added as an appendix to PedPDX , which will be presented to and adopted by City Council.

# Introduction: About PedPDX and Early Engagement Results

PedPDX Mission Statement: Through PedPDX, the City of Portland affirms walking as a fundamental human right and the most fundamental means of transportation. PedPDX will ensure that walking is safe, accessible and attractive experience for everyone in Portland by centering pedestrians at the forefront of City policy, investments and design.

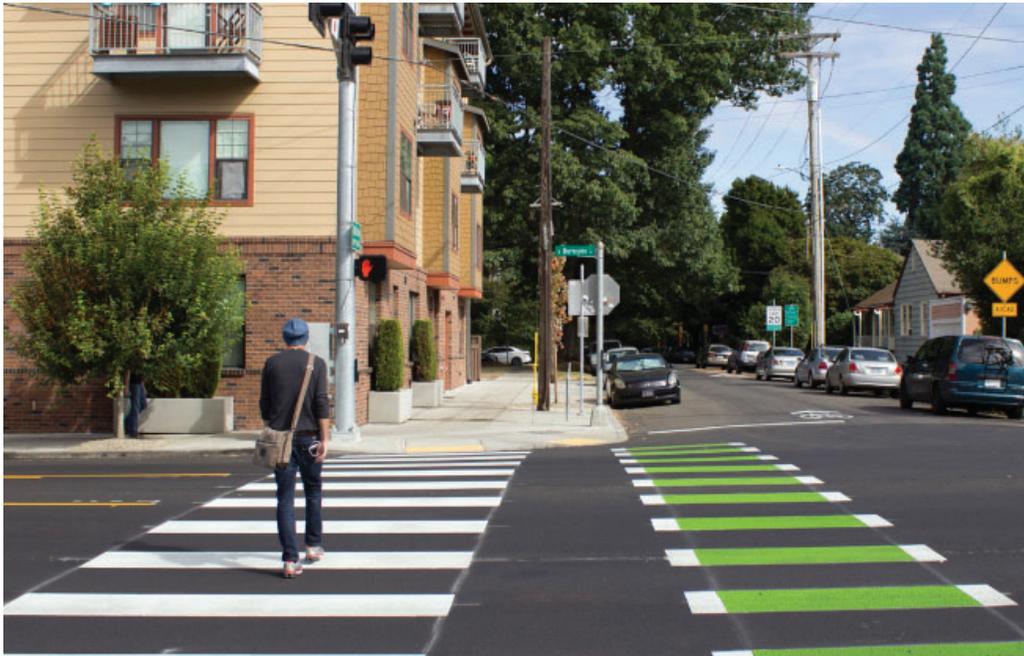
PedPDX envisions Portland as a great walking city for all and includes the following goals:

- **Equitable + Inclusive:** Make Portland walkable and accessible for all, no matter who you are or where you live.
- **Safe + Secure:** Make walking in Portland safe and secure for everyone.
- **Comfortable + Inviting:** Provide a comfortable, inviting, and connected pedestrian network that supports walkable neighborhoods and strengthens community.
- **Healthy People + Environment:** Increase walking for transportation and recreation in Portland as a means of achieving improved health outcomes for all people and

for the environment.

The Plan will identify the key strategies and tools the City will use to make Portland a great walking city for all. A key piece of the PedPDX public involvement strategy was a community-wide survey asking Portlanders to share their priorities for making Portland a more walkable city.

PedPDX survey distribution and engagement strategies focused on public events, language-based engagement and youth engagement activities. There were 5,405 total participants surveyed, including 136 paper surveys, 4,697 online surveys, 22 youth in a workshop and 550 participants at public events. Surveys were provided in five different languages: English, Russian, Vietnamese, Chinese and Spanish.



*Above: A pedestrian crosses the street at a newly painted crosswalk at NE Burnside.*

Survey responses revealed the challenges of garnering responses from communities of color, and in particular, the Black, African American and African communities.

Out of the 5,405 total survey respondents, 2% of total respondents identified as Black (African American, African immigrant or of African descent), while 80% of survey respondents identified as White; 8% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander; and 5% identified as Hispanic/Latino.

