

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 9, 2025
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Hybrid Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Magill, Commissioners Keilman, Kurz,
Marciante, Ting

COMMISSIONERS REMOTE:

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Stash, Commissioner Rebhuhn

STAFF PRESENT: Kevin McDonald, Andrew Singelakis, Michael Ingram,
Molly Johnson, Department of Transportation; Colin
Munson, Department of Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Vice Chair Magill who presided.

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Stash and Commissioner Rebhuhn who were excused.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Ting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keilman and the motion carried unanimously.

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Vice Chair Magill noted for the record the staff forwarded to the Commissioners all written communications received since the Commission's previous meeting.

Ben Mikle, a Downtown resident, voiced concern that the proposed system will ignore the most important factor that contributes to pedestrian stress. On the evening of October 25 while walking home from a grocery store a car traveling on Bellevue Way made a left turn onto NE 1st Street without checking for pedestrians in the crosswalk. Tires squealed as the driver finally saw the pedestrian in the crosswalk. It all happened in an instant, but it was absolutely terrifying. Under the proposed system, the low-volume, two-lane crossing at a stop sign with a curb extension would be rated LTS-1, the gold standard for what is an atrocious design that recklessly encourages cars to speed over a crosswalk. It should be more like LTS-1000. On December 17 at what might be considered to be the most dangerous crosswalk in the city, Bellevue Way and NE 2nd Street, while again walking home from the grocery store, the green walk signal came on, inviting the group of waiting pedestrians to cross, but just as they did, a car made a right turn without yielding. Fortunately, the driver slammed on the brakes at the last moment before angrily shaking a fist at the people who were nearly killed. The proposed

system would assign that crossing an LTS-4, but only because it happens to be a high-volume, five-lane road. The problem is that none of the interventions needed, such as a dedicated pedestrian phase, a raised intersection, or banning right-turns on red, would improve it from LTS-4. By focusing on the wrong metrics, the pedestrian LTS system could actually prevent the city from pursuing the most effective interventions. The new intersections by the transit center prove that the city knows how to make big crossings safe and comfortable for pedestrians. The raised intersections there have won multiple awards. They are favorite intersections because they feel so safe and comfortable. Their key feature is the dedicated pedestrian phase. Vehicles cannot run over pedestrians if they are not moving. There is one clear dominant factor in pedestrian stress, and it is not sidewalk width, buffer width or the average vehicle speed. It is the presence of vehicle conflict points in places and times when pedestrian safety depends on drivers seeing and yielding. Drivers are terrible at looking for pedestrians, and that is why that needs to be the most important metric in the LTS system.

Alex Tsimmerman began with a Nazi salute and called the Commissioners dirty damn Nazi gestapo fascist cockroach mafia soldiers. Last Tuesday after starting to speak in Council Chambers about the police commission, which has four meetings per year during which the public is not allowed to be present, Mayor Robinson shut down the talk saying it was not pertinent to Council business. It is unique. In Seattle, the police commission comes every month. In Bellevue under Mayor Robinson there are many problems with policemen acting like the gestapo. They have fabricated cases against the speaker. Eighteen tickets for \$3000. It is a Nazi dream that the Mayor and the city attorney can do this. Perhaps the police department is independent or a private corporation. What Mayor Robinson has done for the last six years is absolutely insane, the city is destroyed totally.

Nicole Myers voiced appreciation for the work of the staff on the Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress (PLTS) topic. The supplemental items are great. One item that should be added is driveway speeds. It can be distressing for pedestrians where driveways are angled so that the driver does not have to slow down to go into the driveway, or where a driveway is very wide, allowing the driver to also enter that driveway at close to full speed. Obviously, the driver is worried about cars hitting from behind, so the driver does not want to slow down more than necessary. That could be something to take into account in the metrics. There also may be permanent versus temporary obstructions for pedestrians to encounter. A lot of sidewalks are blocked by trash bins a large part of the week. While there are rules about bringing them in after scheduled pickup, but it does not always happen. There was a previous discussion by the Commission about comfort versus safety and hopefully there will be a list of ways generated to increase comfort, such as having shade and not having excessive light reflected on pedestrians, having good maintenance so it is clear of leaves, and other ways to increase the dignity of the experience for pedestrians. Hopefully, the process of updating the Ped-Bike Plan will include publicizing traffic calming options offered by the city. Many community members are unaware of the process for requesting a change to their neighborhood street. There have been many complaints about speed. With regard to the parking duration on Main Street, it is not uncommon for folks to drive around hoping they will get lucky and find a parking spot. Having longer parking times translates into more dollars being spent on shopping, and avoids the need to make an additional trip later for a particular errand. If enforcement is not happening, and people are spending more than two hours parked, it makes it less likely that customers will find spots for a quick stop. Parking limits should be enforced as a first step. If the utilization rates are still too high, above 80 to 85 percent, then parking fees should be added as a separate change. For those thinking about making a quick stop, half of the time is spent in walking to the payment kiosk.

