



April 29, 2024

Commissioner Mingus Mapps
Portland City Hall
Portland, Oregon 97301

CC: Mayor Ted Wheeler
Millicent Williams, Director, Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT)

Commissioner Mapps,

First, I want to thank you for your stalwart and consistent leadership working to restore Portland's livability and a rapid recovery of our beloved Central City. You have been a consistent partner with stakeholders across our community since you first took office in 2020. Our tracking data continues to show a steady growth in downtown foot traffic, which has recently seen a dramatic improvement in cleanliness and safety. While we have much more progress to make, downtown's current positive momentum would not be happening without your leadership.

I write to you with this collaborative spirit today, on behalf of the Chamber's over 2,200 members, about a transformative opportunity for our Central City. We call on you today to cancel what can only be described as the unnecessary, wasteful, and disruptive [SW 4th Avenue "improvement" project](#) and instead, shift those funds to the transportation improvements for the [Broadway Corridor](#) and [OMSI District redevelopment](#) projects.

This shifting of funds from one project to two, will fully fund the necessary transportation improvements that PBOT must complete before any further construction can begin. The improvements at these two locations include essential infrastructure improvements such as roadways, bike lanes, and pedestrian access. These improvements will unlock the development potential and pave the way for significant housing production, cultural amenities, parks, open space, and catalytic construction projects that will accelerate the vibrancy of our Central City. These projects have received investment from numerous partners, including a \$12 million direct investment by the 2024 state legislature.

For reasons we don't understand, PBOT has shown a lack of commitment to these projects, and this remains the largest barrier to the groundbreaking of the most transformative Central City community development since the Pearl District began in the 90's. By prioritizing the Broadway Corridor and OMSI District projects, you will eliminate this barrier, put both on a faster timeline to groundbreaking, and demonstrate PBOT's commitment to other partners who have already made major investments.

In 2018, the Chamber endorsed the Central City in Motion (CCIM) program, which was conceived when our Central City was experiencing rapid growth in employees and visitors. At its peak approximately 130,000 workers were traveling downtown every day. At that time, we needed to give workers and visitors alternatives to single occupancy vehicle trips traveling to and from downtown. That reality no longer exists, yet CCIM has continued to move forward without any consideration for the completely transformed landscape and reality. [PBOT's own data](#) shows that [bike trips have fallen to just 2.8% of all trips](#), including a dramatic decline in the Central City, even with major bike projects including SW Broadway and Naito. The data show a clear correlation between the shift to remote work and the decline in downtown bike commutes.

There is no need for more bike lanes on SW 4th Avenue. PBOT has already installed protected bike lanes between the north and south ends of downtown on SW 2nd Avenue, SW Broadway, and SW Naito. The current infrastructure is clearly not being fully utilized or increasing the number of bike trips, which is consistent with PBOT's data. This is not surprising since PBOT based this plan on projection of 25% of all commutes would be

via bike, when it is less than 3%. We remind you that the Chamber's original support for CCIM did not include SW 4th Avenue. Our suggestion to instead place the bike lanes on the transit mall or in Waterfront Park was ignored. And now PBOT is set to begin the SW 4th Avenue project with no support from downtown stakeholders or buy in from critical businesses and property owners facing major disruptions.

At the same time, Broadway Corridor and the OMSI Redevelopment include needed and broadly supported improvements to bike and pedestrian infrastructure in those respective areas of the Central City making this a far better use of these funds.

PBOT's stonewalling of these two historic projects has been perplexing for several reasons. As exemplified by the 2024 legislative session, [Governor Kotek's Central City Task Force](#), and historic reforms enacted by the City Council, a broad agreement exists that addressing our state's extreme housing shortage and homelessness crises are our most urgent priorities. With the permanent shift to remote and flexible work, we know we will need more future Portlanders living in our Central City in multi-family housing of all types – affordable, middle, and market rate. The Chamber's [2023 State of the Central City](#) report found that the percentage of residents living downtown has been much lower than in our peer cities, while we had one of the highest percentages of office dependent jobs. This structural imbalance has been one of the single biggest contributors to the slow recovery of downtown Portland. The Broadway Corridor and OMSI District projects will be game changing contributors to fixing these multiple challenges simultaneously.

Once completed, Broadway Corridor and the OMSI District will bring thousands of units of housing to the market, revitalize livability, develop new retail and commercial districts, improve access to multi-modal transportation, and lift-up historically underserved communities. Both projects embody the type of big public-private investments that will be required to solve our housing affordability and homelessness crises and ensure a vibrant central city for future generations. Both projects also have racial equity at their core as exemplified by the [Central for Tribal Nations](#) partnership with OMSI.

It's time for PBOT to demonstrate its alignment with these priorities that we know you also share.

Lastly, the dollars add up. After reviewing data with Prosper Portland and OMSI Leadership, by our analysis the funding gap to begin the transportation improvements for both projects are about \$18-21 million, which virtually matches the \$18m - \$23 million current projected cost of the SW 4th Avenue project.

We do not make this request lightly and with the knowledge that the PBOT bureaucracy will likely push back against it. We were impressed with your inspired appointment of Millicent Williams as the new PBOT Director last year. We have seen a renewed commitment to collaboration and prioritization of essential services that align with our broader community goals. This is a rare opportunity to demonstrate bold leadership consistent with these stated priorities.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration. We are available anytime to discuss this with you in person.

Sincerely,



Andrew Hoan
President & CEO
Portland Metro Chamber