

Downtown Oregon City Bike & Pedestrian Needs Inventory: What We Heard

A summary of stakeholder interviews

Spring 2021

Introduction:

To prepare for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project, the City of Oregon City commissioned a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan. This plan calls for, “creating safe connections to the riverwalk and full site through multiple transportation modes and efficient parking standards will complement the Falls area and Downtown Oregon City for years to come.” This Downtown Bicycle Needs Inventory and Action Plan (NIAP) project is based on TDM strategies within the plan.

As part of the community engagement effort for the NIAP, City staff interviewed 14 individual stakeholders, including business owners, residents, and other stakeholders, and had conversations with representatives from The Father’s Heart Ministry, Clackamas County and TriMet.

Most of the interviewees were asked nearly identical questions about the existing conditions of the NIAP project area (e.g. what is/where are the most dangerous intersections for pedestrians?), as well as a few questions designed to generate project ideas (“are there any places where you think we need to add bicycle parking?”). Some interviewees were asked additional questions that reflected their expertise, interests, or occupation (e.g. “how many people use the Municipal Elevator each day?”). The interviews were conducted either by phone or video chat and typically lasted between 30-60 minutes.

In addition to the interviews, some of the insights below were gathered from a field survey of existing conditions, conducted with the help of some of the interviewees, and four tours of the project area, which some of interviewees also attended.

Key Insights:

Equity

One of the challenges identified early on was the need to make Main Street more accessible to more people, including members of historically marginalized communities. When asked who are the “disadvantaged” populations who should benefit from the pedestrian and bike projects identified by the NIAP, interviewees provided a long list of answers. This list included seniors, especially those who use

canes, as well as children, but the two most common responses were transit users and wheelchair users.

Of the six interviewees who mentioned transit users, three asked for improvements to the Transit Center to better serve low-income residents who use transit to move between downtown and the hilltop neighborhoods. The suggested improvements included widening the sidewalks surrounding the Transit Center, improving nighttime illumination, adding more covered areas, and installing artwork. Interviewees also pointed out the need to improve the sidewalks and crossings between 11th St. and 10th St. to better connect the transit center to the rest of downtown. TriMet representatives indicated that improvements around the Transit Center might be added in conjunction with TriMet's planned capacity upgrades in the next five years.

When it came to improving downtown for wheelchair users, one interviewee (who uses a wheelchair) suggested addressing the sidewalk cracking found across the scope and signing some on-street parking spaces specifically for ADA. .

In addition to serving transit and wheelchair users, one interviewee hoped for Oregon City take more steps to make downtown more inclusive to BIPOC community members. Several project area tour attendees supported the idea of commissioning local artists (including BIPOC community members) to paint murals across the scope to reflect the city's values.

Dangerous Intersections:

Figuring out which intersections were perceived to be the most dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists was one of the primary objectives of these interviews. While the City already collects traffic volume, speed, and crash information, the data is limited and incomplete, so getting personal insight from people who regularly walk, bike, and/or drive in the project area helps paint a fuller picture.

When it comes to the most dangerous intersections, most interviewees agreed that the intersection of 10th St. & Main St. is a top concern. Two interviewees noted that they are almost hit crossing that intersection on a regular basis, and several commented that the current design of the 4-way stop is "confusing" and makes pedestrians harder to see. This is primarily attributed to the turn lanes, which forces drivers to focus on car traffic coming from as many as six different directions before crossing or turning, leaving little time to look for pedestrians. Interviewees also noted the importance of this intersection as a pedestrian and bike link between the two areas of downtown.

The second most dangerous intersection according to the interviewees is 14th St. & Main St., which was also described as "confusing" for drivers due to the lack of stop signs and heavy traffic coming off of McLoughlin Blvd. While there was little consensus, interviewees felt that the traffic control signage needed some kind of update, and some had ideas for better bicycle infrastructure at the intersection.

The third and fourth most referenced intersections were 7th St. & Main St., where there is a long wait time for pedestrians trying to cross and cars using the intersection tend to drive fast, and Main St. & McLoughlin Blvd., where the same problems apply. Many interviewees pointed out that improving Main St. & McLoughlin Blvd. and 10th St. & McLoughlin Blvd. is critical to prepare for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project.

