



DATE: October 16, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

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SUBJECT: Active Transportation Workshop

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council receive a presentation on active transportation planning efforts and projects, receive public comments, and provide guidance and feedback for staff on priorities and design elements.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the City of Petaluma has placed a growing emphasis on active transportation, which includes any form of personal, car-free transportation, whether it be by foot, wheelchair or other assistive mobility devices, bike, scooter, skateboard, etc. (for more information, see <https://cityofpetaluma.org/departments/climate-ready-2030/>). This comes in response to policy and funding shifts at the local, regional, state, and federal levels, all stemming from recognition that (1) transportation engineering, policy, and funding throughout much of California and the United States have placed too much emphasis on the movement of vehicle traffic, often at the expense of other modes of travel, and (2) improving transportation options and reducing car dependency has numerous benefits, most notably by enabling people to reduce their transportation costs, meet their recommended daily activity levels, and reduce their carbon footprints. For cities, car dependency hurts fiscal sustainability; land and infrastructure devoted to the movement and storage of vehicles yields less tax revenue and with greater ongoing infrastructure costs.

Concurrent with these policy shifts, significant research and attention has been placed on making active transportation infrastructure safe, accessible, convenient, and appealing to people of all ages and physical ability levels. Many cities, including Petaluma, are working to accomplish this by redesigning streets and multi-use trails to improve accessibility, provide direct and convenient paths of travel, increase separation from vehicle traffic, and improve safety at intersections and crosswalks through a variety of measures that slow traffic, improve visibility, and reduce or

eliminate potential “conflict points.” Increasing street tree canopies and replacing paved/impervious surfaces with landscaping also make active transportation a safer, more comfortable, and inviting option while mitigating climate-driven heat and precipitation events. Perhaps the most notable street design changes have been in the addition and enhancement of bicycle facilities, where there has been a strong shift away from the “vehicular cycling” design philosophy that was pervasive throughout much of the United States since the 1970s. Vehicular cycling is characterized by riding in and near traffic and operating the bicycle like a vehicle. However, this approach has been criticized for failing to make bicycling an appealing option to the broader population. A 2011 survey of adults in the 50 largest metro regions of the U.S. found that 51 percent of people would be willing to bike if higher-quality bike infrastructure were provided; this in addition to 12 percent who indicated some level of comfort with existing bike infrastructure (<https://jenniferdill.net/types-of-cyclists/>).

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), which produces transportation design guides that seek to “raise the state of the practice in the transportation field,” in 2017 published *Designing for All Ages & Abilities: Contextual Guidance for High-Comfort Bicycle Facilities*. The guidebook provides criteria to identify what type of bike infrastructure is needed to create an all ages and abilities bicycling environment, based on a street’s design characteristics, volume, and speed. It stresses the importance of physical separation and protection from traffic on busier roads.

Nearly all transportation funding opportunities now require or significantly favor projects with robust active transportation improvements that reflect best practices, often referred to as “Complete Streets”. The State of California Complete Streets Policy requires that projects funded with regional funds must implement local Complete Streets plans. The policy also requires that projects implement All Ages and Abilities design guidelines on the Active Transportation Network. Caltrans' Complete Streets requirement went into effect on December 7, 2021. The requirement requires Caltrans to add bike lanes, safe crossings, and safe transit stops when they repave or repair a state-owned surface street. Moreover, Complete Streets can boost employment levels, property values, investment from the private sector, and net new businesses.

In 2022, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which is the transportation planning, financing, and coordinating agency for the San Francisco Bay Area, updated its requirements for projects seeking regional discretionary funding for consistency with all ages and abilities bikeway design, design elements aimed to eliminate severe traffic collisions (Vision Zero), climate resiliency, and equity.

DISCUSSION

The City of Petaluma’s two guiding documents related to active transportation—its Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2008) and Complete Streets Policy (2016)—were adopted prior to many of the developments described above. An update to the Master Plan, now referred to as the “Active Transportation Plan” is underway and expected to be complete in 2024. The Plan serves as the blueprint for the buildout of Petaluma’s active transportation infrastructure, as well as relevant education, encouragement, and enforcement efforts to promote safe active transport. Staff will provide an overview of the planning efforts underway in the presentation.

An update to the 2016 City's Complete Streets Policy has not yet been discussed by City Council, but may be helpful as the City seeks to incorporate best practices, or if City Council wishes to set clearer direction around how to prioritize limited right-of-way on City streets among different, and sometimes, competing uses, such as on-street parking and bike infrastructure.

In this workshop, staff will: (1) share an overview of active transportation elements and policies, (2) provide an update on active transportation planning efforts, and (3) share example projects as case studies for discussion and feedback. As explained in the presentation, active transportation projects often involve constraints and conflicts with regard to safety elements, adjusting to new norms or traffic patterns, and reduced or modified on-street parking.

The example projects/case studies are as follows:

- Citywide Traffic Calming & Safety Improvements
- Rainier Avenue Parking-Protected Bike Lane Demonstration Project (North McDowell Boulevard – Maria Drive)
- D Street Traffic Calming and Active Transportation Quick-Build Project (Petaluma Boulevard South – City Limits)
- 5th Street Neighborhood Greenway (Mt. View Avenue – Western Avenue)

In addition to seeking feedback on these projects, staff will be sharing updates on the City's new Safe Streets Nomination Program, the CityThread Accelerated Mobility Playbook, and the Safe Routes to School Task Force.

