



## City Council Staff Report

**From: City Manager**

**Report Type: INFORMATION REPORTS**

**Lead Department: Transportation**

**Meeting Date: January 22, 2024**

Report #:2312-2331

### **TITLE**

Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan (BPTP) Update: an active transportation plan-- Introduction & Overview, Community Engagement, Context & Baseline Conditions, and Next Steps

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Receive this Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan (BPTP) Update—Introduction & Overview.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Staff is providing this Information Report as an overview to the City Council on the recently launched effort to update the City's existing 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan (BPTP). The City's existing BPTP is a critical planning, policy, and implementation document that supports efforts to improve the safety and attractiveness of walking, biking, and rolling as a means of transportation and recreation. The objectives of the BPTP Update are to seek robust community feedback; reevaluate implementation progress from previous plans to adjust recommendations for new policies, facilities, and programs; and to determine appropriate criteria and metrics to prioritize recommendations and network routes. The BPTP Update effort will also further investigate safety data to propose impactful recommendations, explore the role of emerging transportation technologies such as electric-bicycles and micro-mobility devices, and establish big-picture planning to expand bicycling and walking for all user types in support of the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan, the Sustainability/Climate Action Plan, a Safe System approach, and other planning documents and policies. The Plan Update effort will be an 18–24-month process, with the Plan Update adoption anticipated for Summer 2025.

### **BACKGROUND**

At its May 17, 2021 meeting, the City Council adopted a resolution supporting the City's grant application for the State Transportation Development Act (TDA) Article 3 Funds for the BPTP Update project, and in September 2021, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) approved of the allocation of Transportation Development Act Article 3 (TDA3) funds to the City

of Palo Alto in the amount of \$334,852 for the purposes of updating the 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan. At the June 19, 2023 meeting, the City Council approved a professional services contract with Kittelson & Associates, Inc. with subconsultants Mobycon, to prepare this BPTP Update.

## **ANALYSIS**

The existing conditions and needs analysis is underway. The following section presents a brief discussion of each of the topics covered in this task.

*Network Mapping and Facilities Inventory.* Available data has been compiled and the GIS-based infrastructure inventory has been updated to reflect the existing pedestrian and bicycle network.

*Demographic Analysis.* The City of Palo Alto has a population of 68,680 according to the American Community Survey (ACS) 2021 5-year estimates. The working age population cohort (ages 20 to 64) represents the largest population segment in the City at 57% of the total population. Palo Alto residents are highly educated, with the majority (98%) of people aged 25 years or older having at least a high school graduate degree. 53% of the population is White, 7% of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino, and 35% Asian.; Chinese, Asian Indian, and Korean constitute the major Asian ethnic groups in the City. Approximately 61% of the population exclusively speaks English at home. Asian and Pacific Island languages make up about 22% of the population, with around 32% of this group not speaking English proficiently. Other Indo-European languages account for 11%, of which roughly 14% do not speak English very well. There are no Equity Priority Communities or Disadvantaged Communities within the City of Palo Alto but there are Equity Priority Communities in Stanford University and East Palo Alto.

*Program and Policy Inventory.* Over twenty relevant planning documents and programs were reviewed to develop an enhanced understanding of the policy and planning environment for walking and biking in Palo Alto. This work also supports the creation of an updated inventory of existing programs and policies relevant to biking and walking and identifies gaps or needs that could be addressed by the Plan.

*Bicycle Friendly Community Assessment.* Since 2003, the League of American Bicyclists' (LAB) Bike-Friendly America program has been evaluating states, communities, businesses, and universities with the aim of rewarding excellence and raising standards and expectations for what constitutes a bicycle-friendly environment. As of 2023, Palo Alto was designated as a Gold-level cycling community. It has been listed as a Bicycle-Friendly Community since 2003 and has been a Gold-level community since 2010.

The 2023 application increases the emphasis on addressing gaps in the low-stress network with

the most recent report card indicating that neighborhood streets are underutilized in Palo Alto, which could easily become low-stress linkages in the cycling network for a relatively low cost.

