

March 9, 2016

Palo Alto Comp Plan
City Staff
Citizens' Advisory Committee
City Council

The Palo Alto Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee (PABAC) is a city committee which is advisory to city staff on transportation issues for bicyclists and pedestrians. Here are PABAC's comments on the Transportation Element.

Our most important feedback is:

- We like the continued emphasis on active transportation in Palo Alto, with a focus on improving the environment for people who bicycle and people who walk in our city.
- We support having Policy T-1.27, incorporating the 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan (BPTP) into this Comp Plan by reference. This incorporates important elements of the BPTP like the implementation of a network of bicycle boulevards without having to call them out in detail in the Comp Plan.
- We feel strongly that the lack of data has hampered our ability to evaluate the effectiveness of bicycle safety measures. We would like to see a strong commitment supporting data collection in the future.

We have some specific feedback on this draft (2/9/16) of the Transportation Element:

Important changes and additions to Programs and Policies:

Page T-35:

Policy T-1.26: ~~Prioritize~~ Give high priority to investments for enhanced pedestrian access and bicycle use within Palo Alto and to surrounding communities.

This is less ambiguous.

Page T-36, under T-1.27: Incorporate the 2012 BPTP

Program T-1.27.5: Allocate funding to conduct an annual survey of bicycle use across the city, by collecting bicycle counts on important and potential bicycle corridors. (New Program)

PABAC thinks it is essential to collect data to identify and motivate locations for improvements city wide.

Page T-36, New program under Policy T-1.30 (related to supporting regional plans)

Program T-1.30.1: Identify and improve bicycle connections to neighboring communities in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, to support local trips that cross city boundaries.

Improving these connections will enable more commuter and shopping trips from neighboring communities to Palo Alto, and outbound trips originating in Palo Alto.

Page T-37, under Policy T-1.34: Improve Maintenance of bike/ped infrastructure, add this program:

Program T-1.34.3: Establish standards and procedures with Utilities and Public Works to maintain safe cycling routes and adequately and safely sign warnings and detours during construction projects. (New Program)

Our experience is that bikeway detours, signage, and construction standards are inconsistent and sometimes dangerous. A program similar to the one in Cambridge, MA should be considered.

Program T-1.34.4: Establish a program to educate citizens to keep sidewalks clear of parked cars, especially on narrow local streets in neighborhoods with rolled curbs. Survey for compliance annually.

Our sidewalks were never intended for storing automobiles, but many of our narrow streets with rolled curbs have more than half of the cars parked on the sidewalk. Many residents do not recognize parking on the sidewalk until it is pointed out to them. In one neighborhood an informal education program (a single neighbor, leaving flyers on windshields) has fixed this in the past.

Page T-38, Policy T-1.38: Current version:

Improve pedestrian crossings with bulb outs, small curb radii, and street trees near corners, bollards, and landscaping to create protected areas.

We suggest this version instead:

Policy T-1.38. Improve pedestrian crossings by creating protected areas and better pedestrian and traffic visibility. Use a toolbox including bulb outs, small curb radii, high visibility crosswalks, and landscaping.

The existing version supports improved, safer pedestrian crossings, but prescribes specific solutions which may be out of date. In particular, we worry about street trees and bollards specified in the current policy, which may create safety hazards at corners.

Page T-40, Policy T-2.13. Ensure that additional ~~through~~ traffic lanes are not installed at the expense of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, or landscaping.

We would prefer this policy expanded to “traffic lanes”, not just “through lanes.” For example, on Middlefield, the removal of two short bicycle lane segments to allow for a traffic turning lane significantly reduced the utility of a full mile of bike lane.

Page T-50, under Policy T-4.14 (Bicycle Parking)

Program T-4.14.2 Consider installing secure electronic bike lockers (such as the BikeLink system) at high theft locations like train stations and in city parking garages. (New program)

Our current bike locker and bike-station secured parking system works well for daily users who know the system, but is not available to occasional users. Installing electronic, sharable lockers at high risk and heavily used locations will support day-long bicycle parking for occasional transit riders, shoppers, and visitors, and will also supply secure parking for those who consider on-street bike racks insecure for their bikes and bicycle accessories.

Page T-51, under Goal T-5 (Road Safety)

Policy T-5.1: To the extent allowed by law, continue to make safety the first priority of citywide transportation planning. Prioritize pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile safety over vehicle level-of-service at intersections *and vehicle parking.*

We think that vehicle parking needs should not diminish safety. For example, at a busy corner it may be best to remove parking to “daylight” a corner for better visibility for pedestrians and crossing auto or bicycle traffic.

Program T-5.1.3: Develop and disseminate a city-wide safe routes map. (this could be combined with Program 5.1.2)

We do not have (and have never had) a city-wide user-oriented map that emphasizes safer routes.

Page T-51, under Policy T-5.2: Achieve zero roadway fatalities

Program T-5.2.1 Collect severity and location data for all roadway fatality and injury accidents, for all modes. Develop (or share with the county) an up-to-date, public database for this information.

Data should drive this new Policy.

Other comments on this version of the text:

Pages T1-T25. We are surprised that this section, which was one page in the 1998 document, is now 26. Some parts, like discussions of regional transportation systems (AMTRAK and BART) and HOV lanes do not seem consequential to this document. We encourage you to keep this introduction as brief as possible, to maintain focus on the Goals, Policies, and Programs of the Comp Plan. Specific comments include:

Map T-2 could be incorporated by reference to the 2012 Bike/Ped Transportation Plan.

Page T-10: Better provisions for bicycles on mass transit enables bicycles as a first/last mile option, promoting ~~would promote~~ the use of both modes by increasing convenience and accessibility of destinations.

More brief comments on Goals, Policies, and Programs:

Page T-27, Goal T-1. ... reduce GHG emissions and the use of single occupancy motor vehicles.

Page T-33, Program T.18.2: Recognize the importance of the University Avenue Multi-modal Transit Station during special events and if dedicated funds are available, explore opportunities for station improvements, including circulation and access improvements to the station for all modes, in cooperation with Stanford University.

Page T-36, Policy T-1.28: Consider substituting “multi-use” or “off-roadway” for “off-road” in this policy. Off-road connotes motorized ORV modes like motorcycles.

Page T-37. Policy T-1.31 should be a Program under Policy T-1.34.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft of the Transportation Element, and thank you for your service to the City of Palo Alto.

Submitted by PABAC members:

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with help from the rest of PABAC.