Court Olson, member of the leadership team of an organization called People for Climate

Action, explained that the organization has been actively working with City Council members and city staff for several years on trying to help the city reduce greenhouse gas emissions. An email forwarded to the Commission earlier in the day included a two-page attachment that outlines the actions that the organization would like the Commission to recommend to the Environmental Stewardship group. The greenhouse gas emissions in Bellevue have really not dropped to a level where it can be said the city is on a trajectory to hit the reduction targets set by the city. Stronger actions are needed. The Environmental Stewardship Plan is set to be updated during 2025 and hopefully it will include actions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet those future reductions that are much needed to fight climate change. It is really important that the Transportation Commission make recommendations so that the City Council will stand up and listen even more than they listen to the organization. The Commissioners were urged to read the letter and the two-page attachment and give serious consideration to making the recommendations as outlined. It is not going to be easy. It is going to take some money, but if the city at least gets recommendations down on paper, the city's finance team can get to work finding the money that will be needed.

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, AND MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION – None

5. STAFF REPORTS

Transportation Director Andrew Singelakis took a moment to inform the Commission that Assistant Director of Transportation Planning Paula Stevens plans to retire in March. Taking over in that position will be Molly Johnson. Paula Stevens was thanked for doing an excellent job, and it was noted that Molly Johnson will follow suit.

Molly Johnson shared having most recently been Manager of the Transportation Development Review group.

6. PUBLIC HEARING – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. 2026-2030 Sustainable Bellevue Environmental Stewardship Plan Update

Climate and Electric Mobility Coordinator Colin Munson explained that the current Environmental Stewardship Plan was adopted by Council in 2020 and is scheduled to be updated every five years. Within the plan, there are goals and targets for 2030 and 2050 that apply community-wide across the five focus areas of climate change, energy, mobility and land use, materials management and waste, and natural systems. There is also a component of the plan related to municipal operations, such as building decarbonization and fleet electrification. Transportation Commission will zero in particularly on the mobility and land use focus areas, while the other boards and commissions will be addressed on their relevant areas of focus.

Colin Munson shared a graph describing the overall vision of the current plan. It was emphasized that sustainability and climate work are multifaceted, and the team collaborates with every board and commission, and every department, on the plan update and on the actions and strategies themselves. The update will include a new section focused on climate resilience.

As part of the recent Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, the city adopted a new overall emissions reduction target of 95 percent by 2050, increased from the previous 80 percent.

The Environmental Stewardship Plan update process was initiated in October by the Council and it is expected to take about a year. The team is talking to many stakeholders, both inside and outside the city. The update will occur in three phases. Phase 1 is currently underway and it involves addressing draft goals and targets. Phase 2 will involve the discussion of draft strategies. In Phase 3 an updated plan will be drafted. In each phase there will be multiple touchpoints with the city's boards and commissions. The expectation is that the Council will adopt the plan by the end of the year.

Colin Munson showed a chart indicating an eight percent reduction in the community-wide greenhouse gas emissions to date compared against the 2011 baseline, noting a 25 percent per capita reduction, notable for a rapidly growing city. However, the city is not on track to meet its 2030 or 2050 goals. Through the plan update, the aim will be to find strategies, targets, and actions that will help meet the emissions reduction goals. Like everywhere, transportation and mobility sources amount to about 40 percent of the total annually in the city.

With regard to the progress to date relative to mobility and land use, Colin Munson noted that the top two goals relate to transportation demand management for workers and residents, following by electric vehicle adoption, vehicle miles traveled reduction, and finally goals related to land use by locating jobs and housing near frequent transit. The progress made relative to the 2050 target for each metric was shared, noting that the city is performing relatively well on several of the measures. However, that does not mean the city is on track to meet its overall emissions reduction goals. The vehicle miles traveled metric, for example, has trended in the wrong direction year over year, reflecting a dip in 2020 and then a gradual rebound.

The team's initial thinking about updating the goals was outlined in a matrix format, with one column showing the existing 2030 and 2050 targets. For each target year, the items highlighted in blue were those proposed to be changed based on new data and analysis. The items highlighted in orange were those in need of further review. The two community-alone goals will need to align with the Transportation Demand Management Plan. Regarding the land-use goals for jobs and housing near transit, the team is running some background analysis that incorporates Comprehensive Plan policies, future transit expansions such as the K-Line, and the Sound Transit improvements expected before 2050.

There is a full table that outlines all of the strategies and associated actions divided into three main categories: land use, mobility options, and electric or low-carbon fuels. Over the past few years, significant progress has been made on many of them, including completion of major planning efforts like the Mobility Implementation Plan, the Curb Management Plan, and the Electric Vehicle Roadmap. Many strategies and actions are ongoing, such as commute-trip reduction and expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure that will continue to be worked on indefinitely.

Colin Munson said there will be more input sought during Phase Two resulting from much more in-depth conversations on the actions and the strategies for how to meet the goals. All city boards and commissions are being updated, and there will be some significant community outreach as well, including a town hall for the Stewardship Initiative to really kick things off.

