

# 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



December 13, 2023

To: Commissioner Mingus Mapps  
PBOT Director Millicent Williams

Cc: Mayor Ted Wheeler

The members of the Bicycle Advisory Committee are writing to address a series of recent events regarding bicycling infrastructure and this committee's relationship with City leadership. We take this step because while we remain committed to supporting Portland's work to make it safer, easier, and more efficient for everyone to get around, we are deeply concerned about the direction of current leadership.

We know that the city has goals to increase bicycle ridership and mode share, reduce crashes, and improve the climate. We also acknowledge the City of Portland Bureau of Transportation faces significant financial challenges. That is why it is troubling that the Bureau recently decided to use its limited resources to remove existing bicycling infrastructure. Also troubling is the fact that the Bureau is removing protected bicycling infrastructure, in clear opposition to the 2035 Comprehensive Plan policy 9.6, during a measured decline in bicycle commuting, and a sobering increase in deaths from traffic crashes since the City Council adopted Vision Zero in 2016. Further still, it reverses key progress in implementing projects envisioned and identified as priorities in plans broadly and intentionally engaging Portlanders like the 2035 Transportation System Plan and Central City in Motion.

Most troubling is that these decisions appear connected to recent Council- and director-level leadership changes at the Bureau. Despite years of effort by multiple commissioners and directors working with neighborhoods and communities to create and adopt plans and policies that promote bicycling, it appears the current direction is misaligned. Is there any other infrastructure that can simply be removed by fiat? Can you also remove traffic signals and stop signs? It is antithetical to public safety to remove any infrastructure that is known to be safe, that is identified—and indeed prioritized—in city design guidance, that requires a Professional Engineer to design, and that is approved by the City Engineer to build. It undermines our Vision Zero goals and breaches community trust to remove proven safe infrastructure from a high crash corridor such as NW/SW Broadway.

Recently, you proposed removal of the Broadway bike lane and the removal of recently installed and long-planned bicycling facilities along NE 33rd Avenue. In fact, buffered bike lanes on NE 33rd were specifically mentioned at the BAC's December 13, 2022 meeting.<sup>1</sup> These decisions are problematic in and of themselves and are more problematic because of the ways you chose to

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.portland.gov/transportation/bicycle-committee/documents/5-year-paving-list-presentation/download](http://www.portland.gov/transportation/bicycle-committee/documents/5-year-paving-list-presentation/download)

respond to – or ignore – community concerns. We're further concerned about and disheartened by whispers of Rose Lanes that may be losing support and projects like 72nd Ave through Rose City Park where we experienced whiplash as bikeway construction was paused in mid-September and then abruptly reversed. These types of projects and programs are critical to supporting the city's goals around mobility, climate, and land use. It is unclear what is driving these decisions beyond uplifting the voices of people with a more auto-centric perspective in a manner inconsistent with City policies, rather than providing citizens with options that enhance community equity, safety and network contiguity.

In the case of the Broadway bike lane, the process, timing, and accountability were less than transparent. From your actions it is implausible to conclude anything other than that the desires of a handful of downtown interests superseded adopted policy and safety. We acknowledge the importance of communicating with neighbors before installing infrastructure. We recognize that addressing racial justice requires consideration of how past actions must influence current and future decisions. And it's difficult not to notice the contrast between how staff assumed accountability in the discussion surrounding NE 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue within 48 hours of the issue coming to people's attention with your efforts to shift accountability for, and generally obfuscate, the initial Broadway decision.

The financial crisis and need for additional funding for the City via sources that are in use elsewhere also serve to compromise the public support that will be necessary to overcome this challenge. How are people who advocate on behalf of safer bicycling infrastructure supposed to interpret recent actions with the current funding lens? If \$32 million is found to keep PBOT in a less bad place, how concerned should they be that this situation will recur? It is unclear how PBOT intends to generate the groundswell of support necessary if the projects that are undertaken remove or diminish current facilities.

We remain concerned that under your leadership the Bureau jumped to a decision to remove recently-installed infrastructure before attempting other approaches to address neighbors' concerns, just as it jumped to a decision to remove the protected bike lane along Broadway and seemed poised to revert on commitments for the design of Willamette Boulevard. Further documents made public through the media communicate that PBOT staff were unequivocally stating that there was a large menu of options to choose from and several that would have adhered to policies, maintained the utility of the facilities, and provided safety improvements for users.

As the leaders of the Bureau of Transportation, we ask - at the very least - you begin contacting the Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee (notifying the Chair and Vice Chair at minimum) before submitting a work order or soliciting a bid on any project that would significantly modify the safety of any bike lane throughout the city. In fact, given our role to advise the bureaus and City Council on all biking-related matters, committee participation should be part of every bicycling project. We ask that you provide us with the information we need to perform this role (outlined

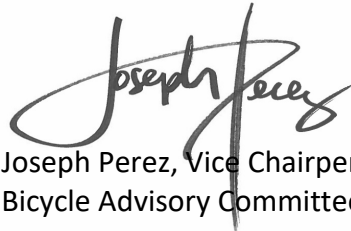
in a forthcoming letter to staff) and commit to improved transparency and candor with our committee. We ask you to recognize the excellent planning work that the Bureau has done and make a public commitment to implementing existing policy to promote bicycling or to commit to a transparent and adequately-noticed effort to change those policies. This includes committing to: finding a path to getting to yes with neighborhood members on the 33rd Avenue bicycle lanes, reinitiating the 72nd Avenue project, completing planned improvements NW/SW Broadway and SW 4th Avenue, implementing and expanding the Rose Lanes program, and constructing a world class bicycle facility on Willamette Boulevard.

Absent these commitments from you, and in this environment where trust has been broken, there is little reason for the members of the BAC to provide you needed support for the critical decisions you will soon face. People who ride bicycles will have significant reason to consider who may be positioned under the new form of government to advance long-adopted transportation policy that includes a robust, safe, and accessible system of bicycling infrastructure. However, we remain hopeful and optimistic that you will choose to unequivocally and transparently address our concerns by intentionally shifting the direction of current leadership through these commitments.

Sincerely,



Ally Holmqvist, Chairperson  
Bicycle Advisory Committee



Joseph Perez, Vice Chairperson  
Bicycle Advisory Committee