The Black community is currently 5.7% of Portland's overall population. To address the gap in responses from this population, PBOT staff worked with community partners from the Portland African American Leadership Forum (PAALF), Black Parent Initiative (BPI) and Immigrant and Refugee

Community Organization (IRCO) Africa House to host two focus groups to secure more input from the Black community and to better understand how their walking experience may be different because of their racial and ethnic identities.

To learn more about citywide survey responses, review the Draft Walking Priorities Survey Report online at [www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/pedpdx](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/pedpdx).

# Background: Resilience Despite a Tumultuous History

The history of racism in Portland has been cumulative and deep. Over many generations, the Black community has been subject to public policies and underinvestments that continue to impact their access to and safety within Portland's transportation system today.

"Bleeding Albina: A History of Community Disinvestment, 1940-2000" authored by Karen J. Gibson, PhD, is one of many reports that outlines the history and discriminatory policies that created a concentrated African American community in North Portland, including formal and "informal" real estate redlining, predatory lending and housing speculation. In response, the Black community developed a concentration of Black home ownership, thriving Black business districts and supportive community networks and social institutions. Then, in the 1950's, at the height of Portland Black home ownership and entrepreneurship, local transportation and land use decisions resulted in the demolition of more than 1,550 homes and businesses within the community in order to

build the Memorial Coliseum, I-5, Hwy 99, and an Emanuel Hospital expansion<sup>1</sup>.

Over time, the cumulative impact of these decisions, in the name of urban renewal, has resulted in the displacement of Black Portlanders to other areas of the metro region. More recently, rising housing costs for both homeowners and renters has contributed to the further migration of the Black community to East Portland and outside of the City limits to neighboring counties. This is important to note in the context of PedPDX because East Portland was annexed into the City of Portland in 1981 and has significant transportation infrastructure deficiencies, including lack of sidewalks, a high concentration of gravel roads, and inadequate crossings and bike lanes. Despite efforts to prioritize investments in this part of town, East Portland has twice the number of pedestrian fatalities per capita compared to the city overall areas citywide<sup>2</sup>.

"While pedestrians make up nearly one-third of all traffic-related deaths in Portland, gentrification and changing demographics have forced low-income, transit-dependent residents into neighborhoods where walking is especially dangerous."

*-Portland's Vision Zero Action Plan*

“Race-based discrimination—both interpersonal and institutional—gets “under the skin” of African-Americans and contributes to the racial disparities in health. This happens through internal processes of the physiological stress response system, and also through limited access to the healthy environments and lifestyles found in some neighborhoods (clean air, healthy homes, walkable streets). The combination of internal physiological responses, coping responses, and segregation in disadvantaged social and physical environments have a significant impact on health outcomes.”

*The African American Community in Multnomah County:  
An Unsettling Profile*

<sup>1</sup> Loving, Lisa. “Portland gentrification: The North Williams Avenue that was—1956”. *The Skanner*. December 11, 2015. Accessed February 05, 2018. <http://www.theskanner.com/article/view/section/2/id/11409>

<sup>2</sup> PBOT Equity Matrix: 2011-2015 American Community Survey

Portland is known as a liberal and progressive city, but there is still ample evidence illustrating racism is not just a thing of the past - it is indeed embedded into local institutions and influencing individual behavior patterns. The Black community continues to be subject to personal attacks that are impacting their physical safety and overall wellbeing in public spaces. For example:

- A 2015 Portland study of racial bias in driver yielding behavior at crosswalks showed that Black pedestrians were twice as likely as Whites to be passed by two or more cars and Black pedestrians experienced 32% longer waits before drivers yielded<sup>3</sup>.
- Black Portland area pedestrians are stopped by police at higher rates than Whites or other races<sup>4</sup>.
- Since 2016, Oregonians have reported over 30 “hate incidents,” a higher rate than any other state, according to Southern Poverty Law Center data. In response, the Portland United Against Hate Coalition was formed to closely track incidents and elevate concerns on community safety.
- In May 2017, two White men were stabbed to death, and another seriously injured, when they intervened to protect victims from an act of racist violence on a MAX train. The targets of the White, male perpetrator were two young, Black teenage women, one wearing a hijab.