If the City decides to pursue progressing to a “Platinum” level to assist reaching S/CAP goals, specific opportunities identified for the City of Palo Alto are as follows (based on the 2021 Report Card and the 2023 application criteria):

- Increasing the overall mileage of bicycle network with a specific focus on addressing gaps in the low stress cycling network.
- Increase high-quality cycle parking, especially near major activity centers and transit.
- Expand cycling education efforts to reach adults, especially women, seniors, underrepresented groups, and English learning communities (noting the large Chinese and Hispanic groups present). Further, the LAB suggests that Palo Alto could offer bicycle friendly training to motorists, particularly commercial drivers and fleet operators (such as delivery drivers).
- Creating a bicycle-friendly environment through laws & ordinances.

It is considered that working towards the above suggestions could increase cycling mode share from a modest 9% closer to the Platinum-level average of nearly 14% in the City. This would have the added benefit of reducing crash and fatality rates by increasing overall road safety which would also work towards a Platinum-level community designation. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan can also help to identify opportunities to achieve the items that were identified as opportunities to improve.

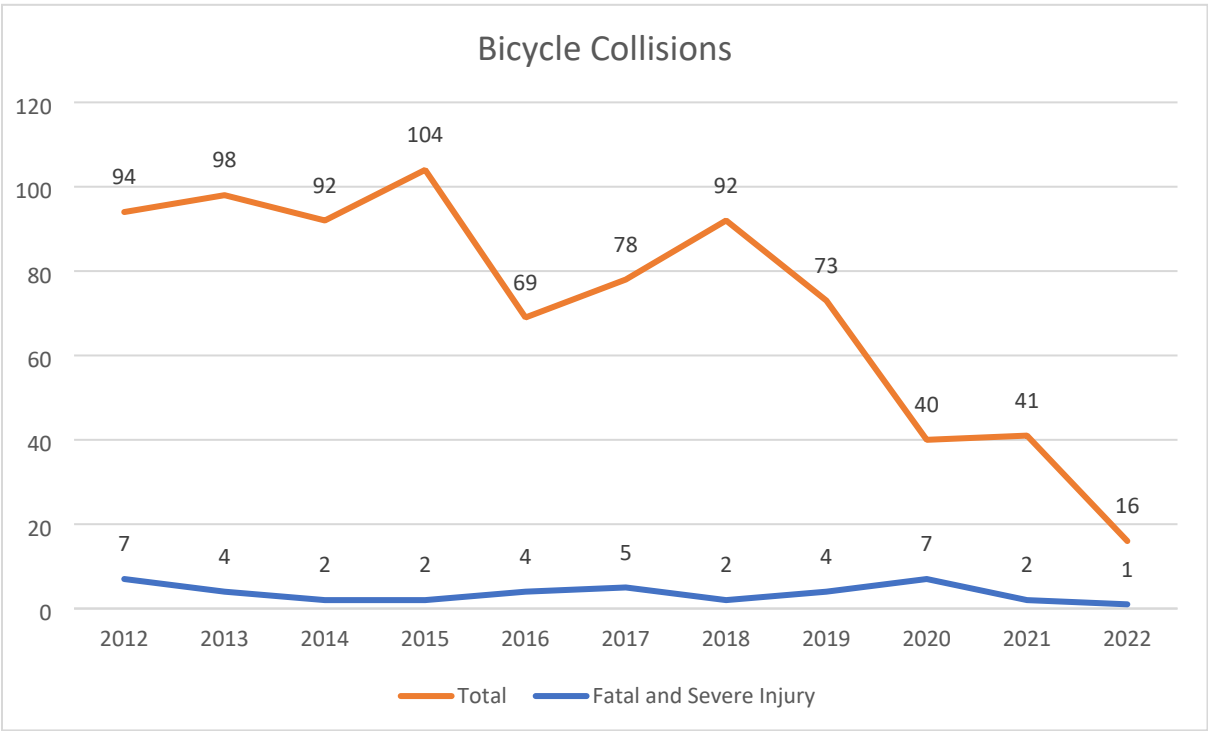
*Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (LTS).* Bicycle level of traffic stress (LTS) is a rating given to a road segment or crossing indicating the traffic stress it imposes on bicyclists. Levels of traffic stress range from 1 to 4 with LTS 1 indicating low stress facility and LTS 4 indicating a high stress facility. The segment analysis considers roadway functional classification, vehicle volume, posted or prevailing vehicle speeds, number of vehicle lanes, the presence of on-street parking, and vehicle parking and bicycle lane widths. The crossing analysis considers the right-turn lane configuration and length, bike lane approach, vehicle turning speeds, and the presence of a median refuge. The results of the LTS analysis will inform the locations and types of treatments and facilities needed to create a low-stress all ages and abilities bicycle network.