Commissioner Ting referred to the chart showing the overall trend line and noted that commercial energy showed a significant drop. Colin Munson said that it was likely due to the pandemic. There is a dashboard that allows for delving into more details. Some of the dip could be driven by office buildings which used much less energy after Covid.

Vice Chair Magill referred to the table that showed the 2022 progress for electric vehicles was seven percent, which does not mesh with the roadmap that showed it was actually 25 percent. Colin Munson explained that there are two different figures in play there. The one chart shows the percentage of registered vehicles in Bellevue that are electric, a figure that currently stands at just under 10 percent. The 25 percent figure in the dashboard is the percentage of new vehicles sold that are electric, which is around 25 percent in Bellevue currently.

Commissioner Marciante asked about residents commuting alone and asked if the percentage involves residents commuting to work anywhere in the region. Colin Munson confirmed that. Many of the goals and actions involve close coordination with other departments. For purposes of consistency, the goal for that category was pulled directly from the Transportation Demand Management plan.

Senior Planner Mike Ingram said the reality is that Bellevue residents have a lower drive-alone rate than workers in Bellevue. That is likely because many people who live in Bellevue work in Seattle and choose to take the bus, since parking is expensive there, while many people who work in Bellevue come from other areas and drive alone.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Marciante, Colin Munson clarified that the current TDM plan calls for a 45 percent drive-alone rate by 2030, and 35 percent by 2050 for residents.

Commissioner Keilman asked if the performance factors in the plan align with county, state, or federal standards, and asked how Bellevue compares. Colin Munson said broadly speaking, much of what is done relative to the planning work is closely tied to county and regional efforts, particularly King County. A number of the goals and targets were set with consideration given to county-level metrics. For the most part, Bellevue has its own data and its own targets that are tailored specifically to Bellevue.

Commissioner Ting asked how work-from-home trends impact total vehicle miles traveled. Mike Ingram said the research shows people still drive a fair amount even if they are working from home, perhaps running errands. The overall vehicle miles traveled reduction is less than one might expect, but it is still a reduction. The city encourages working from home. On the transportation side of things, it is trips made during the peak hours that matter most, while from the environmental side of things, total greenhouse gases emissions are more important.

Commissioner Marciante said the topic is complicated and emerging. Travel behavior and travel volumes are not yet fully understood, so direct correlations are difficult to make. From the climate side, there is a wide range of different slices of the pie. No one initiative is a silver bullet, so there is a need to try many different strategies.

Commissioner Kurz asked if vehicle miles traveled include trips that begin and end in Bellevue, or does it also include pass-through trips. Colin Munson said it is all of the above. That data is compiled by the city's Transportation Modeling Team and involves Puget Sound Regional Council survey inputs along with Bellevue-Kirkland-Redmond data. The team validates the data against real-time traffic counts.

Vice Chair Magill asked if there are some goals the city has more control over than others, and possibly some the city has no control over. Colin Munson said the city actually does have quite a lot of control over the various goals, particularly those in the land use category. The goals are intentionally set at high levels and for each there are hundreds of different actions, small steps

that add up over time.

Commissioner Marciante stressed the importance of the per capita vehicle miles traveled reduction metric given that it will have the most impact. The metric is, of course, influenced by the pool of vehicles. Registered electric vehicles is a good metric, but the number of miles the electric vehicles drive needs to be determined so it can be known how many of the overall miles driven are by electric vehicles. Vehicle miles traveled is one of the most important metrics and the gold standard, but it is one of the hardest to control. The public should be informed as to why the metric is so important.

Commissioner Marciante commented on having been intrigued by the notion of adding an air travel component to the mix. Bellevue residents do travel a lot by air. More homework needs to be done into how many Bellevue air travelers are compensating in some way their air travel. There is an opportunity to at least start tracking the data that might include ways of offsetting carbon emissions.

Commissioner Marciante asked about the goals focused on the built environment. Colin Munson said the metrics regarding jobs and housing within a quarter mile of a frequent transit stop are the two most related to land use. Density and urban form are certainly related topics.

Commissioner Marciante commented that climate goals and targets are often lost. They are tracked over many years and the public does not always see much movement. It is important to make clear to the public why specific decisions are made so that when it comes time to make tough decisions and tradeoffs the public will be able to understand.

Commissioner Ting referenced non-resident commute miles and asked if those miles would go down with increased Metro stops or Metro buses, something which of course the city does not control. Since non-resident workers appear to be a tougher goal for the city to address than commuters in Bellevue, it could be that adding stops and buses would make a difference. Colin Munson said adding additional transit access could indeed translate into few vehicle miles traveled. The city does work to influence King County Metro and the transit agencies to provide services that will benefit the city.

