

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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WHY WALKABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY MATTER

Walkability and accessibility are at the core of a strong, healthy community. Seattle strives to be a place where people walk because it is an accessible, convenient, fun, and a healthy choice. As pedestrians, we meet new neighbors, explore treasured places, improve our bodies and minds, and support our local businesses. For employers, Seattle’s sustained commitment to creating a pedestrian-friendly city is a key factor in our community’s competitive advantage. For residents, the quality of a neighborhood’s pedestrian environment is often a deciding factor for where they want to live.

Walkable, accessible cities share common elements:

- A reliable pedestrian network that allows people to access many different types of destinations, including schools, parks, and neighborhood businesses

SEATTLE PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLAN VISION:

“Seattle is the most walkable and accessible city in the nation.”

- Direct connections to transit and the destinations it serves
- Clear, inviting spaces to move along every street, such as a walkway, a trail, or a shared space
- Well-maintained pedestrian facilities that are easy for everyone to navigate, including those who rely on wheelchairs and other mobility devices
- Compelling nearby destinations that allow people to live close to transit, shops, and public places
- Places of respite that invite casual conversation, encourage connection with nature, and provide places to play

In a pedestrian-friendly city, the public realm is attractive—whether it be because of a street tree turning colors, an engaging retail façade, a convivial sidewalk café, or an inviting public open space. Walkable and accessible cities allow residents to meet people, experience places first-hand, and connect with their culture.

Walking is our most basic, most sustainable form of transportation. Overall, walking has fewer impacts than any other travel mode, including fewer environmental impacts. It reduces vehicle trips and greenhouse gas emissions, creates less wear on existing infrastructure, and is available

at little or no cost. In addition to these social benefits, walking can positively impact personal health, as a well-connected, comfortable pedestrian network can provide opportunities for physical activity. This Plan is intended to encourage people to walk for their own benefit, for the life of the city, and for the good of our natural environment.

PLAN PURPOSE

Seattle is consistently recognized as one of the nation's safest and most accessible cities for pedestrians. We are tied for the second-lowest pedestrian fatality rate in the country¹, and we are ranked 5th in the country for the percentage of people who commute to work by foot².

Additionally, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center ranks Seattle as the only platinum-level Walk Friendly Community in the nation. We are recognized for our leadership in pedestrian planning and engineering practices, our commitment to public outreach and education, and our strong enforcement and evaluation practices.



¹ 2016 Benchmarking Report, Alliance for Biking & Walking

² Ibid.

However, there is more we can do. Both the natural and built environment can create barriers that are especially challenging for people with disabilities, children, and older residents. While several Seattle neighborhoods have a pedestrian-friendly commercial core, many areas of the city are lacking sidewalks or other pedestrian infrastructure and have few accessible destinations. Between 2005 and 2012, we have seen an increase in the percentage of adults who are overweight, and/or who have diabetes³. And, despite our pedestrian fatality rate being one of the lowest in the country, we have not made significant strides in dramatically reducing the number of pedestrian fatal and serious injury collisions over the years.

Concerns for the well-being of our residents and the vibrancy of our neighborhoods underscore the need for the Pedestrian Master Plan (PMP). The Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) relies on the PMP as our 20-year blueprint to prioritize pedestrian investments we make throughout the city.

If we can only afford to build or improve a certain number of sidewalks or crossings each year, which ones should be built first, and where? What actions can we take to improve safety and pedestrian access in the city?

The PMP helps answer these questions by establishing policies, programs, and project opportunity areas that push Seattle to make measurable strides in pedestrian accessibility and safety, while remaining a national leader. It lays out the key strategies and actions that are intended to achieve our vision, and it establishes the performance measures we use to gauge our success.

WHO DOES THE PMP SERVE?

This Plan is intended to improve mobility conditions for all who use our city's sidewalks and crossings. The PMP is an inclusive plan, and is intended to address the needs of people who use mobility devices to get around and people with visual and/or hearing impairments. This includes prioritizing sidewalk and crossing improvements on streets that connect people to important destinations, and identifying a set of implementing strategies and actions that we will use to improve mobility conditions for all on these streets.



The PMP is intended to improve mobility conditions for all who use Seattle's sidewalks and crossings, including those who rely upon wheelchairs and mobility devices, and those with visual and/or hearing impairments.

³ 2016 Benchmarking Report, Alliance for Biking & Walking

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS UPDATED PLAN?

When Seattle's first PMP was adopted in 2009, the City Council envisioned a 5-year update to ensure the PMP continues to reflect current best practices in policy, planning, and design. This update also affords an opportunity to ensure that the data and the methodology we use to prioritize pedestrian improvements in Seattle continues to reflect community priorities, City policy objectives, and national and international best practices.

A key outcome of the 2009 PMP was a robust, data-based framework for evaluating priorities and directing pedestrian investments and programs throughout the city. We remain committed to using this data-based approach. Similarly, the vision, goals, and objectives developed in 2009 serve as the foundation for the PMP and remain fundamentally unchanged with this update.

The principal updates to the Pedestrian Master Plan include:

- An **assessment of progress** made implementing the Plan since 2009, to evaluate whether the projects that have been implemented are meeting the Plan's goals and performance measures.