On June 4, 2017 the Oregonian wrote an article to highlight the experiences of Black Portlanders on public transportation entitled “Portland’s people of color felt under attack long before MAX Stabbings<sup>5</sup>.” The gentrification of Black communities and lack of political representation in public office continues to add to the sentiment of feeling undervalued and isolated. Zahir Janmohamed, the former policy director for the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, wrote in a CNN op-ed in 2017 that he has “lost count of how many Muslims, especially teenage Black Muslim women, have confided in me that they have been threatened on public transportation, that they have had their head scarves pulled while walking home at night, that they have been called ‘ISIS lovers’ while walking on their public high school campuses<sup>6</sup>.”

The article also mentioned Black and Latino experiences of being overpoliced on the MAX Train. “What police presence on the MAX has afforded our communities is a drastically higher arrest rate of Black and Latino community members for not having proper fare,” Joshi said. “That hasn’t afforded any safety for our communities. It only increases the amount of aggression that we experience by just accessing this public good, which is transit. It just means more of our folks will be pulled off trains.”

It feels important to elevate this historical context and these present-day experiences because, as you will read, they were central to the themes elevated in the Walking While Black Focus Groups.

3 Tara Goddard, Kimberly Barsamian Kahn, Arlie Adkins, *Racial bias in driver yielding behavior at crosswalks, Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour, Volume 33, 2015, Pages 1-6, ISSN 1369-8478, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trf.2015.06.002>*

4 Stops Data Collection, Portland Police Bureau Strategic Services Division

5 Oregonian/OregonLive, Jim Ryan | *The. “2 killed in stabbing on MAX train in Northeast Portland as man directs slurs at Muslim women, police say.” OregonLive.com. May 27, 2017. Accessed February 05, 2018. [http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2017/05/police\\_responding\\_to\\_ne\\_portla.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2017/05/police_responding_to_ne_portla.html)*

6 CNN, Zahir Janmohamed | *“Portland isn’t as liberal as you think.” CNN.com. May 29, 2017. Accessed October 17, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/29/opinions/portland-not-so-liberal-opinion-janmohamed/index.html>*

# Methodology: Empowering Black Voices in PedPDX

In recognition of the low response rates from Black Portlanders in comparison to their counterparts and the need for a deeper understanding of the concerns, interests, and needs specific to the Black community, PedPDX project leads sought assistance for facilitating additional outreach efforts.

PBOT Communications and Public Involvement staff members Irene Schwoeffermann Marion, Public Involvement Coordinator, and Tosin Abiodun, Constituent Services Coordinator, volunteered to organize and facilitate two focus groups titled “Walking While Black” to better understand walking priorities, transportation barriers and experiences that are unique to their racial and ethnic identities as Black Portlanders.

Key elements that contributed to the success of these sessions included:

- Focus group development and facilitation being led by Black City of Portland staff;
- An event title and promotional materials that were inviting to the Black community and emphasized interest in their specific experience;
- Partnership with popular community organizations that could extend invitations to community members;
- The focus groups being held at Black owned/operated community spaces and dinner being provided by Black owned caterers;

- A pre-survey of focus group registrants collected demographic information so that facilitators could have a deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences within the Black Portland;
- Seeking participant responses to and dialogue on the citywide survey, as well as additional discussion questions that sought more information on their pedestrian experience as Black Portlanders; and
- Participants were provided with \$25 gift cards for grocery stores and a local Black restaurant as a token of appreciation for their time and contributions. Partnering organizations received a small donation for their assistance with outreach.

Focus groups were held on November 28th, 2017 at the June Key Delta Community Center in North Portland, and on December 9th, 2017 at IRCO Africa House in East Portland. The original goal was for each focus group to have 8-12 participants. A total of 60 community members registered to attend. Close to 50 community members participated between both sessions.

# Registrant Demographics: Diversity Within the Black Experience

The Black community is not monolithic and the rich diversity of the Black community was well represented within the focus groups. To better understand the various background and experiences that were represented, here is a snapshot of the demographic information was collected during the registration process:

**Age:** registrants ranged from ages 21-69 with a fairly even split between those under 40 and those over 40. It is important to note that during the IRCO Africa House focus group, many youth and students dropped in, but their demographic information was not secured.

