

# PBOT

PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION

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February 8, 2023

To: Tressie Word, BES  
From: Roger Geller, PBOT  
Subject: **Addressing Title 33.430.250.C.2. Identifying that the public benefits of the proposal outweigh all significant detrimental impacts for E07383.**

## **Main thrust of argument:**

Demonstration of public benefit. Assumes that achieving city policy goals provide public benefit. That the trail is a public benefit is clear from its role in helping realize multiple policies and goals, notably those that benefit from increased active transportation and access to Major Public Trails.

Potential detrimental impacts. Residents proximate to the trail have suggested several potential significant detrimental impacts that will result from the trail. They posit increased crime, vandalism, drug use and similar impacts to personal safety and quality of life. For trail projects across the US these and similar concerns are often expressed pre-construction. As below articles indicate, such negative impacts have not occurred. Instead, residents initially in opposition experience the benefits of proximity to trails. These benefits include the easy access to the trail and increased property values.

## **Demonstration of public benefits**

### **Overall benefits**

This trail provides public benefit in the following ways:

1. It contributes to the city's goal of improving opportunities for Portlanders to lead healthy, active lives
2. It contributes to the city's goals of lowering carbon emissions, reducing household costs and providing access to open spaces
3. It improves access to a Major Public Trail
4. Its development with the BES project is the most prudent use of public resources in achieving stated city goals.

The desirability of these outcomes—and how to achieve them—are spelled out in multiple city goals and policies related to urban form, transportation, and public trails. City goals and policies are clear about the importance of reducing automobile use, the public good that is realized through that reduction, and the role that bicycling and walking play as key tools to achieving this reduction<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Multiple Comprehensive Plan goals and policies elevate the importance of increased bicycling and walking, including [emphasis added]:

**Comprehensive Plan Guiding Principle: Human Health** Avoid or minimize negative health impacts and improve opportunities for Portlanders to lead healthy, active lives.



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## The role of the trail connection in achieving transportation goals

The trail connection is integral to the above desired outcomes. Its' bicycle and pedestrian classifications ("City Bikeway" and "Neighborhood Walkway", respectively) identify it as a priority element in Portland's transportation networks<sup>2</sup>. This short segment is part of a longer bicycle and pedestrian corridor running north along SE 115<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It contributes a network element to the type of urban form envisioned in city policy for encouraging active transportation<sup>3</sup>. This urban form is based on network connections as well as on the quality of individual facilities. Portland has clear policies about the importance of network connectivity, calling out especially challenges with connectivity gaps in the Eastern Neighborhood Pattern Area<sup>4</sup>. This connection addresses a significant gap, as shown in Figure 1.

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**GOAL 9.D: Environmentally sustainable** The transportation system increasingly uses active transportation, renewable energy, or electricity from renewable sources, achieves adopted carbon reduction targets, and reduces air pollution, water pollution, noise, and Portlanders' reliance on private vehicles.

**GOAL 9.E: Equitable transportation** The transportation system provides all Portlanders options to move about the city and meet their daily needs by using a variety of safe, efficient, convenient, and affordable modes of transportation. Transportation investments are responsive to the distinct needs of each community.

**GOAL 9.F: Positive health outcomes** The transportation system promotes positive health outcomes and minimizes negative impacts for all Portlanders by supporting active transportation, physical activity, and community and individual health.

**Policy 9.5 Mode share goals and Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) reduction.** Increase the share of trips made using active and low-carbon transportation modes. Reduce VMT to achieve targets set in the most current Climate Action Plan and Transportation System Plan, and meet or exceed Metro's mode share and VMT targets.

**Policy 9.6 Transportation strategy for people movement.** Implement a prioritization of modes for people movement by making transportation system decisions according to the following ordered list: 1. Walking 2. Bicycling 3. Transit 4. Fleets of electric, fully automated, multiple passenger vehicles 5. Other shared vehicles 6. Low or no occupancy vehicles, fossil-fueled non-transit vehicles

**Policy 9.17 Pedestrian transportation.** Encourage walking as the most attractive mode of transportation for most short trips, within neighborhoods and to centers, corridors, and major destinations, and as a means for accessing transit.