Commissioner Kurtz agreed with the need to make vehicle miles traveled a metric that everyone talks more about. It is missing from many discussions, even in the Mobility Implementation Plan (MIP). In the MIP, all modes are equally important because they all move people around, but from the perspective of vehicle miles traveled, all modes are not equal. Pedestrian, bike, and electric modes are actually better. That is the only place where the city can have a bias toward changing the system. The metric should be emphasized along with additional metrics to help highlight progress. Even Bike Bellevue does not talk much about vehicle miles traveled, focusing instead on the issue of equity.

Vice Chair Magill asked if getting to 100 percent electric vehicles will trigger a different way of measuring vehicle miles traveled. Colin Munson said electric vehicles do not alter vehicle miles traveled; there is no factor that modifies vehicle miles traveled itself. What is applied is a fuel mix or carbon intensity factor. For transportation emissions, the calculations factor in vehicle miles traveled, the vehicle mix and the type of fuel, and from that comes total emissions. Higher electric vehicle adoption will lower emissions, but it will not alter the vehicle miles traveled figure itself.

On the point of how to make the approach actionable, Vice Chair Magill pointed out that wanting to do something does not necessarily translate into seeing actual impacts. Vehicle

miles traveled is a really important element, but it might be useful to look at each metric and determine which ones have the biggest impact on CO2, or whatever is most important, as well as which ones the city can influence. That might entail alignment with other cities and with the county to increase the overall impact. Bellevue is somewhat unique in that it has a large number of jobs and business headquarters, so there is the opportunity for leverage by working with those businesses that also have environmental goals.

Colin Munson reiterated that the actions and strategies in the current plan will be discussed in Phase 2. That discussion will include a focus on updating them or adding new strategies based on stakeholder input and staff research to help the city reach its 2030 and 2050 goals.

Commissioner Marciante highlighted the fact that there is a wealth of information in the companies located in Bellevue. There are environmental staff working at Microsoft, Amazon, and other businesses who are working globally on issues of sustainability. There could be an opportunity for the cities of Kirkland, Redmond, and Bellevue to work together in bringing everyone together, almost like a conference, to apply the collective expertise locally.

Commissioner Keilman commented that in moving toward the goal of 100 percent electric vehicles, there should be attention given to the equity component. Bellevue has a very large socioeconomic gap and that makes it necessary to consider how low-income individuals or families can afford electric vehicles. Additionally, if everyone eventually drives electric vehicles, it will be necessary to think about capacity of the power grid to handle the demand, and what would happen during power outages. Colin Munson said there is a lot of detail in the Electric Vehicle Roadmap, including about equity. Additionally, the city is launching a grid capacity study, which was requested by the Council in 2024, to examine questions about electrification demands.

B. MIP Update Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress

Kevin McDonald explained that the MIP Update topic of Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress (PLTS) is a component of planning and describes in simple, clear, and understandable terms the performance of the pedestrian network along arterials using defined metrics. That information can then be used to identify and prioritize concepts for projects to improve PLTS, similar to the Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress already in place.

Best practices and industry implementation often include four LTS categories for pedestrian stress on a scale of one to four, with LTS-1 being the most comfortable and safe environment for a pedestrian. LTS-2 is considered to be generally safe and comfortable but has some concerns. LTS-3 is moderately safe and uncomfortable, and LTS4 is somewhere one might not choose to walk.

In terms of how it relates to the Mobility Implementation Plan, Kevin McDonald explained that PLTS can address all four goals in the adopted plan, including identifying priorities and projects in places where there is the greatest need, generally correlating to land use in the Performance Management Areas of Downtown, BelRed, and Wilburton, where the most growth in both housing and office or commercial use is expected. The PLTS approach aligns well with Vision Zero. Safety is a big concern and an outcome the city wants to achieve when describing and implementing PLTS.

There is an equity component as well in wanting to make sure that individuals with mobility challenges have comfortable and safe access to daily needs, including transit, jobs, retail and commercial uses. PLTS also addresses the provision of access and mobility improvements to

the high-growth performance management areas that have high demand for pedestrian activity, plus specific locations outside those areas relative to schools, libraries, small commercial centers and the like where it is known people want to walk to and from.

Consultant Chris Breiland with Fehr & Peers said a scan of best practices was performed to help inform the work. The PLTS concept is much newer than Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress, which has been around for some 20 years. The idea of PLTS, which some agencies call Pedestrian Level of Comfort, arose in the 2020s. The leading research institute is the University Transportation Center Consortium of five universities, called the Center of Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety. Their work has led to defining the PLTS concept. The idea is to identify conditions that reduce fatalities and injuries and which also encourage places for people to walk. For Bellevue, the focus will be on arterials given that they are the most hazardous for pedestrians. People do walk a lot on local streets, but most injuries and fatalities occur on arterials.