**Gender:** 41 registrants identified as women; 18 identified as men; 1 person identified as gender nonconforming.

## **Racial/Ethnic Background + Country of Origin:**

all registrants identified as Black; 20 identified as African American and 17 specified being immigrants and refugees from the African diaspora. Countries of origin included Central Africa (country unspecified), Belize, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Panama and Somali. Those with mixed Black heritage specified Latino, Native American and White.

**Education level:** education level among registrants included: 33% university; 30% graduate school; 26.7% community college; 6.7% high school; 1% primary; and 1% PhD.

**Employment:** registrants included 30% employed full time; 28.3% employed part

**Time:** 15% students; 11% unemployed; and 5% stay at home parents.

**Place of Residence:** 20 registrants live in Northeast Portland; 9 in North Portland; 8 in Southeast Portland; 7 in Northwest; 7 in Southwest; one in Vancouver; and one in Hillsboro.

**Places most traveled to:** overwhelmingly, registrants said they traveled to Northeast and North Portland most frequently. Close to two-thirds of registrants indicated that they travel to three or more parts of Portland frequently. Many registrants travel frequently to Downtown and Outer East Portland. The furthest frequent travel destinations were Dundee, OR and Vancouver, WA.

**Modes of Transportation:** when asked how registrants travel on a typical day, 21 registrants said they utilize 3 or more modes of transportation on a typical day. 9 registrants said they only drive. One registrant said they only bike. 68.3% of the registrants said they take public transportation; 65% drive; 61.7% walk; 11.7% bike; 8.3% utilize private-for-hire transportation (rideshare companies); and 1.7% utilize rides from friends.

**As the City of Portland deepens its commitment to racial equity, PBOT is continuing to evolve its collection, use and understanding of data that will help the Bureau refine program and policy priorities. Analysis of data by race will be a key research area for the bureau moving forward - see this report's recommendations section for more details.**

# Focus Group Findings Part I: Responses to the Citywide Priorities Survey

During the focus group sessions, facilitators opened the focus groups with a brief presentation on information about Portland's transportation system and the role the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) plays in building, maintaining and managing the system.

Participants were then asked to respond to a paper survey that focused on the PedPDX questions so that PBOT could see how their priorities and concerns aligned or differed from the citywide responses.

## The Priorities Survey questions were:

1. **What are your top transportation priorities or concerns?**
2. **What makes walking difficult in Portland?**
3. **Which kinds of places are the most important to improve for walking in Portland?**

## What are your top transportation priorities or concerns?

Participants mentioned the following concerns as their top transportation priorities and concerns:

### Traffic and congestion

- Influx of new residents to the Portland region bringing more cars to Portland has intensified commutes and congestion
- Communities displaced due to

gentrification having to spend more time commuting because where they can't afford to live near the places they travel to daily

### Pedestrian Infrastructure Issues

- Lack of sidewalks and poor sidewalk conditions in East Portland
- Lack of pedestrian wayfinding
- Uplifted/buckled sidewalk tripping hazards
- Branches in sidewalk path impeding site lines making passage difficult
- Cars parked at or too close to the corners impeding passage and making site lines difficult

### Public Transit Issues

- Lack of bus shelters
- Bus reliability
- Challenges using the Vancouver Vine transit system
- MAX delays and unreliable timing

### Personal Safety

- Experiences of racism and discrimination in public spaces, right of way, and on public transit
- Poor lighting
- Inconsiderate drivers
- Unmaintained bike lanes
- Habitat encroachment exposing pedestrians to coyotes and other wildlife, especially in East Portland

Places to Improve - Average Point Value (from 1-6)

WHAT MAKES WALKING DIFFICULT IN PORTLAND?	WALKING WHILE BLACK	CITYWIDE
Poor Lighting	5.00	3.62
Sidewalks / walking paths missing on BUSY streets	4.94	4.66
People driving too fast on BUSY streets	4.82	4.29
Not enough safe places to cross busy streets	4.78	4.46
People driving too fast on RESIDENTIAL streets	4.74	4.44
Sidewalks / walking paths missing on RESIDENTIAL streets	4.71	4.29
Drivers not stopping for pedestrians crossing the street	4.47	4.29
Buckled / cracked / uplifted sidewalks, or other tripping hazards	4.47	3.46
Missing curb ramps at intersections	4.00	3.22
Not enough time to cross the streets	3.91	3.08

Figure 1. Which kinds of places are the most important to improve for walking in Portland?