**Policy 9.20 Bicycle transportation.** Create conditions that make bicycling more attractive than driving for most trips of approximately three miles or less.

<sup>2</sup> The importance of this segment is evidenced by its classification as both a City Bikeway and a Neighborhood Walkway in the Transportation System Plan. The segment was initially identified as a priority in the *Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030* (2010). It was then incorporated into the City's *Transportation System Plan* in 2016, and then into the *2035 Comprehensive Plan* (2018). It was identified as a pedestrian priority route in "*PedPDX*" (Portland's Pedestrian Plan) in 2019.

<sup>3</sup> **From Comprehensive Plan Principle Human Health: Build City Greenways** A network of safe, accessible, and attractive streets, trails, parks, and open spaces can make it easier to choose healthier lifestyle choices. This network complements complete communities by encouraging active living, community interaction and nature in neighborhoods. Walking, biking and using public transit become the easy choice. Driving less reduces household costs, improves personal and environmental health, and lowers carbon emissions and air pollution. A transportation network that integrates nature into neighborhoods increases access to the outdoors, provides corridors for wildlife movement, and helps manage and clean stormwater will significantly improve environmental health. Access to open spaces and parks increases opportunities for recreation, relaxation and learning.

<sup>4</sup> **From the Comprehensive Plan: Eastern Neighborhood Pattern Area** ....Some policies address the opportunities and challenges presented by the area's large blocks, deep lots, gaps in pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and wide street corridors....

**Policy 9.47 Connectivity.** Establish an interconnected, multimodal transportation system to serve centers and other significant locations. Promote a logical, direct, and connected street system through street spacing guidelines and district specific street plans found in the Transportation System Plan, and prioritize access to specific places by certain modes in accordance with policies 9.6 and 9.7.

The *Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030* discusses the importance of creating a fine-grained bikeway network in encouraging bicycle use<sup>5</sup>. The 115<sup>th</sup> corridor and its connections to the Springwater Corridor is an essential part of the network connectivity in this part of town.

The importance of the trail is the network connection it makes to the Springwater Corridor Trail and to multiple points to the north, east and west. The Springwater Trail carries the highest classifications for bicycling and walking (“Major City Bikeway” and “Major City Walkway”, respectively). In its own right it is an important element of these transportation networks. The importance of a fully developed transportation network is identified in city policies that talk about creating an urban form that contributes to active transportation and the importance of network connectivity. Without this trail connection, the network is broken, access is diminished and active transportation becomes less attractive than with the connection.<sup>6</sup>

The 115<sup>th</sup> Ave bikeway will extend from the Springwater Trail north to the Midway Town Center. It will continue north along 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue and connect to bikeways recently developed along SE Cherry Blossom in the Gateway Regional Center. Active transportation connections to commercial centers is a key Comprehensive Plan strategy to achieving the city’s goals. As noted in Policy 9.47 (see footnote 4), connections to centers is a city policy. By connecting to the Springwater, this trail makes the bicycling connection to centers more accessible to people of all ages and abilities<sup>7</sup>.

### **The role of the trail in providing access to a Major Public Trail**

Portland’s policies recognize a dual role for Portland’s trails. They are considered elements of a multi-modal transportation system as well as recreational facilities.<sup>8</sup> This small trail segment honors both those functions in providing access to the Springwater Trail as a Major City Bikeway and Major City Walkway, and also as an opportunity for recreation.

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**9.47.e** Provide bike and pedestrian connections at approximately 330 feet intervals on public easements or rights-of-way when full street connections are not possible, except where prevented by barriers such as topography, railroads, freeways, or environmental constraints. Bike and pedestrian connections that cross protected water features should have an average spacing of no more than 530 feet, unless exceptional habitat quality or length of connection prevents a connection.