Chris Breiland noted that at the previous meeting Commissioner Ting wanted to ensure that whatever is done will be rooted in true safety outcomes, not just comfort. That is a core part of the research. There were four fundamental factors identified by the Center for Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety relative to comfort and safety: posted speed limit or actual travel speed; traffic volume; the width of the sidewalk or paved shoulder if no sidewalk exists; and the width of the buffer from the motor vehicle travel lane. Each relates to safety. It is intuitive that given slower speeds, lower traffic volumes, wider sidewalks and more separation from moving cars, it generally feels better and is safer for pedestrians.

Most of the research took shape around 2020 and a number of papers were published in 2021 and 2022. Some implementation efforts are currently getting under way. There are regional examples coming from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), both of which consider speeds, the posted speed limits for WSDOT and sometimes the posted speed limits and the prevailing vehicle speeds for ODOT. Both also consider traffic volume, the number of lanes, and the presence of a sidewalk on one side or both sides of the roadway, or none). ODOT also looks at buffers such as trees and parking, pavement condition, and surrounding land use.

Chris Breiland said there are a couple more examples of mature local applications of PLTS, one from Montgomery County in the Washington, DC, area, which involves a very detailed system that is complicated but thorough, and one from Boulder, Colorado, which uses a more simplified approach. Montgomery County looks at posted or prevailing speeds, roadway classification, sidewalk presence and width, whether there is a buffer and what kind of buffer, as well as surface conditions. Boulder focuses on posted speed limits, lanes, sidewalk presence, the presence of a buffer, and commercial driveways, but does so in a pragmatic way based on what data are available. Boulder has explicitly said they would prefer more comprehensive data in the form of actual speeds, volumes and sidewalk widths, but they did not want the lack of data to keep them from moving forward.

With regard to vehicle speed, Chris Breiland said many places list the posted speed limits, but that is not necessarily how drivers behave. The gold standard is actual speeds, though that data can be harder to collect, which leads to some variations.

Kevin McDonald said the question of which metrics should define PLTS in Bellevue was put to transportation staff. The primary feedback received was that the metrics should be simple and easy to understand for the staff who implement it, for the Transportation Commission that endorses it, and for the broader community who wants to know what is being talked about.

Most of all, data is needed to back it all up. Bellevue is fortunate in that it has a wealth of data, especially for the arterial network, though less so for local streets. Therefore, the staff are focusing on a few primary metrics for PLTS.

Staff believes that there is sufficient data to support using traffic speed rather than the posted speed limit as a more accurate metric for PLTS. While the speed limit is one thing, how fast people actually drive is a completely different matter. Looking specifically at the 85th percentile traffic speed means 15 percent of the traffic is going faster than that posted speed limit and 85 percent is going slower. Traffic stress is tied to drivers going faster rather than slower. Speed connects directly to the intensity of a collision that might happen and the propensity for a collision, since there is less reaction time. Thus traffic speed is one metric.

Average daily traffic volume is another metric. The city has data and already uses it for Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress. The metric is one that everyone seems comfortable with. The width of the sidewalk and the width of the buffer work together, and that information is in hand as well. The buffer can sometimes be a physical separation, and sometimes there are components within the buffer that make a difference, such as a parked car, a street tree, or a raised barrier, like what can be seen on Bellevue Way in front of Lincoln Square where there are actual raised objects between the curb and the sidewalk to prevent cars from entering the sidewalk space.

Those four primary metrics, traffic speed, traffic volume, sidewalk width, and buffer width, are what staff recommends in determining PLTS. However, that is not all that will be considered. Staff identified a number of supplemental components that can make a difference in the actual experience of a pedestrian walking along an arterial. Some relate to the sidewalk environment, some to driveways in terms of spacing and volume and how that impacts comfort and safety, and others relate to generalized land use. More people can expect to be walking where there is a specific destination, such as a school or a library, and that needs to be considered.

Kevin McDonald said staff propose to include a narrative about the supplemental components in the Mobility Implementation Plan. The factors could help in prioritizing which areas to invest in when a performance target gap is identified, and they could also inform how to design a facility to close that gap. Other factors the Commission might recommend could also be part of the narrative and feed into prioritization and design decisions.

The staff believe that PLTS is the best practice for implementation in Bellevue, and the proposal is to use simple, easy-to-understand primary metrics for which there is already data, as well as supplemental components that inform priorities and project design.

With regard to how to consider the safety aspect, given that the research cited discusses perceived safety and comfort versus actual safety, Commissioner Ting noted that many places refer to comfort, as opposed to actual pedestrian safety. It would be good to find a way to distinguish between the comfort aspect and the safety aspect in the PLTS levels. For instance, visibility is a factor. A person may be walking on the street and a car cannot see them due to landscaping or other obstructions, and they are more likely to be hit. That is not necessarily captured by the LTS metrics or even the supplemental qualitative aspects. The staff were encouraged to think about how to encourage people to walk while also ensuring that they are truly safe, and making sure the two are not conflated. The data indicates that over the last ten years there were roughly 66 killed or seriously injury (KSI) incidents. A lot of them involved turning cars, either right turns or left turns, plus some straight-ahead collisions and a few uncategorized ones. It would be good to look at that existing KSI data and use it to inform how to calculate PLTS. Although it is not a huge data set, it is sufficient for a first look to see if any additional elements in facility design might help reduce those incidents. Chris Breiland

remarked that the relationship between speed, volume, width, and buffer is not conflation. According to the data, pedestrians are involved in KSI accidents due to cars moving too quickly, no space to walk, or being too close to traffic without a buffer or barrier. Those metrics were not chosen accidentally; they come from years of national research. Where there are two roads that are otherwise the same, except that one offers more space, separation, and deflection, that one will have fewer pedestrian deaths or serious injuries. A slower-speed street also has fewer severe injuries. The fundamental elements are rock solid core safety factors; comfort is somewhat secondary.

