

Recommendations of the Portland Bureau of Transportation Bureau and Budget Advisory Committee for FY 2024-25

We must continue to make both strategic improvements and prioritize maintenance to ensure a functional system that will serve Portlanders now and in the future.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation's Advisory Committee, representing diverse community interests, supports equitable and sustainable transportation investments. We recommend budget strategies for PBOT FY 2024-25 and sharing our assessment that the bureau's capacity to mitigate cuts is exhausted. With traffic deaths on the rise it is critical that we continue adequately fund maintenance and safety. While the proposed investments from the Portland Clean Energy Fund will help support important projects, the long-term trend of divestment is statement that council has deprioritized Vision Zero and maintenance of our transportation infrastructure which is critical to Portland's future. We urge the Council reverse course and to address infrastructure underfunding now, initiating the needed rebuild of our city's transportation system.

Background

Over the past decade, PBOT's funding and service delivery have declined, risking asset deterioration and hampering our shift to a sustainable, resilient system.

Portlanders experience service and infrastructure declines in many forms: unsafe pavement for all modalities, delays in repair, derelict vehicles and hazards that are slow to be removed, insufficient and delayed response to inclement weather events, congestion that creates emissions, and safety improvements and poor lighting. These are symptoms of transportation system with aging assets and a city that has grown substantially over the past two decades.

Rising costs, reduced funding and aging infrastructure have led to this situation, similar to Portland Parks' challenges. Further budget cuts will worsen the disinvestment in essential transportation infrastructure and run contrary to Portland's climate and equity goals for this essential public function.

Investing for the long term

While there have been notable and needed improvements in non-vehicular safety, these mask the underlying asset degradation and service delays. We advise prioritizing investments that include ongoing maintenance and bolster our severe weather response, ensuring the system remains functional for current and future Portlanders. Neglecting long-term maintenance will lead to costly failures, impacting all, especially vulnerable groups like cyclists, pedestrians, public transit users, the differently abled and the elderly.

Capacity to mitigate cuts is exhausted

Our assessment reveals that PBOT's capacity for budget cuts through simple efficiencies or unfilled positions is exhausted. Such measures, while temporarily preserving jobs or projects, lead to skill and knowledge gaps and long-term understaffing, causing service delays. Moreover, it's uncertain if a new city administrative structure will bring future efficiencies, so we cannot depend on hypothetical savings to address the broader issue of underfunding.

Budget Priorities:

In alignment with Bureau, City and public priorities we support:

- **A system safer for all users** through service delivery and investment in maintenance of PBOT assets with higher prioritization for projects with the biggest impacts on all users.
- **Financial stability** for our transportation system to support thriving climate-resilient communities.
- **Completion of linkages** that will create a measurable **increase in mode shifting** or decrease in traffic. We ask that the impact of linkage investments on mode shifting, specifically increasing non-vehicular traffic be measured and reported.

Recommendations:

To address systemic underfunding and maintenance backlogs in our transportation system, we propose near- and long-term recommendations for financial stability, ensuring Portland's future transportation needs are met.

For FY 2024-25 BBAC urges Council to:

- **Maintain 2023-24 funding levels** to prevent further loss of service delivery, staff expertise and asset quality by shifting city funds from other areas.
- **Approve a parking meter rate increases cover the short-term deficit** and to adjust for inflation on an ongoing basis and parking permit fees to allow for program cost-recovery.
- **Create a plan for substantially improving and funding a city-wide response to severe weather events** including post-event cleanup.
- **Consider the adoption of use fee if it is equitable** and dedicated to address the maintenance backlog which will cost exponentially more to address in the coming years.

Long term BBAC urges Council to:

- **Shift to budgeting holistically** with a larger, more accessible general fund that all bureaus utilize for ongoing funding. Current practice of dedicating revenues within bureaus where not legally required, restricts use and collaboration.
- **Seek revenue sources that capture non-resident as well as resident use.**

- **Use non-traditional funding** such as PCEF, to support aligned projects that can be shifted from existing funding, until systemic revenue and maintenance challenges can be addressed.
- **Examine all Bureau funds** for future potential to address critical needs. With nearly 80% of PBOT funds designated as restricted, PBOT has resorted to allocating reductions to unrestricted funds which are operationally critical for service delivery, maintenance and programming. The Bureau with guidance from Council, should remove restrictions on funds that can be accessed in the next five years for appropriation to critical needs.

Investment

BBAC urges Council to:

- **Limit new projects without comprehensive maintenance plans** in consideration of the substantial existing maintenance needs. The strategy of investing in low cost, highly visible or temporary projects, such as bollards, without identified support for the maintenance is unsustainable and should be avoided.
- **Maintain and improve the delivery of critical services that most impact non-vehicular users** including: street sweeping, leaf removal, pothole repair and lighting that make our streets safer and more usable for all. These investments are aligned with creating safer streets for all.
- **Focus on equity and resilience by improving seismic safety of assets**, especially in North Portland, where residents face significant risks within the next five years.

These recommendations aim for a well-maintained, safer, and equitable transportation system that with additional investments will reduce traffic deaths and build for a sustainable future. We urge the Council to enable PBOT to secure new, sustainable revenue for maintenance, facilitating investments in climate-responsive and diverse mobility options.

Respectfully,

PBOT Bureau & Budget Advisory Committee