<sup>5</sup> **From the *Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030*: Section 3.1.2 Form a fine-grained bikeway network.** “A study of best practices from the world’s most successful bicycling cities reveals that a dense bikeway network has the advantages of limiting out-of-direction travel and providing a variety of route options to each destination. Having more route options allows bicyclists of different skill and comfort levels to identify routes best suited to their transportation needs. Streets optimized for bicycle travel translate to savings in time and energy that help to make bicycling more attractive than driving.

“The density of Portland’s recommended bikeway network varies from district to district. Spacing guidelines identified in the survey of best practices suggest that a bikeway be provided every 800 feet in urban areas (about three Portland blocks). While this standard can be met in many areas in Portland, it can’t be achieved in all Portland neighborhoods due to disconnected roadway networks, physical barriers or terrain constraints. In such cases, the bikeway corridors have been spaced as closely as possible while minimizing out-of-direction travel and steep slopes.”

<sup>6</sup> **Comprehensive Plan Chapter 3: Urban Form** Portland’s identity now and in the future is significantly shaped by the design and physical structure of the city and its neighborhoods. How people live and get around is partly determined by the location of services and other destinations and the arrangement and design of buildings and connections provided by streets, trails, and other public spaces. Together these design characteristics help determine whether: (1) a community is walkable, (2) children have safe places to play, (3) people have places to gather, and (4) businesses are easy to access.

<sup>7</sup> **Policy 9.21 Accessible bicycle system** Create a bicycle transportation system that is safe, comfortable, and accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

<sup>8</sup> **Comprehensive Plan Chapter 8 Trails** The City of Portland’s trail system is a key part of both the City’s multi-modal transportation system and its recreation system. Trails within this system take many different forms and are located within the right-of-way and on public and private property. Trails provide Portlanders with local and regional pedestrian and bicycle connections and access to many key destinations within the city. They also provide a place to recreate and allow Portlanders

This short trail segment also provides direct access to the Springwater Corridor Trail for a wide swath of Portland residents. For, in addition to direct access to Town and Regional Centers, the 115<sup>th</sup> corridor connects to neighborhoods the entire north-south breadth of Portland. Because of that this corridor will create a direct connection to the Springwater Trail for many. This improved access for Portland's neighborhoods is also a clear benefit recognized in city policies<sup>9</sup>.

### **The benefit of construction this alignment with the BES project**

Not to be overlooked is the efficient expenditure of public resources associated with constructing this trail segment in the proposed alignment with the wetland enhancement project. PBOT is currently considering near-term funding sources to implement the corridor. Previous planning and design assumed this trail segment would be built by this BES project. Portland's Comprehensive Plan discusses efficiency of service delivery, which would be realized through this type of coordinated delivery<sup>10</sup>.

The Bureau of Transportation and Bureau of Environmental Services have been coordinating planning for this trail. PBOT's designs and initial cost estimates for the 115<sup>th</sup> corridor project assumed that this challenging segment would be built by BES.

Other potential access points to the Springwater Trail include SE 111<sup>th</sup> and SE 117<sup>th</sup>. The first is classified as a City Bikeway, the latter is not. They are not good candidates for efficient use of public resources. SE 11<sup>th</sup> is challenged by existing traffic volumes (~3500-5000) and speeds (85<sup>th</sup>% speeds of 36-37 mph), either of which would necessitate some type of separated bicycle lane treatment. The narrow roadway width of the existing roadway—26' south of Holgate—would necessitate significant widening of the roadway. This makes 111<sup>th</sup> an unlikely candidate for bikeway development. By contrast, 115<sup>th</sup> with its low traffic volumes (fewer than 400 cars/day south of Bush Street) make it a surer near-term candidate for development for less expensive development as a neighborhood greenway.