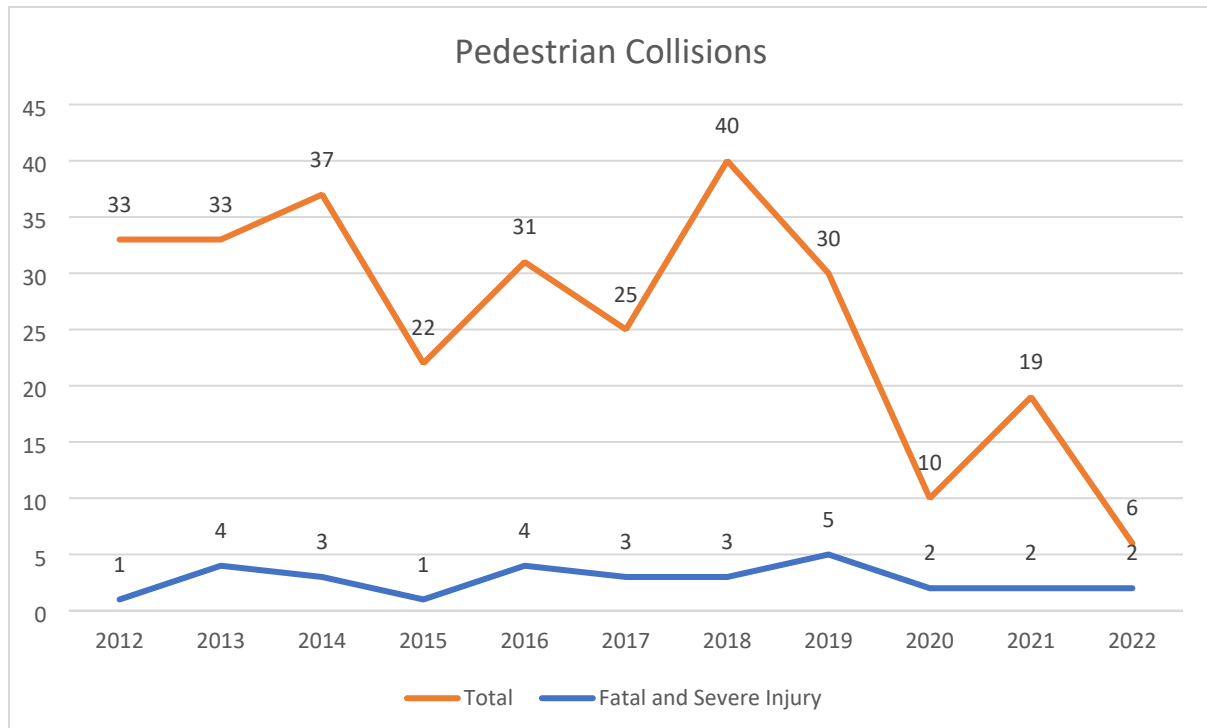
*Pedestrian Barriers.* The analysis of pedestrian barriers will examine linear barriers (such as freeways, water bodies, and rail lines) and barriers near transit (including gaps in sidewalks, curb ramps, signals, or disconnected cul-de-sacs) that force people to take detours and increase the and types of treatments and facilities needed to create direct connections and reduce the length of walking trips.

*Safety and Collisions.* A detailed spatial analysis of the five most recent years of reported collision data involving bicyclists and pedestrians will be conducted to identify pedestrian and bicycle high

injury networks (HINs). Additionally, available variables in the collision data will be analyzed to identify patterns or trends based on temporal characteristics, lighting conditions, location characteristics (intersection versus segment), primary collision factors, age, and gender. These collision profiles will provide a better understanding of the common risks, and where and how efforts should be focused to most effectively make streets safer for people walking and biking.