Staff is also open to feedback on our community engagement process, including discussion of how and when to best utilize quick-build projects (also known as demonstration or pilot projects) to inform longer-term infrastructure improvements.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This item first appeared in the Tentative Agenda at the October 2, 2023, regular City Council meeting. City Council meetings are publicly noticed.

Additional meetings have been held regarding active transportation planning efforts and specific projects with the community and the Pedestrian Bicycle Advisory Committee. Community informational meetings are advertised, published on project websites, and announced in community updates. PBAC meetings and agenda items are publicly noticed.

Ongoing discussions about citywide infrastructure improvements, active transportation, safe streets, and connectivity are occurring as part of the General Plan Update process. There has already been considerable community conversation as part of that process about ensuring connectivity for all modes of transportation and a commitment to the City's goal of carbon neutrality by 2030. Additionally, the development of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan

will focus on aggressive measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, of which transportation is identified as a key contributor.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

Active transportation planning and projects relate to several council goals, objectives, and workplan elements:

A CITY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

- Provide City infrastructure that is safe, sustainable, multi-use, efficient, inspiring civic pride.
 - Establish and improve paths as useful transportation options, and make walking and biking easy, fun, and safe.
 - Better integrate multi-modal transportation with street designs
 - Update the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and realize opportunities for crosstown connections for all modes of transportation.

A SAFE COMMUNITY THAT THRIVES

- Maintain and enhance public safety and prepare for emergencies and disasters, through crime and fire prevention, and traffic safety.
 - Implement City Vision Zero plan with a focus on pedestrian and cyclist safety with improvements to uncontrolled crosswalks, curb ramps, sidewalk, and bicycle infrastructure.
 - Enhance pavement management program to improve the safety and serviceability of our roads to protect drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.
 - Create and promote multi-cultural and multi-generational recreation and wellness programs that support community connection, physical well-being, and opportunities for play. Focus on public health in planning processes—including air quality, walkability, and childcare incorporated into larger developments, including revisiting zoning around sensitive receptors (e.g., schools, health care facilities).

Safety is paramount for all street improvement and active transportation projects. Staff endeavors to develop strategies and implement designs that foster safe mobility and community connectivity, further demonstrating our City's commitment to safe streets, Vision Zero, and the implementation of myriad active transportation elements, traffic calming, ADA accessibility, trails, sidewalks, etc.

CLIMATE ACTION/SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

Improving transportation options helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, which is the primary source of emissions in Petaluma and Sonoma County. Additionally, complete streets and active transportation projects present opportunities to reduce paved surfaces, increase tree canopy, and recharge groundwater, all of which help mitigate climate change and its impacts.

In 2019, the City Council adopted a climate crisis resolution (Resolution No. 2019-055) acknowledging issues of climate change and placing sustainable practices as a primary City goal. On January 11, 2021, at a joint meeting of the City Council and the Climate Action Commission,

the City Council adopted the Climate Emergency Framework. The Framework guides the City's ongoing response to and discussion about the climate crisis and establishes 2030 as the City's goal for achieving carbon neutrality.

Along with the Climate Emergency Framework, the Climate Action Commission identified 15 potential priority climate actions for the City Council's future consideration. Priority Action No. 5 states:

“Adopt a [Vehicle Miles Traveled] VMT policy that is consistent with the 2030 carbon neutrality goal. In order to meet these targets, prepare policy recommendations for rapidly implementing alternative clean, safe, accessible, and affordable and active and public transportation modes to meet the rising community need for climate-friendly transportation.”

Managing our community's transportation system to minimize VMT contributes directly and indirectly to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The legislative intent of SB 743 is to “more appropriately balance the needs of congestion management with statewide goals related to infill development, promotion of public health through active transportation, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.”

As such, it is clear that a primary strategy for mitigating climate impacts involves a heavy focus on enhancing the City's existing active transportation facilities and ensuring that new facilities are designed to encourage walking and biking throughout our community. This helps reduce vehicle trips and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

All proposed improvements discussed in this workshop further our goals of enhancing safety, improving pedestrian crossings, and installing bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and ADA-compliant curb ramps. Additionally, improving transit services and supporting facilities would be an important component of any and all street improvement projects.

In conclusion, active transportation projects help achieve our Climate Action goals by allowing roadway users to feel safer and more comfortable while walking and riding bikes. Moreover, such projects help to implement safer walking and biking routes to and from neighborhood schools. A significant financial investment is needed to build out the City's bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Through careful planning and design, we will make our streets safer and help our City realize a meaningful communitywide shift to alternative travel modes.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The item before the City Council is for presentation and discussion only and no action is to be taken at this time. Therefore, the item is not a "project" pursuant to Section 15378 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. Further CEQA analysis will occur for any future projects arising from this workshop.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

There are no financial impacts in conjunction with this workshop discussion. The financial impacts resulting from any guidance or recommended actions will be brought to Council in the future for consideration and authorization.

ALTERNATIVES

This workshop presents alternatives for consideration along with supporting information in an effort to seek guidance and direction for staff.

The Council could choose to accept the information and not provide direction to staff, in which efforts will proceed with projects as presented and in accordance with the FY 23/24 budget, and/or as otherwise approved by the Council.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Active Transportation Workshop Presentation
2. Complete Streets Policy (2016)