The other potential immediate connection—SE 117<sup>th</sup>—is an unpaved road. The expense associated with its development would be prohibitive for PBOT. The right of way would have to be developed to roadway standards (as automobiles will drive on it) and would include extensive stormwater treatment. Using 117<sup>th</sup> rather than the readily available 115<sup>th</sup> would be an unnecessarily inefficient expenditure of public dollars. Development of 117<sup>th</sup> is also likely to raise the same types of objections associated with the 115<sup>th</sup> project.

In conclusion, development of this trail segment offers many significant benefits. Not implementing the pathway connection would deform the transportation network connections, make it more difficult to access a Major City

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to experience the city's parks and natural areas. Trails play a particularly important role in meeting pedestrian and bicyclist mobility and connectivity needs in western neighborhoods.

**Policy 8.53 Public trails.** Establish, improve, and maintain a citywide system of local and regional public trails that provide transportation and/or recreation options and are a component of larger network of facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians, and recreational users.

<sup>9</sup> **Policy 8.54 Trail system connectivity.** Plan, improve, and maintain the citywide trail system so that it connects and improves access to Portland's neighborhoods, commercial areas, employment centers, schools, parks, natural areas, recreational facilities, regional destinations, the regional trail system, and other key places that Portlanders access in their daily lives.

**Policy 8.57 Public access requirements.** Require public access and improvement of Major Public Trails as shown in Figure 8-2 — Major Public Trails. Major Public Trails include regional trails and other significant trail connections that provide for the movement of pedestrians, cyclists, and other users for recreation and transportation purposes.

<sup>10</sup> **GOAL 9.H: Cost effectiveness** The City analyzes and prioritizes capital and operating investments to cost effectively achieve the above goals while responsibly managing and protecting our past investments in existing assets.

**Policy 8.9 Internal coordination.** Coordinate planning and provision of public facilities and services, including land acquisition, among City agencies, including internal service bureaus.

Bikeway and Major Public Trail, and not provide as good active connections to commercial districts. Making bicycle transportation less accessible would make it more difficult to lead a healthy, active life and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By not contributing to city policies and goals, and directly thwarting the policies directly the city to build the trail, not building the trail arguably creates a dis-benefit to the city.

## Potential Detrimental Impacts

### Negative concerns pre-construction are common to US trail projects. Such concerns are not realized

Some residents proximate to the proposed trail connection have expressed strong concern about potential detrimental impacts associated with its development. These include with undesirable actions resulting from increased active transportation access to their neighborhood. These concerns are common to US trail projects and have been well documented—and consistently debunked—through both academic research as well as by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Rails-to-Trails has been advocating and assessing the impacts of trails in the US since 1986.

Some common concerns expressed pre-implementation to trail projects by those living closest to them: Crime. Vandalism. Drug Use. According to multiple articles by Rails-to Trails such concerns did not materialize, while benefits did, including increased access to nature, health and increased property values. Below is a sample of excerpts from articles about expressed concerns regarding trail projects and the actual outcomes.

Admittedly, both the concerns expressed, and positive resolutions are anecdotal. However, the anecdotes indicate that the concerns are generally not realized with the development of the projects.

Article reference	Concern Expressed	Positive results
<a href="#">“Utah’s Jordan River Parkway Trail”</a>	In the beginning, there was a lot of push-back among the neighbors along the river. They were worried the trail could possibly bring crime into the residential areas. That was one of the things we had to overcome.”	The resistance waned when residents realized that they loved getting out on the trails near their homes, Larsen said, and when their land values went up because of the trail proximity.
<a href="#">“Kansas’ Flint Hills Trail State Park”</a>	In 2005, there was a tremendous amount of opposition, but none of the things they claimed the trail would cause—crime, drug use, vandalism—has happened.	Over time, the unrealized fears surrounding the trail dissipated, and support for the project grew. “There are people on the trail all the time, no matter where you go,” said Walker. “And they come from all over.”
<a href="#">“Pathway to Prosperity: Missouri’s Katy Trail is a Beautiful Model for Commerce”</a>	Like many rail-trail projects, the Katy Trail had early opponents among rural residents who thought the trail would bring crime and other problems to their homes, farms and communities.	Farmers parked their tractors on the line to block us at the time, but those same people see the economic and recreation and lifestyle benefits now. One of the most ardent [former] opponents of the Katy Trail stood up in a meeting about the Rock Island proposals and told folks who live along that line that 99 percent of people on the Katy Trail are good people. No one’s stealing watermelons or leaving litter like they feared.
<a href="#">Indiana’s Pumpkinvine Nature Trail</a>	“...the local paper got wind of what was going on—because we were working with the parks department—and the opposition started coming out of the woodwork,” remembers Yoder. “They said the trail would be a magnet for crime, trespassing and littering.”	“There was a lot less opposition once we got the first 1.7-mile section done,” says Yoder. “It was the most important thing we did. They could really see the benefits of it....”

