

Dear Transportation Commissioner Hardesty, Mayor Wheeler, and Commissioners Mapps, Rubio, and Ryan:

The Bureau and Budget Advisory Committee (BBAC) for the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) presents the following recommendations for PBOT's FY 2021-2022 budget priorities. As a collection of Portland residents from a broad range of personal and professional backgrounds, the BBAC supports investments that promote transportation justice, safety, and climate action. The overlapping crises of this past year – COVID-19, unemployment, police brutality, a surge in homelessness, and the reduction of many local government services – has only increased the importance of these investments, particularly for communities of color and underserved neighborhoods. We recognize the historic nature of these challenges, and acknowledge that they demand a bold response from all levels of government. However, the BBAC calls upon the City of Portland to lead the way on a just and strong recovery – and we urge PBOT to use this moment as an opportunity to renew its commitment to these three areas:

- **Equity:** Correcting the harmful legacies of racism, displacement, and marginalization that led to underinvestment in communities of color.
- **Safety:** Designing streets to protect our most vulnerable users and make them safe for all.
- **Climate Action:** Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and working toward a carbon-neutral transportation system.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and falling City revenue, we understand that PBOT faces a series of difficult choices. Below are BBAC's recommendations for the FY 2021-2022 budget:

#### [Protect the Lighting Portland for Safety Initiative:](#)

BBAC urges Council to maintain funding for the Lighting Portland for Safety initiative at FY 2020-2021 levels. The proposed cuts to the Lighting Portland for Safety initiative would devastate this important program, limiting installations to only 275 new streetlights -- an 84% decrease from the program's initial goal of 1,800. This is unacceptable, and would show a stunning disregard for the City's own safety, equity, and climate goals.

As BBAC, PBOT, and Council have all noted in the past, the lack of adequate street lighting is a significant contributor to deadly traffic crashes and disproportionately impacts communities of color and neighborhoods in East Portland. PBOT's data indicates that the majority of fatal and severe pedestrian crashes occur in low-light conditions. Moreover, pedestrian-friendly streetlights improve safety for all roadway users and encourage more Portlanders to make car-free trips, a key climate objective.

#### [Provide Capital Set-Aside funding for the ADA Curb Ramp Program:](#)

ADA curb ramps serve important equity and accessibility goals, and Capital Set-Aside funding is a critical component of the ADA curb ramp program framework. Without this support, PBOT will need to make deeper cuts, potentially putting the program at risk of failing to meet City obligations. BBAC therefore urges Council to allocate Capital Set-Aside funds to supplement this important program.

### Protect Labor and jobs:

Reduction in PBOT jobs would undo efforts made to enhance diversity in the city's workforce as well as adversely affect current program function and implementation. Reductions in personnel could also potentially slow down response times for those areas of program offers which operate in a time sensitive manner.

### Other Investment Priorities:

- ***Communities of color and historically under-resourced neighborhoods:***

Programs that invest in and cultivate relationships with underserved populations and areas of Portland should be protected and expanded. This includes communities of color and neighborhoods in East Portland. We urge PBOT to foster better outcomes and reduce the disproportionate impact of traffic violence, transportation costs, and climate change on these communities.

- ***Projects and Programs that Directly Pursue the Goals of Vision Zero:***

Traffic violence reached a 24-year high in 2020: 56 individuals were killed within the City of Portland, including 19 pedestrians and 5 bicyclists. Sadly, this pace has increased thus far in 2021, with 4 individuals losing their life in the first two weeks of the new year. This is unacceptable. BBAC understands that many of these fatalities occur on ODOT- owned streets. However, this level of traffic violence is symptomatic of larger failures in the City's approach to safety. BBAC urges PBOT to renew its commitment to reducing fatalities in the City of Portland. This means ongoing investment, evaluating and re- designing programs when needed, and doubling down on the City's commitment to promote safe and accessible alternatives to driving.

- ***Programs with large impacts for their level of investment:***

BBAC believes that PBOT should preserve and expand programs that generate revenue or are revenue neutral (e.g., parking districts). Moreover, BBAC strongly supports programs that provide transportation alternatives and subsidies to encourage residents to bike, walk, and use transit (e.g. the Transportation Wallet, discounted BIKETOWN trips, etc.). Through their focus on managing transportation demand and shifting trips from cars to cleaner, safer, and more sustainable modes, these programs have an outsized positive impact on pursuing PBOT and City goals.

- ***Projects that expand Portland's multimodal transportation system:***

BBAC supports the continued expansion of safe, accessible, and equitable multimodal infrastructure. This includes building out a complete bicycle network that is safe and connected, prioritizing walkability and pedestrian safety, and ensuring safe routes to school. We also support Commissioner Hardesty in her plans to open a variety of car- free streets in the urban core.

- ***Roadway and sidewalk maintenance:***

BBAC supports ongoing investment in maintenance to our current infrastructure to ensure the City keeps its existing systems in good repair and to avoid costly repairs in the future. While we believe some reductions can be explored through removing vacant positions (where they exist), we urge PBOT to continue basic maintenance initiatives to the extent possible, particularly in geographic areas that have been historically underserved by infrastructure investments.

### Potential Areas of Reduction

- **Street system:**

Although BBAC emphasizes the importance of PBOT's street system program area for larger PBOT goals, we believe there are some areas of this program that could absorb reductions (e.g., street markings).

- **Contract services:**

BBAC believes that some contracts could be reduced to lower service levels (e.g. Streetcar mall maintenance contract, Sunday Parkways, etc.). However, BBAC also urges PBOT to protect specific contracts and service levels that work to directly improve safety or may disproportionately impact communities of color.

Although we acknowledge short-term reductions are necessary, BBAC urges PBOT to avoid permanent cuts that will establish lower baseline levels for future budget discussions. Moreover, if the federal government provides additional aid for local governments in the coming months, we hope that the City can use some of this aid to support PBOT program areas that receive reduced funding for the 2021-2022 budget cycle.

### Moving Forward: Recovery and Future Investments

Achieving the goals in PBOT's Strategic Plan depends upon PBOT's ability to invest sufficient resources. PBOT has acknowledged for several years that its long-term revenue outlook is uncertain, with the gas tax and other revenue sources falling in real value. Although the City could not have predicted the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis in many ways simply accelerated revenue challenges that already existed and provided a picture of a financially unsustainable future.

BBAC urges PBOT and the City of Portland to pursue new sources of revenue – at the local, state, and federal level – to compensate for shortfalls in the near-term and stabilize the long-term financial outlook. This will be particularly important as electric vehicles assume a larger share of the market and the City continues to promote non-car modes of travel (both of which will further reduce gas tax receipts). We encourage PBOT to implement new and creative opportunities (such as roadway and congestion pricing) to generate revenue from the private use of public rights of way.

BBAC's recommendations reflect our view that City investments must pursue transportation justice. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis must not derail our collective efforts. We urge PBOT to continue to invest in programs that move beyond transportation paradigms of the past, and that enable all Portlanders to travel in safe and sustainable ways.

Respectfully,

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