Commissioner Ting said if the approach is aimed at measuring safety, it should be stated up front that the focus is on safety, not just comfort. While that may be splitting hairs, the city should be clear on whether the focus is on safety or on comfort. The two should not be interchanged when talking about goals.

Commissioner Marciante disagreed. The reason one feels comfortable is because they feel safe. One's sense of safety is highly correlated with the actual risk. If one is walking on an arterial with a minimal sidewalk, it is perceived to be a dangerous situation, so the person feels stressed. The research calls it "level of stress" or "comfort" because they correlate. It is not 100 percent for everyone, but it is highly correlated.

Commissioner Keilman said the focus should not stop at a metric, it should be taken one step further. For a PLTS-1 corridor where there is no significant safety concern, the focus can turn to comfort. However, for PLTS-2 or higher corridors, safety is the primary factor and evidence that something needs to be rectified. For PLTS-4 corridors, the minimum steps might include reflective barriers, additional lights, more landscaping, and so on.

Commissioner Ting suggested comfort may be easier to measure than safety in that it might be more understandable or easier to explain to the public. Chris Breiland agreed that comfort is more easily understandable by the public. If it was all about pedestrian safety, the city could simply ban people from walking on roads and eliminate the hazard, which is the approach taken relative to freeways. That is obviously not a practical approach in a city. Comfort is introduced to ensure a fundamentally safe environment that is as free from harm as possible.

Commissioner Ting said there might be a messaging issue in play. For instance, with poor driver visibility, a pedestrian might feel comfortable without realizing cars cannot see them. That is a genuine safety concern. Speed, volume, sidewalk width and buffer width do seem like valid safety factors. But labeling them comfort metrics decreases the focus on other aspects, such as visibility. The staff were encouraged to think about what key things should be focused on from a safety perspective. Chris Breiland agreed things could be framed in that way but stressed the importance of understanding that in implementation things like sight distance and a whole suite of traffic engineering principles come into play; they are not separate from one another. In other words, one does not plant street trees in a way that will obscure the minimum sight distance. There are landscaping requirements that ensure those elements are removed at driveway entrances. There is a whole suite of elements that are really more fundamental to the design standards in the engineering space, and the concept runs in parallel with those standards. The fundamental engineering pieces, which are the safety pieces, must come first, and then elements that enhance aesthetics or quality can be added, but only once the design standards are satisfied.

Kevin McDonald pointed out that the new assistant director Molly Johnson comes from the Development Services world and is an engineer, and thus will ensure that the standards are met. One of the goals for the Mobility Implementation Plan is safety, not comfort. The

emphasis is properly placed on ensuring that the PLTS has a safety focus.

Vice Chair Magill noted that both the city and Boulder, Colorado, have identified the presence of driveways as an element. From a bicycle perspective, it is obviously very important, but it is also important from a pedestrian perspective. It is easier for pedestrians to take evasive action over someone on a bike, but practically, pedestrians can feel the stress when walking in areas with lots of driveways or parking lot exits. Downtown Bellevue has places where cars are coming out quickly to merge onto Bellevue Way. Conversely, for one walking on NE 6th Street behind Lincoln Square, the experience is totally different. It is somewhat surprising that driveways are not included as one of the primary metrics given their importance from both a comfort and a safety perspective. Kevin McDonald said the driveway issue is related to safety. The primary considerations include spacing, volume of vehicles, driveway design, and sight distance. The current standards are different from the older standards, so many of the existing driveways do not meet the current requirements. The development review staff will ensure the application of the latest visibility and sight distance standards, particularly in regard to commercial driveways in Performance Management Areas with large volumes of vehicles but with greater spacing between the driveways. That variability is why driveways are included as a supplemental rather than primary component. Driveways are addressed on a site-specific or segment-specific basis rather than as a primary mapping metric. There likely is GIS data on where driveways are, but there is no data on driveway volumes, though some inferences can be drawn based by building size. Even so there are many variables, such as time of day. It is a complex factor to be considered in prioritization and project design rather than in mapping PLTS across a corridor.