<p><a href="#">Grant's Trail, Missouri</a></p>		<p>Grant's Trail is very multi-use," says Kevin Keach, project and operations manager for Trailnet. "You'll see everything from cyclists to bladders to walkers and baby carriages; the whole gamut of users. Even people who were not for the trail originally, including some who worried that it would bring crime, now call it 'their trail.'"</p>
<p><a href="#">Florida's Blountstown Greenway Bike Path</a></p>	<p>"Opponents were worried about potential crime associated with the trail. They worried that there would be people loitering up and down the trail," says David Melvin, owner of Melvin Engineering, the firm that guided the trail's development."</p>	<p>"But they came around after the trail was complete. They couldn't catch the vision of it until they really saw the use. Now it's a huge source of pride for the community."</p>
<p><a href="#">Michigan's Dequindre Cut Greenway</a></p>	<p>"The immediate universal reaction to the idea of building a trail there was, 'You are out of your freaking mind,'" recalls Tom Woiwode, director of the GreenWays Initiative of the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan</p>	<p>The Dequindre Cut—once a haven for derelicts and drug activity and now a well-loved showpiece</p>
<p><a href="#">Caring For a Common Space: Research Connects Urban Greening With Safer Neighborhoods</a></p>	<p>One of the most stubborn obstacles to building new trails, particularly in big cities where crime and public safety are often dominating concerns, is the perception that such pathways encourage or increase incidents of vandalism, assault, vagrancy and theft in nearby neighborhoods.</p>	<p>Which is why a groundbreaking <a href="#">study on the effects of urban greening in Philadelphia</a>, recently published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, has drawn so much attention from urban planners, community groups and sociologists alike. The study puts solid data behind what we have long known: that bringing human traffic, community activity and opportunities for recreation to once neglected, defaced areas brightens unlit spaces, making them safer and increasing their 'value' - whether measured in terms of real estate indices or appeal to the community.</p>
<p><a href="#">Working with Opposition and Neighbors</a></p>		<p>A large majority of trail opponents find that their fears about the trail never materialize, and numerous studies refute that rail-trails increase crime, lower property values or introduce new liability claims. In fact, adjacent residents almost invariably become enthusiastic trail users and supporters within a few years of a trail's creation.</p>
<p><a href="#">Impact of the MKT Trail on Nearby Property Owners: MKT Trail Residents Survey Technical Report</a></p> <p>A study conducted by University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources</p>		<p>Property owners were satisfied living adjacent to the MKT Trail and indicated the trail had improved their quality of life. A majority of respondents would choose to live near a trail again if they were to move. Most MKT neighbors thought the trail will make their property more desirable and valuable if listed for sale.</p> <p>Overall, respondents ranked potential benefits of living near the MKT Trail very high and ranked potential problems of living next to the trail relatively low.</p>