While the full NIAP project area includes the area above the elevator in the McLoughlin Neighborhood, responses regarding dangerous intersections were focused almost entirely on improving Main Street. Six interviewees also cited Main Street as the most important destination where access needed to be improved (three cited the Waterfront). Three interviewees agreed that Main Street north of 10th needed pedestrian improvements in order to feel more like a part of downtown. All who were prompted (and some who weren't) felt that improving north-south pedestrian and bike connections along Main Street from McLoughlin Blvd. to the Cove was critical to encourage more people to walk, bike, or ride transit to reach downtown, regardless of their place of origin.

According to data collected from 2014-18, the most dangerous intersection in the project area is 12th St. and Washington. That intersection has since been signalized. A representative of Father's Heart Ministry stated that they have noticed a drop in car speeds at the intersection since the traffic signals were installed, however they are aware of at least one incident of a car hitting a pedestrian since then. In addition, The Father's Heart staff noted that pedestrians cross without a walk signal due to long wait times. They felt the intersection would be even safer if the wait times were reduced.

Crosswalks and Sidewalks

A common theme of the interviews was crosswalk safety, primarily through the addition of curb extensions and striping (or striping improvements). Striping was the most cited solution, and during tours of the project area three attendees supported using colorful striping designs at key intersections like 7th St. & Railroad Ave and 10th St. & Main St. to improve safety and reflect community values. Other solutions to improve crosswalk safety included more signs that alerted drivers to the presence of pedestrians, shorter pedestrian wait times at signalized intersections, strategically-placed candlestick bollards, and better nighttime illumination.

Sidewalk issues were one of the most common observations made by volunteers who collected data in the field. Many of the interviewees, including a wheelchair user, felt that Main St. and the sidewalks near the Bluff should be prioritized when repairing sidewalk lifts and cracks. The sidewalks surrounding the Transit Center and the sidewalk on Singer Hill were both identified as needing to be widened, along with filling in sidewalk gaps on Main Street leading to the Cove development.

One of the most ambitious projects identified in the interviews was to redevelop Center Street from 12th-14th to be more pedestrian and bike friendly. One interviewee suggested that this would be an opportunity to improve pedestrian and bike connectivity between the new food cart pod and the rest of downtown. During a project area tour, several stakeholders noted that improvements to Center St. would also connect drivers using the public parking lot to the food cart pod. The improvements discussed included adding sidewalks and bike parking, better nighttime illumination, painting the trestle with brighter colors, adding sculptures, and adding a bioswale or rain garden.

An equally ambitious project was to create a pedestrian connection between Main St. & Washington St. in the vicinity of the Amtrak station. Three interviewees supported this project, and two older volunteers shared that they cross the railway at 17th St. on a regular basis despite the danger and it not being allowed. Throughout the process interviewees, volunteers, and other stakeholders brought up this project as a good idea, both to improve connectivity for local pedestrians and cyclists as well as for visitors trying to access the Trolley Trail.

Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signage was also a common theme during the interviews. Many felt that downtown's existing signs are inadequate and lacking uniformity, creating a visually busy and confusing network of signage. Some felt the more creative wayfinding signs, such as markings engraved in the sidewalk, were a good idea but too few in number to get visitor's attention.

New signs that were suggested included ones that provided directions to cyclists coming to downtown via McLoughlin Blvd., visitors trying to reach the McLoughlin Promenade or elevator parking lot, and cyclists trying to get to other parts of town from the top of the elevator. While one interviewee warned against using too many new sign designs and logos, others were open to more creative ways to direct visitors, including street murals and colorful crosswalks.

Generally speaking, the interviewees and other stakeholders who have been involved in the NIAP process would be supportive of an Oregon City signage plan that introduces a more uniform design among key wayfinding signs, while also investing in creative signage that double as beautification projects.

Bike Parking

One of the more surprising finds of the interview process was the broad consensus that more bike parking, including bike corrals that could be placed in the street, would be a welcome project.

Seven interviewees asked for more bike parking on Main St. from 5th-10th, three explicitly suggesting or being open to a bike corral. The most common reason was that biking visitors want to park their bikes where they can see them, and if there isn't adequate parking cyclists will lock their bikes where they might obstruct the

sidewalk. Several interviewees pointed out that improving the visibility of bike parking, with brighter paint and/or bike corrals, would encourage more people to bike to Main St. rather than drive. While the area around the courthouse was mentioned several times, the most popular location for adding bike parking downtown is in front of Black Ink/White Rabbit, where customers routinely lean their bikes against the wall rather than park down the street. The owner of the business strongly supports this idea.