Chris Breiland pointed out that the city does not have direct control over driveways given that property owners have a right of entry from the time their permits are granted. It can be frustrating to the public when the city cannot simply close or modify driveways. Over time, development standards change, and where there is redevelopment, the city might put some restrictions in place. That does not, however, remove the fact that driveways are a concern for pedestrians and bicyclists. Many communities do not list them as a primary measure, partly because there is little they can do unless the property redevelops. Meanwhile, the city can influence sidewalk width, buffers, speed limits and the like.

Vice Chair Magill suggested that where PLTS is used as a prioritization tool, the city could choose not to invest as heavily in sidewalks on corridors with a lot of driveways, electing instead to prioritize safer areas first. That would align with the staff approach of treating driveways as a supplemental metric. Chris Breiland said the first four metrics highlight where improvements are fundamentally needed, and the secondary metric helps decide how to prioritize and design.

Commissioner Marciante: agreed that driveways are important. Labeling a street as wonderful when it really is not would degrade the value of the metric. If it is not possible for the city to do anything about some situation, it will need to defend that decision. It might be more honest for the city to acknowledge that a certain street is uncomfortable instead of calling it safe or comfortable.

Commissioner Marciante suggested that lighting should possibly be a primary metric, because low lighting conditions at night can pose risks for pedestrians. The importance of comfort relative to utilization should be stressed, but underlying everything is the issue of safety, which correlates to comfort. If people feel safer, they will be more comfortable walking. The city should be clear in communicating with the public that level of stress or comfort is closely tied to safety, but they are not identical. Priority should be given to low-stress environments,

especially near high-pedestrian areas or transit stations.

Commissioner Ting agreed that from a messaging perspective safety is an easy sell. It can be followed with the message that one feels comfortable when they are safe. The first focus, however, should be on the metrics and the mechanisms that focus on safety.

Commissioner Ting said the comment made by Vice Chair Magill regarding a corridor with many driveways should be linked with the question of whether people should be kept off the street or if the city should try to improve it. Of course the issue is highly contextual because it depends on factors such as whether there is a parallel route and specific destinations in the area. While the city cannot simply close off a driveway, there are steps that can be taken to make things better, including street width, visibility, lighting, and other factors. Consideration should be given to the notion of elevating the number of driveways to a primary metric, or if it should remain a secondary one. Intuitively, the number of incidents caused by left and right turns suggests that driveways are indeed a significant issue for pedestrian safety.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Ting, Kevin McDonald said the issue of crossing pedestrian level of traffic stress will be discussed at the Commission's January 23 meeting. The city has a toolkit for addressing mid-block crossings and signalized intersections and it is very similar to bicycle level of traffic stress along a corridor. The idea is to give the same level of attention to pedestrian crossings as is given to bicycle crossings at signalized intersections.

Commissioner Kurz urged caution of promoting driveways to become a primary metric, which might prevent the city from building a complete network. It would be wrong to say a sidewalk cannot be built somewhere just because there are too many driveways and it is too dangerous. People need to walk where they need to walk and the city should make things better than they are now, even if it is not possible to reach LTS-1. It is possible that an LTS-2 or LTS-3 could be achieved despite the driveways by including design measures such as additional striping. There would be danger in saying it is simply too unsafe to build somewhere.

Commissioner Marciante pointed out that where there is a high level of conflict between pedestrians and vehicles, there are strategies that can be implemented, including stationing an officer at a driveway during certain times. It is not as though the city has absolutely no options. The city should not simply skip investing in an area just because there are numerous driveways, but the factor might affect the priorities. Areas with many driveway conflicts can be addressed through buffers, additional signage, or something else to mitigate the stress.

Commissioner Ting agreed. Whether or not driveways are elevated to become a primary metric does not necessarily imply the city should ignore it or automatically build it out. It all depends on the context. If there is no alternative route, the city might try to improve it. If it is extremely dangerous and there is another good option, maybe that is preferable. The Commission currently lacks a good understanding of how the pedestrian network is fully built out or how trade-offs are made.

Commissioner Kurz pointed out that driveways are not necessarily fixed in their current levels of danger. Over time culture and driving habits can change, and people may become more cautious if there are more pedestrians. Policies such as banning right turns on red could be implemented, which might make drivers more careful emerging from driveways. It is not a given that driveways will always be dangerous.

Vice Chair Magill commented that elevating the importance of driveways would not

necessarily lead to stopping a project; it is more about where to invest. It has already been identified that intersections are in play. A driveway is essentially an intersection or vehicle contact point. The focus may simply need to be on reducing the number of contact points if possible.

Kevin McDonald said the issue of incorporating driveways into the PLTS system will be addressed during an upcoming staff meeting, and their perspectives will be shared with the Commission on January 23.

Commissioner Marciante added that pedestrians are going to use any route that connects two points, not just official pedestrian routes. A route connecting a school with a library will be heavily used, even if it has a large number of intersecting driveways. There may be fewer pedestrians because of the difficulty, but if that is the way they want to go, the city cannot simply ignore it. The four primary metrics are intended to help the city determine where to look first, and the supplemental metrics help in refining the design. Even where pedestrians face difficulties, those areas need to stay on the city's radar as an area in need of attention.