Participant comments:

- *“People treat people who are Black, or girls who wear hijabs differently.”*
- *“I don’t usually walk or ride the MAX without having my brother with me because of the 2017 MAX incident.”*
- *“I have had many experiences walking down the street or crossing at an intersection where a car will slow down or stop and the driver yells at me, telling me to go back to my country or calling me derogatory names.”*

### What makes walking difficult in Portland?

Focus group participants were asked to rate a variety of barriers on a scale from 1 to 6, with 1 indicating “not important” and 6 indicating “really important.” Participant answers were captured, and average rankings were compared to the citywide data.

Figure 1 notes the difference of walking experiences for Black

Portlanders who attended the focus groups compared to data collected from Citywide survey participants. Black community members expressed their unpleasant and often time difficult experiences as pedestrians in their communities. Participants mentioned the following difficulties:

#### Poor lighting

The most prominent difference between results from the focus groups compared to the PedPDX citywide survey responses was the impact of poor lighting. Focus group participants rated this the highest, with an average rating of 5.0, while it was ranked significantly lower than in the citywide survey responses.

Participant comments:

- *“Lighting is good for safety. It gets dark in Portland during the winter and it is hard to see pedestrians walking, and it’s especially hard for drivers to see people when they’re walking across the street. If it’s raining, sometimes people run*

*across the street; at night this is really dangerous.”*

- *“After they take away the Christmas lights downtown it is too dark. [We] need more pedestrian-scale lighting.”*
- *“Lighting is very important if we really want to protect Black lives, not everyone has shiny clothes on them. Proper lighting especially helps people with dark skin. If we had enough light everywhere, it would be safer citywide to walk while Black. White drivers don’t see Black people, even in [the] daytime.”*
- *Participants noted that wearing something reflective or with a light will save black lives.*

### **Sidewalks and walking paths missing on busy streets**

*Participant comments:*

- *“It’s scary to cross busy streets.”*
- *“When you’re walking on there’s no sidewalk, or it stops abruptly, it’s dangerous and more likely you’ll get hurt if you’re walking.”*
- *“There are no sidewalks on outer Powell”*
- *“Streets without sidewalks are dangerous. City reacts when something happens instead of preventing [it in the first place]. City does something when a White person is killed. White children go missing, amber alert, Black children go missing, not the same treatment. Make me think if a black person is hit, the City won’t go do anything.*

### **People driving too fast on busy streets**

*Participant comments:*

- *“Speeding on residential streets where there are no sidewalks is very dangerous. SW Barnes starting around 84th, there is a sidewalk on one side, but not the other, then you have to cross to the other side to stay on a sidewalk but it’s unmaintained.”*

### **Not enough safe places to cross busy streets**

*Participant comments:*

- *“Division 122nd to 162nd there is not a week where there are no crashes, there are crashes daily. 127th there are so many crashes, they put different crossing treatments, but people do not respect the treatments. 142nd is dangerous, there are crashes when cars that are stopping in inconvenient or illogical locations and should be relocated.*

### **Missing curb ramps at intersections**

*Participant comments:*

- *“Curb ramps [are] important for people in wheelchairs. I’ve seen someone fall out of their wheelchair. Some refugees are medically fragile, some are in wheelchairs.”*

## Other barriers/ concerns/ priorities:

### Personal safety

A discussion about poor lighting led to a deeper understanding about concerns for personal safety in public spaces and during travel commutes. Participants shared that the choices they make on a daily basis is what travel route to prioritize travel routes that make them feel safe and visible, even if the travel route is longer or the travel option is more expensive.

During the focus groups, the 2017 MAX incident was elevated as having a lasting impact on feelings of safety in public spaces and during travel commutes, but there was acknowledgment that while this was an extreme event, many participants quoted experiences on public transit or in public spaces that made them feel exposed and vulnerable to racially-motivated attacks. Participants cited both the conditions of their neighborhood transportation infrastructure and lack of City officials understanding the Black Portland experience as the result of historic and structural racism.