- Updates to the Plan's **prioritization methodology**, in order to better meet Plan goals, and to ensure that the PMP prioritization reflects current City policy and community priorities for race, social justice, and equity.
- **Updates to the data** used in the Plan's analysis. The outdated demographic data used in the 2009 prioritization analysis has been refreshed.
- A list of **implementing strategies and actions** to advance the Plan's vision, goals, and objectives. These updated strategies and actions focus on planning, design, engineering, education, enforcement, and encouragement activities.
- A review of and updates to the Plan **performance measures** to ensure they are still meaningful. The updated Plan also establishes performance targets or trends for each measure.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the PMP continues to reflect the priorities of Seattle’s residents, we engaged the community in a variety of ways. This included enlisting the Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board (SPAB) as advisors for the Plan update, conducting an online public survey to receive community feedback, hosting public open houses, and attending community meetings. Each of these engagement opportunities allowed us to solicit input and learn from community members and organizations.

Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board

The SPAB is made up of 11 members and advises the Mayor, City Council, and all departments and offices of the City on pedestrian-related matters in Seattle. They are the stewards of the PMP and track its implementation.

Throughout the update process, the SPAB acted in an advisory role, providing an invaluable sounding board to test ideas and glean insights. Project staff attended SPAB’s monthly meetings to provide project updates and solicit input. Additionally, we conducted targeted workshops with Board members to discuss specific topics in more depth.

All SPAB meetings are open to the public and were advertised on the project website and email list. Project briefing materials provided to the SPAB were posted on the project website.

Online survey

To ensure the Plan reflects the priorities of Seattle residents, we released an online survey in Fall 2015 that received nearly 4,700 responses citywide. The survey was a key component of our outreach and engagement strategy. Participants provided input on how and where we should prioritize pedestrian improvements in the city. Additionally, the survey showed images of a variety of lower-cost improvements considered for residential streets without sidewalks, and asked for feedback about these alternative engineering treatments.

We worked with other City departments, outside agencies, advocacy organizations, and media outlets to electronically distribute the survey as broadly as possible across the city. We targeted our outreach to neighborhoods with low response rates, translated the survey, and held focus groups to reach non-English speaking residents.

Feedback we received from the survey informed the updated prioritization methodology, as well as the implementing strategies and actions. A summary of our outreach activities is shown in Figure 1-1. Survey results are described in Chapter 4, and the full public survey report is provided in Appendix 2.



Communities across Seattle are seeking new ways to make their streets safe and more inviting.

FIGURE 1-1: PMP PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS



4,700
Total survey
responses
collected

**Over
6,000**
Written
comments

45
Neighborhoods
represented



15 Different languages
translated

- Korean
- Thai
- Russian
- Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Spanish
- Laotian
- Cambodian
- African languages (Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Swahili, Dinka, Lingala)



3
Outdoor
summer
events



2
Pedestrian
Master Plan
open houses

Public open houses

We held two public open houses in October 2015 to inform attendees about the PMP, advertise the public survey, and solicit survey responses. The PMP open houses were held jointly with the Trails Upgrade Plan, a concurrent SDOT pedestrian planning project seeking to make trail improvements throughout the city. The first open house was held in North Seattle, at the Northgate Library, and the second was held in Southeast Seattle, in Hillman City.

Community briefings

In addition to the project open houses, we worked with the Department of Neighborhoods to brief district and community councils. These meetings provided an opportunity to speak with residents directly about the PMP and the online survey, and to receive initial feedback on the Plan. We also attended several community and SDOT events to provide information on the Plan, including the Central District Summer Parkway, Ballard Summer Parkway, and PARK(ing) Day. In addition, we briefed various City Boards and Commissions during this outreach period, including the Seattle Planning Commission, Seattle Design Commission, Bicycle Advisory Board, Freight Advisory Board, Commission for People with Disabilities, Immigrant and Refugee Commission, and Urban Forestry Commission. Table 1-1 provides a summary of the community events and briefings we attended to solicit public input on the PMP.

During our summer outreach, we asked people “What is the single most important thing we can do to improve walking conditions in Seattle?” Event attendees shared their answers, and the responses we received fell into the following categories:

- Improve sidewalks
- Improve crossings
- Improve lighting, especially at crossings
- Slow vehicle speeds through traffic calming

- Increase car-free spaces, either permanently or temporarily
- Improve pedestrian access around construction sites

These answers have helped shape the strategies and actions developed for the Plan.

TABLE 1-1: PMP COMMUNITY EVENTS AND BRIEFINGS

PMP and Urban Trails Upgrade Plan Open Houses
Freight Advisory Board
Seattle Design Commission
Commission for People with Disabilities
Park(ing) Day
Seattle Comprehensive Plan Open Houses
Central District and Ballard Summer Parkways
District Council and Community Council meetings
Freight Master Plan Open Houses
“Seattle at Work” event
Immigrant and Refugee Commission
Bicycle Advisory Board
Seattle Planning Commission
Urban Forestry Commission



SDOT attended community events, including the Central District Summer Parkways, to provide information on the PMP.

PLAN ORGANIZATION

As you explore this document, you will find the following content:

Chapter 2: Policy Framework, outlines the planning context informing the updated PMP, as well as the Plan's vision, goals, and objectives.

Chapter 3: Measuring Progress, describes the progress we've made since the Plan's adoption in 2009 and assesses our performance toward desired plan outcomes.

Chapter 4: Prioritization Framework, presents the analysis framework for prioritizing locations for pedestrian investment throughout the city.

Chapter 5: Implementing Strategies and Actions, identifies tasks to implement the Plan and achieve its goals.

Chapter 6: Plan Implementation, lays out the path for executing the PMP, including a funding strategy, performance measures, and targets that we will use to determine the success of the Plan.



Photo credit: Adam Coppola Photography