Commissioner Ting asked if anyone has looked at the KSI data for pedestrians with an eye on identifying patterns. Obviously the High Injury Network can be used to determine where the most incidents occur, but in terms of the root causes, it is known that turns are an issue, but there could be something particular about a turn, some aspect that might appear as a different type of metric that is not being considered.

Vice Chair Magill commented that the things discussed have some similarities with Bike Bellevue, particularly in regard to how to look at where people really want to go. While there are different walkability scores, Bellevue frankly does not score very well. There are various technical solutions and models that measure walkability, but one measurable element is simply where the amenities are in terms of schools, libraries, coffee shops and restaurants. The focus should be on using the system to prioritize where to invest resources. That might result in more value by connecting where people truly want to go and encouraging business traffic. It might also help from a safety perspective, since the investments can be specific to where people are likely to go. Kevin McDonald said the comments hit on at least two fundamental goals of the Mobility Implementation Plan: supporting growth and providing access and mobility. Supporting growth relates to generalized land use, looking at where development is occurring, the density, and the mix of uses. Access and mobility focuses on those outlier places, such as local coffee shops or small businesses that are not necessarily in a high-growth area but area located where people in the neighborhood want to go. The goal is to ensure people have access to those places.

Commissioner Marciante stressed the need to avoid only investing in the high-development areas, like Downtown or BelRed. Some communities feel they never get sidewalks fixed or any improvements because they have low volume and a low walkability score. The city must consider equity to ensure that all places are safe and accessible, and that funds are distributed fairly among all residents.

Commissioner Ting voiced the assumption that the PMA-3 and the PLTS scores will be similar given that the neighborhoods have relatively low vehicle volumes and speeds. The question asked was whether or not those areas will all end up being green outside of the urban core, or if there would still be some red zones. Chris Breiland agreed that the local roads, which is the majority of PMA-3, would be green. The arterials in PMA-3 may not look as good as PMA-1 and PMA-2 in part due to the reasons mentioned by Commissioner Marciante.

Commissioner Keilman asked if alternate routes like skybridges or underground walkways or bike paths can be looked at simultaneously to looking at the red zones. As the city grows, sidewalks will only be able to be so wide and will only hold so many people. If the aim is to increase pedestrian activity, and growth keeps happening, the sidewalks may feel very crowded, in New York City. Kevin McDonald said one of the supplemental characteristics is pedestrian volume. Grade separation can be an option in certain locations, though the City Council has only approved skybridges or separate pathways in limited areas. They are a last resort for a number of reasons, including the need to maintain sidewalk safety and active uses at street level. However, that does not preclude considering such options where they may be reasonable implementation strategies.

Commissioner Keilman suggested medical centers, urgent care clinics, grocery stores, libraries, high schools, and the like could be prioritized.

Commissioner Ting asked if the PLTS score is based on the worst score between both sides of a corridor, the average, or just the best side. Chris Breiland said the approach will involve rating each side of the street independently. It is likely the streets will be segmented down into fairly fine-grained sections. It would not be helpful to declare an entire stretch to be at the worst level if there is variation between the sides. Segmentation will be needed in order to tell a more accurate story.

Commissioner Ting commented that there is a preference for having a sidewalk on at least one side of every street. All the streets with a sidewalk on only one side might all be labeled as higher stress. Chris Breiland said the Commission will need to consider prioritization but it makes sense to make sure the total gaps are filled. To that end each side will be scored. Roads with no facilities whatsoever will be specially flagged and shown distinctly in the data.

Kevin McDonald said at the January 23 meeting the primary metrics will be relied on in creating a PLTS matrix, similar to what was done for bicycles, using a combination of roadway factors and sidewalk factors to derive a stress level. It might start with a gradation rather than an assignment of a PLTS category to a specific cell given that there are many supplemental components to consider, which could blur the lines between LTS levels. Attention will also be given to the implementation tools to ensure continuity at intersections and mid-block crossings. Likely in February, the focus will turn to applying the matrix to produce color-coded lines on a map to show how the arterial network functions in terms of pedestrian level of traffic stress.

Commissioner Marciante proposed having actual numbers to apply to the PLTS categories. The secondary metrics can inform what is done next. Simply having something labeled as PLTS-2 does not mean it will be the first priority since there will be other contextual factors. What is needed is a clearly delineated system that is easy to explain. Kevin McDonald said that is a fair point. The PLTS approach is part science and part art. Staff will provide a range of reasonableness on which the Commission can weigh in.

Commissioner Ting pointed out that an LTS of 1.1 will be different from an LTS of 1.9, and that difference should be clear.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 12, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Commissioner Keilman. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ting and the motion carried unanimously.

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS – None

10. NEW BUSINESS – None

11. REVIEW OF COMMISSION CALENDAR

Kevin McDonald took a moment to inform the Commissioners about upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Magill adjourned the meeting at 8:52 p.m.