### Threatening driver behavior

*Participant comments:*

- *“Drivers are speeding, not slowing down for pedestrian crossing, sometimes speed up to threaten the pedestrian.”*
- *“When your crossing cars don’t wait until you’re across into the next lane, they start turning right at your back.”*
- *“Pedestrian laws are not being followed*

*by drivers, risking pedestrian safety.”*

- *“Cars stop more when there are rapid flashing lights.”*

### Maintenance of the right of way

*Participant comments:*

- *“Leaves and ice make sidewalks slippery and dangerous.”*
- *“Clogged storm drains discourage walking.”*
- *“Sidewalks need to be free debris, glass, needles, etc.”*

## Which kinds of places are the most important to improve for walking in Portland?

Responses to this question were mostly aligned with citywide responses (see Figure 2). Themes that surfaced during the discussion included:

### Streets connecting families and children to schools

*Participant comments:*

- *“135th near Lincoln Elementary, unsafe, no crossing for the children. Children and families have to walk to 136th, go over the bridge to come back. The safe route is way out of the way so they are put in a dangerous situation. ”*
- *“Access to parks are important”*

### Streets connecting people to transit/ bus stops

*Participant comments:*

- *“Sidewalks need to go from the stop, to where you need to go. Cars speed when*

Places to Improve - Average Point Value (from 1-6)

WHICH KINDS OF PLACES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE FOR WALKING IN PORTLAND?	WALKING WHILE BLACK	CITYWIDE
Streets where people walking have been killed or injured	5.03	5.08
Areas that serve people who need to rely on walking the most (for example low income)	4.97	5.11
Residential streets lacking sidewalks or walking paths	4.53	4.54
Along and across busy streets	4.35	4.99
Streets connecting families and children to school	4.29	4.99
Streets connecting people to transit / bus stops	4.27	5.06
Streets connecting people to neighborhood commercial districts (neighborhood shops)	4.06	4.73
Areas where the most people live and / or work	4.03	4.55
Streets connecting people to parks	3.81	4.52
Streets connecting people to libraries, community centers, and other community facilities)	3.66	4.66

Figure 2. Which kinds of places are the most important to improve for walking in Portland?

*the sidewalk ends. Sidewalk is crucial."*

- *"Every bus stop needs a crossing."*
- *"103rd and Washington is unsafe, bus driver didn't wait for pedestrians to cross. Drivers of bus and MAX make choices of who to stop for –they see them, but still White drivers sometimes choose not to stop."*
- *"Sometimes pedestrians are unsafe because they need to hurry to catch the bus."*

### **Areas that serve people who need to rely on walking**

*Participant comments:*

- *"I have concerns for people who only rely on walking because they have to take risks. Drivers don't always give you the right of way."*
- *"Making sure newcomers understand our traffic laws and what the different signals mean. Drivers wait for White people to cross but not Black people."*

# Focus Group Findings Part 2: Insights Into the Black Pedestrian Experience

In addition to answering the PedPDX survey questions, the facilitators wanted to capture more about the unique experiences of the Black community to better understand their transportation concerns and barriers. Community members shared the following concerns, experiences, and recommendations during the two focus groups which have been organized into the following themes:

## Personal Safety

- *“When you’re Black [anywhere in Portland], you have to make sure that you are extra careful when crossing the street or using the crosswalk.”*
- *“Fear of getting in trouble for jaywalking, always feeling the extra pressure to follow the law and go to the right crossing, which can be hard to do. This is like having to keep your receipt on you when you go shopping because you might get stopped for no reason and have to prove yourself. Head coverings draw more attention, want to be doing the exact right thing, crossing in the right place.”*
- *“I won’t allow my husband to run at night as a tall Black man, for I fear he won’t come home.”*
- *“I pay a large amount of money for my son’s car insurance because it is safer for him to drive than to be exposed.”*
- *“I want to lose weight by walking but can’t walk after 5 pm because I am afraid to exercise when it gets dark. I feel vulnerable, so I stay home or drive and it is impacting my health.”*
- *“I feel scared on the MAX, I’m always looking around to see if people look suspicious. I carry mace, but I have to take the MAX to and from school.”*
- *“When there are no lights, I feel very unsafe. I don’t have the choice, I have to take the MAX, I have to walk.”*
- *“We need infrastructure and facilities that protect*