The safety analysis also includes a high-level review of the ten most recent years of reported collision data involving bicyclists and pedestrians has been conducted to understand how the number and severity of pedestrian and bicycle involved collisions are changing over time. The following charts illustrate a general decrease in the total number of pedestrian and bicycle involved collisions.





*Activity and Benefits.* The analysis will utilize various data sources, including counts and location based data, to estimate existing and future walking, biking, and rolling activity in the City and forecast benefits of investments in the active transportation network.

### Next Steps

The City's Office of Transportation will host a Visioning Workshop with stakeholders on January 31, 2024 to craft the Vision and Goals for the Plan Update effort.

Additionally, the existing conditions and needs analysis will be completed over the next few months and presented to working groups and committees for review and input as part of Phase 2 engagement, anticipated for Spring 2024. Following committee review and input, the City Council will review the existing conditions and needs analysis in Spring/Summer 2024. Further along in the project, Council will provide input to shape the process during the later phases, when we get to the criteria development, prioritizing projects, and ultimately the draft and final plan.

### FISCAL/RESOURCE IMPACT

The BPTP Update project cost is \$333,945, including a 10% contingency. The City is eligible to cover project expenditures under MTC's TDA Article 3 program and can request an allocation of up to \$334,852 for the effort. City staff anticipates that all eligible costs incurred will be reimbursed through the TDA Article 3 payment reimbursement process. These funds are included in the FY 2024 Adopted Budget in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan Implementation Project (PL-04010).

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The goals of the community engagement for the BTP Update include:

- Communicate timely information to the public and agency partners throughout the Plan Update
- Actively seek feedback prior to key milestones during the development of Plan Update
- Provide meaningful opportunities for involvement
- Demonstrate how community input has influenced the Plan Update's development
- Seek participation of potentially underserved and disadvantaged communities
- Ensure consistency with applicable state and federal laws and regulations, as well as local policies, goals, and objectives
- Coordinate with ongoing community engagement efforts carried out through other plans and programs such as the Safe Streets for All Plan and Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS)

Community engagement is divided into three phases: 1) Visioning; 2) Needs & Concerns; and 3) Recommended Projects and Programs. The community engagement effort includes a combination of digital outreach and in-person events.

- *Project website and interactive map.* The project website can be accessed at: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/bikepedplan>. The website recently included an interactive map that allowed respondents to provide geographic input on key issues and opportunity locations for walking, biking, and rolling in Palo Alto. The interactive map was open from early October through December 31, 2024 and received a total of 956 individual comments. The comments used will inform the BTP Update vision, goals, and priorities, as well as identify areas of concern and opportunities for upgrading the pedestrian and bicycle network and improving safety and comfort for those walking and rolling in the city.
- *Committee and Working Group Meetings.* The project team will engage the following committees and working groups at three key points over the course of the plan:
  - Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee
  - City School Transportation Safety Committee
  - Planning and Transportation Commission
  - Parks and Recreation Commission
  - Rail Committee
  - City Council
  - Interagency Staff Working Group
- *Neighborhood and Focus Group Meetings.* Four neighborhood meetings will be held during the second phase of engagement. These meetings will be jointly organized by the consultant team and community partners and will be distributed geographically throughout the city. Community partners will provide a range of roles, including distributing materials, promoting events, hosting events, providing translation and notetaking, facilitating focus groups, and reviewing material for the inclusion in the Plan.
- *Street Level Engagement:* Four street level engagement events will be held at various locations, to be selected with recommendations from City staff, working groups and committees. These events will include tabling to introduce the project and seek input on community needs and recommendations at key locations such as farmer's markets, City fairs, community events, and

pop-ups during peak lunch, dinner, and drop-off/pick-up hours on site (e.g., downtown, California Ave., middle and high schools).

- The project team tabled at the Bike Palo Alto event on Sunday, October 1, 2023 to introduce the project and to receive input from the community on specific locations that need improvement.
- *Community Meetings.* Two community meetings will be hosted and are planned to be hybrid, offering both in person and virtual options for participation.
  - Meeting #1: Visioning Workshop (January 31, 2024). The goal of the visioning workshop will be to identify the direction of the Plan and set forth objectives and goals. The outcomes from the visioning workshop will be revisited at the STAR Analysis workshop as part of the multi-day in-person collaborative work sessions. Stakeholders will be invited to this meeting.
  - Meeting #2: System Development & Network Priorities (June 2024). The goal of the second meeting is to refine project recommendations and gather feedback on prioritization. Stakeholders will be invited to this meeting.