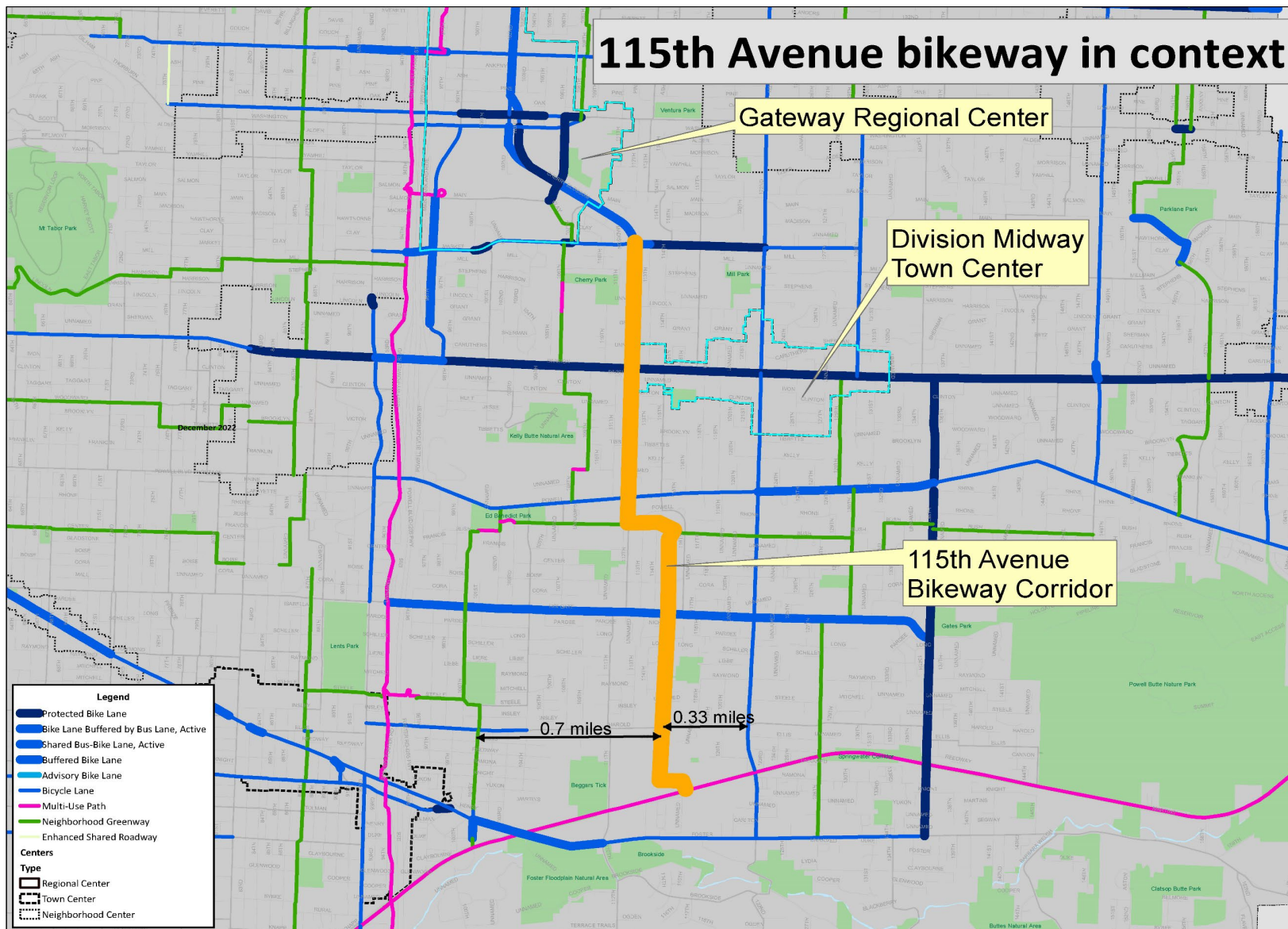


Figure 1. 115th Avenue bikeway corridor in context. Spacing to adjacent N-S bikeways does not meet preferred city guidance, which calls for bikeways every 800 feet (approximately 3 city blocks). The connection to the Springwater Corridor Trail is a key element of network connectivity. Not providing the 115<sup>th</sup> connection further strains network connectivity. This also shows the direct connection the bikeway makes to commercial centers.