*our most vulnerable community members and make them feel both safe and personally secure.”*

- *“Homeless people are on every corner. I feel insecure around them when leaving the house.”*

## Prejudice Encounters and Perceptions of Enforcement

- *“The political climate has become more hostile for Black people. A Somali woman was crossing at a green light, people were yelling at her for no reason.”*
- *“Being the target of racial slurs when crossing the street. I press the button to get the green light, then someone yells racial slurs at me because they have a vehicle and don’t like that they were made to wait for me”.*
- *“I left Africa House and was verbally and physically assaulted. I was really, really scared.”*
- *“There is racial profiling on TriMet regarding ticketing for fare evasion.”*
- *“Crosswalk enforcement is a good thing, but needs to be conducted by more Black people to test inequitable driver yielding behavior.”*
- *“Not all [White people] are bad, however there are racist people in the police force.”*
- *“Sometimes witnesses to crashes don’t stop for Black people or are unreliable. We don’t see the outcome of the police report when there is a crash. You think you’re right and the accident isn’t your fault, and then your insurance goes up.”*

## Microaggressions in our Streets

- *“White people not sharing the sidewalk, expecting Black people to step out of their way instead of moving right to make space mutually, respectfully.”*

- *“Crosswalk White girl magic - where cars stop for White women, not for Black people.”*
- *“I’m offended, saddened, and disappointed being a Black person walking in Portland.”*
- *“Black people have to be mindful about how we even exercise on the sidewalk”*

### Perceptions of PBOT’s Priorities

Focus group participants questioned the intentions of the City of Portland as it makes further transportation investments in communities that already have “good” infrastructure, instead of prioritizing areas where community members with lower socioeconomic status have less infrastructure. Focus group participants mentioned the following observations:

- *“Less infrastructure and lack of investment is apparent in East Portland and East Multnomah County where there are now higher populations of Black people. ”*
- *“More and better infrastructure improvements are needed in East County and should be comparable to the types of improvements seen in the Pearl District, and South Waterfront.”*
- *“Signal timing appears more refined in Central City areas and problematic further out in the Portland metro area.”*
- *“It is clear that the City cares about bike lanes. They are everywhere, but East Portland. Lack of bike lanes in East Portland causes people who bike to impede on pedestrian walkways. ”*
- *“There are more bus stops in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods. ”*
- *“More and better street lighting is available in areas of town where there are fewer Black people residing. ”*

### Observations about PBOT Outreach and Communications

Participants from both focus groups were asked

how PBOT and/or the City of Portland should be sharing information and updates with community members and for recommendation on how PBOT should be engaging Portland’s Black community. Participants shared the following observations and experiences:

- *“Communication about safety doesn’t get to us, we are always getting skipped and don’t know who to call when we have questions. When PBOT has information, it doesn’t get to our people.”*
- *“I’m the only minority on the Outer-Powell Planning Community Advisory Committee and I’m asked to speak on behalf of all communities, which is not possible.”*
- *“I signed up to receive PBOT email updates, but when there was street construction in my neighborhood, I didn’t get a notification.”*
- *“Illustrations and videos are helpful for educating community members. Public education, issues like hate crimes and pedestrian laws should be prioritized.”*
- *“I do not always receive information that is important to me. Flyers and emails are a good way to get information from PBOT.”*
- *“It has been ten years since PBOT has visited Africa House. We want to see you more regularly at our community organizations.”*
- *“I receive most information through word of mouth, not directly from the City.”*
- *“We want to see more benefits coming to the Black community. More jobs and contracting opportunities. I don’t know where to find that information.”*

Despite these reflections on PBOT’s general outreach and communications effectiveness in the Black community, all participants appreciated the opportunity to participate in the focus groups. They appreciated that the discussion emphasized seeking to understand their specific experiences as Black Portlanders. Many participants expressed interest in participating in future transportation-focused discussions and encouraged PBOT to continue the efforts.