*Multi-Day Collaborative Work Sessions.* Mobycon staff will be curating and executing a multiday collaborative work session at two points along the project. The first will occur in Spring 2024. Activities conducted during this time will set the stage for the network evaluation and project identification process to follow. The second session will occur in Fall 2024. Activities will focus on solidifying network recommendations and developing a process to prioritize projects, programs, and policies for implementation.

### **Phase 1 Community Engagement Themes**

Phase 1 community engagement themes included an interactive map, public survey (developed and distributed in partnership with the Safe Streets For All Action Plan team), a series of seven committee and working group meetings, and an in person pop-up event at Bike Palo Alto. A community meeting visioning workshop is scheduled for January 31, 2024. A high-level overview of what we heard through these Phase 1 engagement activities is presented in this section.

- *Interactive Map.* A total of 956 unique comments were received between September 28 and December 31, 2023. Commenters had the option to select four different comment categories, including safety concern, infrastructure needed, destination you want to access, and other. Over half of the comments (54%, or 516 comments) were categorized as a "Safety Concern", followed by 29% (276) of comments categorized as "Infrastructure Needed", 14% (136) of comments were categorized as "Other", and the remaining 3% (28) of comments were categorized as "Destination You Want to Access". Participants were given the option to view and like comments from other users. Notably, comments advocating for improved infrastructure to address connectivity gaps in existing bicycle facilities, safety enhancements, wider bike lanes for increased rider comfort, and the provision of bike infrastructure near schools garnered the highest number of likes. The project team will be further reviewing the comments in the upcoming months.
- *Committee and Working Group Meetings.* The BPTP Update team engaged with several standing committees and commissions and created a working group to guide the development of the work. The Phase 1 working group and committee feedback covers a wide range of topics related to

safety, transportation infrastructure, across barrier connections, transformative technologies, and future development. Key themes that emerged from these meetings include:

1. Safety is a top priority. People expressed concerns about pedestrian and bicyclist safety at various locations, especially for students walking to and from school.
2. There is demand for high quality transportation infrastructure. Suggestions to support more walking and biking included implementation of more bicycle boulevards with traffic calming treatments on neighborhood streets, as well as additional secure and long-term bicycle parking, and separated bike lanes on higher speed higher volume roadways. There was general agreement that quality was more important than quantity when it comes to transportation infrastructure for walking and biking.
3. Across barrier connections are needed. Committee and working group members recognized the presence of major barriers, such as U.S. 101 and the Caltrain tracks, and acknowledged the need for low-stress connections to overcome these barriers. There was a sense of urgency around selecting a preferred location for grade-separated crossing(s) of the Caltrain tracks.
4. Power and potential of transformative technologies. The presence of new travel modes, including e-bikes and e-scooters, as well as the availability of new technologies such as LiDar and vehicle to infrastructure sensors, has rapidly changed the landscape of transportation planning and facility design. Committee and working group members expressed an interest in considering and incorporating these transformative technologies in the BPTP Update analysis and recommendations.
5. Plan for the future. There is substantial growth planned in Palo Alto, particularly within select priority development areas. The BPTP Update must consider land use changes and development patterns.

*Bike Palo Alto event.* The BPTP Update team participated in the Bike Palo Alto event, which was held on October 1, 2023 from 1-3 p.m. at Fair Meadow Elementary School. The team received comments from about 40 participants who expressed concerns related to walking and biking safety, supported implementation of protected bike lanes, and identified El Camino Real as a barrier to connectivity within the city.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

California Senate Bill 922 (2022) exempts active transportation plans, such as bicycle transportation plans like the BPTP Update from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A: Existing Bicycle Facilities Map (Dated 01/05/2024)

Attachment B: Basemap

Attachment C: Bicycle Friendly Community Benchmarking Memo

Attachment D: Literature Review Summary

**APPROVED BY:** Philip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official