



October 5, 2009

Ellen Vanderslice, PBP Project Manager
Portland Bureau of Transportation
1120 SW 5th Ave., Suite 800
Portland, Oregon 97204

Re.: The Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030

Dear Ms. Vanderslice,

The Bicycle Transportation Alliance truly valued the opportunity to work with the Portland Bureau of Transportation and other community members on the Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030. Adoption of this Plan should be a seminal moment for the City of Portland in its pursuit of sustainability. The BTA believes the vision, objectives and policies in the Plan, if realized overall, would make Portland a truly world-class cycling city.

But in recent weeks, the BTA stepped back and took a broader look at Portland's progress since the passage of the original bike plan in 1996. With members of our board and the community, we've also dug into the details of the draft and thought about the challenges of implementation.

Here's what we found: Bicycling has grown significantly in the last fifteen years but the city has not demonstrated a sufficient commitment to bicycling investments nor to making the fundamental shift required to make bicycling a realistic travel option for all. Portland has the potential to be a worldwide leader in bicycling. But we all know the truth: even the greatest plan will achieve little without the investments and political will required for implementation. At current investment levels Portland will never realize the vision and potential described in the draft plan and will achieve only few of the objectives endorsed by the community at large and the City Council itself.

The time is now for the City of Portland's leadership to strongly commit to weaving bicycling into every city plan and decision and more importantly to make a fundamental shift in the way transportation resources are prioritized. Shifting existing resources away from the car-dependent practices of the past to a future based on bicycling will create jobs by getting cars off the road and making more room for freight. It will reduce carbon pollution, improve safety and public health and more importantly, increase the return on

investment from our transportation dollars. We need to make the most of our existing roads. Investing in bicycling certainly does so.

To make and maintain this needed shift, the draft plan's creative and thoughtful policies need to be matched by equally creative and thoughtful commitments and investments. While many parts of the plan are revolutionary, too often the language relies on passive voice, weak language and words that don't require commitment and action. The BTA urges you to make a firm commitment to the policies in the plan and to link adoption of the plan to the investments needed to carry it out..

As it stands, the plan does not live up to Portland's potential nor does it provide the investments needed to address our region's need to make the most of our existing transportation system. And because of a lack of adequate resources, the plan fails to live up to Portland's efforts to address global warming.

The transformation of Portland into the sustainable, safe and healthy city that we all seek absolutely will require commitment to action and investment that is not adequately represented in the current draft.

Attached are the specific comments of the BTA's staff leadership and board of directors on the text of the Draft Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030.

Sincerely,

Scott Bricker
Executive Director

Jim Middaugh
Chair, Advocacy Committee
BTA Board of Directors

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Draft Portland Bicycle Plan for 2030
Comments on Text of Plan
November 8, 2009

Green Transportation Hierarchy

One of the most revolutionary and powerful new ideas in the Plan is the Green Transportation Hierarchy (GTH). If our City truly aspires to sustainability, it must start making prioritizing green transportation over non-green transportation.

The GTH should be adopted at the next immediate opportunity into every City plan. In this Plan itself there are multiple opportunities to specify that the GTH will be used as guidance when the City is confronted with limited transportation funding or right-of-way. Those opportunities are detailed below in Attachment A.

Near-term benchmarks

We will not know if the City has succeeded or failed to complete this plan until the year 2030. This makes any corrective action impossible if the City is not following the plan. A small number of specific benchmarks should be developed and written into the plan.

We propose:

- 130 miles by 2013: By the end of 2013, the City will have completed all Tier One projects, i.e. about 130 miles of bikeways on shared roadways.
- Two Trails by 2020: Both of the major trails named in Tier Two will be completed by 2020.
- 20% by 2015: In 2015, 20% of all trips in Portland will be made by bicycle.
- Four Times Safer by 2014: By 2014, the crash rate for people bicycling in Portland will be one quarter what it is today (based on a rolling 5-year average).

Specific places where benchmarks would be appropriate are listed below in Appendix B.

Active language and the City as actor

Many of the action items in this Plan contain passive or aspirational verbs. Often, the “actor” in any given action is “the Plan” and not “the City.” In some places, the Plan describes what “should be done” rather than what “the City will do.”

We ask that occurrences of “seek” and “work to” and “develop” and “pursue” be eliminated, and that the Plan state authoritatively what the City will do.

Specific examples are listed below in Appendix C.

Plans, not “recommendations” or “proposals”

At the end of every chapter of this Plan, action items are listed. Framing all of these action items as “recommendations” weakens them and suggests that the City is not committed to taking action. We ask that you delete the word “recommendations” from the headings in every chapter, as well as from the many other places where it appears, as detailed in Appendix D.

A broadly appealing vision

The most appealing vision detailed in this Plan is contained in a quote from Mayor Sam Adams on page I. In a number of areas, the vision of the Plan has a far narrower appeal, and even may be downright unappealing to a large proportion of Portland residents.

For example, if goals are met “Bicycles everywhere!” would be wonderful to see but actually conveys an unsafe and unpredictable transportation scenario for the people that may be driving or walking. In this example, the BTA advocates for predictable transportation overall and high-levels of roadway sharing . We suggest this statement be replaced with one that appeals to more Portland residents’ shared values.

As another example, the Plan refers to people riding a bike as “bicyclists” and people driving cars as “drivers.” Yet the stated goal of the Plan is to build a future in which nearly everyone uses bicycles as a means of transportation at least some of the time. These labels are already out-of-date today, and their frequent use in this Plan wrongly gives Portlanders the impression that one group of people (“bicyclists”) stands to benefit from its implementation at the expense of another. We suggest that, in most cases, the words “bicyclist,” “driver” and “pedestrian” be replaced with references to people moving about the city by those modes.

Additional opportunities to broaden the vision of the Plan are listed below in Appendix E.

Off-street paths

In this Plan, paths are described as primarily or exclusively serving areas that cannot be served by an on-street bike network. We do not agree that this is the case. Consider deleting this sentence (in 3.2.7) and replacing it with a more accurate description of the unique role off-street paths play in the City’s active transportation network.

A shift in investments

In every place where this Plan refers to funding, it implicitly or explicitly limits that discussion to new sources of funding. While we agree that current levels of transportation funding in Portland are inadequate for all modes, we do not accept the proposition that funding allocations are immutable.

Transportation funding must be reallocated among modes based on the City's existing and new policies, including the Green Transportation Hierarchy. We ask that an immediate analysis, reevaluation and reallocation of transportation dollars spent by the City of Portland become an action item in this Plan. If the City is always waiting to make incredibly modest investments in green transportation until it has "enough" funding to do so, we could easily wait until 2030 and beyond.