# Recommendations for PBOT Policy and Investments

PBOT takes the City of Portland's commitment to addressing racial inequities seriously and will use the themes of the Walking While Black Focus Groups to transform the way we develop transportation policy and plan for a more equitable transportation system.

## The City of Portland is committed to the following Racial Equity Goals:

- 1. We will end racial disparities within city government, so there is fairness in hiring and promotions, greater opportunities in contracting, and equitable services to all residents.**
- 2. We will strengthen outreach, public engagement, and access to City services for communities of color and immigrant and refugee communities, and support or change existing services using racial equity best practices.**
- 3. We will collaborate with communities and institutions to eliminate racial inequity in all areas of government, including education, criminal justice, environmental justice, health, housing, transportation, and economic success.**

Based on the focus group discussions, follow-up conversations and feedback provided during other outreach and engagement efforts in the Black community (which have become more regular as a result of the 2017 focus group discussions), PBOT will begin to act on the following recommendations to address the input and concerns that have been elevated:

## 1. Ensure that PedPDX investments and strategies address the infrastructure concerns raised by Black Portlanders

- Research innovative transportation infrastructure, education, enforcement and other programmatic that are being implemented in communities of color in other cities to address public safety and infrastructure concerns.
- Include an emphasis on lighting needs and infrastructure deficiencies in communities with the highest concentrations of Black Portlanders.
- Consider how transportation infrastructure triggers behavior that impedes on the safety of Black Portlanders (as discussed in Racial Bias in Drivers' Yielding Behavior at Crosswalks: Understanding the Effect) and seek roadway designs, enforcement practices and educational campaigns that address this behavior.
- Follow up with focus group participants to report on how their participation contributed to PedPDX.

## 2. Strengthen community partnerships + leadership development opportunities for Black Portlanders

- Acknowledge the role that the City of Portland, and PBOT specifically, have played in furthering disparate impacts on the economic, health, educational and overall wellness outcomes that have impacted Black Portlanders for multiple generations.
- Develop public involvement strategies that support deeper engagement with community-

based organizations led by and serving the Black community.

- Identify opportunities to amplify Black leadership roles across PBOT, including employment and public advisory body appointments.
- Ensure that community partnerships and leadership development opportunities provide and leverage resources that incentivize and sustain engagement over time.
- Continue to prioritize outreach and communications focused on engaging, empowering and informing the Black community.

### **3. Further research focused on understanding the Black experience in Portland**

- Disaggregate and analyze demographic data available from multiple sources, ranging from the U.S. Census to PBOT's community surveys.
- Review and develop strategies that respond to community-led research and policy recommendations, including the PAALF People's Plan, the Urban League of Portland's State of Black Oregon and the Coalition of Communities of Color's Unsettling Profiles Research Papers on African American and African Immigrant and Refugees in Multnomah County.
- Identify gaps in data and opportunities to partner with research institutions, community based organizations and other government agencies.
- Ensure that PBOT staff is regularly informed by multidisciplinary research, including housing and public health, so that transportation

investments and outcomes contribute to overall community wellness and resilience.

- Conduct more community engagement activities like PedPDX walks.

### **4. Collaborate with City and regional partners to address hate and racially-motivated behavior as a transportation issue**

- Formalize partnership with the Office of Community and Civic Life and the Portland United Against Hate Coalition to align strategies and share data.
- Track and report how PBOT programs and desired outcomes are impacted by upticks in hate and racially-motivated events happening in community.
- Reinforce that PBOT is a safe place for diverse communities and diverse staff within its workforce.

### **5. Develop tools that evaluate and address community impacts, promote community benefits and mitigate unintended outcomes**

- Provide clarity on how PBOT defines and is working towards a more equitable transportation system.
- Work with City and community partners to develop tools that track and evaluate the impacts and outcomes of core PBOT programs and projects in communities of color.
- Develop a plan that clearly communicates community benefits, including job contracting, and community grant opportunities.

Do you have other ideas for PBOT and PedPDX?

Contact: [PedPDX@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:PedPDX@portlandoregon.gov)



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