Beyond Main St., interviewees also recommended new bike parking or a bike corral near City Hall, the top of the Municipal Elevator, the former Singer Hill Café, and the new food cart pod on 14th St. & Washington St. One reason provided to install a corral at the top of the elevator was that the elevator operator could keep an eye on parked bikes during operating hours. Another interviewee suggested also adding a bike repair kiosk next to the customer service desk, which might include a bike pump and a few tools.

Bicycle Facilities

One type of bike infrastructure that was popular among interviewees was sharrows, which are shared lane markings to identify streets where vehicles and bicycles share the street (these are currently found on Main Street).

Several interviewees suggested both repainting the existing sharrows on Main St. as well as adding sharrows across the project area, and two interviewees supported family friendly route projects that would use sharrows and other markings to encourage cyclists coming from Hilltop and the McLoughlin Neighborhood to use 6th St. to reach the Municipal Elevator. A fourth interviewee asked for an alternative biking route, possibly a family friendly route, that would allow cyclists to get to the McLoughlin Neighborhood from the area of the new food cart pod without having to bike up Washington St. In addition to more sharrows, a fifth interviewee supported adding bike boxes to the intersections of 14th & Main, 14th & Washington, and 15th & Washington. Throughout the NIAP process, stakeholders and volunteers have pointed out the need for better pedestrian and bike infrastructure on Railroad Ave., and one interviewee suggested turning that street into a family friendly route as well.

Most of the interviewees who supported installing more sharrows wanted that effort to be tied to new wayfinding signage and crossing improvements for bicycles, with some pointing out that cyclists and the bike-curious need to not only have bike infrastructure available to them, but also know where to find it.

Other Findings

One of the questions asked of most interviewees was “to be successful the Action Plan must...?” The list of responses included:

- Be implemented soon
- Improve safety

- Be well-funded
- Improve equity
- Provide useful infrastructure
- Be a part of a long-term vision
- Be realistic
- Improve the visitor experience
- Establish Oregon City as a bike centric municipality

A few common ideas and comments that have not already been mentioned in this summary include:

- A public restroom downtown is needed, perhaps near the base of the Municipal Elevator.
- Car speeds need to be reduced and pedestrian crossings improved on High Street near the elevator.
- The City should work with businesses to create some kind of program or partnership that rewards people for biking or walking to Main St. (one stakeholder suggested discounts at their business).
- Downtown needs a public e-bike charger, either to top of Elevator or somewhere along Main St.
- Main St. needs more street furniture, especially trash cans and benches.
- The train trestle on Center between 12th St. and 14th St. needs to be repainted to become a more attractive feature.
- The City needs to increase the public's awareness of the public parking lot on 13th & Main St.
- The City needs to increase the public's awareness of the many great recreational biking options surrounding the city.

Appendix A: Detailed Notes from each Interview

Note: not all interview notes are included here; some were more technical in nature and instead, the information obtained has informed the process and been incorporated throughout the plan.

Elevator Staff

- Staff are willing to start counting micromobility and ADA/cane riders at the elevator. Estimates there are 5-10 ADA/cane riders and 20/30 cyclists who use the elevator on a normal day, which sees 1,000 riders on average. On the weekend the number of cyclists jumps to 100, especially on Sunday.
- At the moment, keeping the elevator open past 9:30 would serve few people (besides restaurant workers) and be a safety issue for the operator or a potential property damage risk if no operator is kept there.
- The number one complaint received and a top priority is the lack of a permanent public bathroom in downtown.
- The most critical intersection to address is 10th and Main, where staff is almost hit on a regular basis as a pedestrian, followed by 14th/Main. The general areas in need of more “love” are north of 10th on Main and Washington.
- Improving connection to the mill site at the 99E/Main intersection is critical.
- Would like to see more bike parking in general and identifies the 99E/Main intersection and the stretch of Washington between 10th and 17th as ideal for new racks.
- Improving safety should be the top factor when prioritizing projects, followed by equity. The disadvantaged populations most concerned for are transit users trying to reach downtown from the upper levels
- The elevator parking lot could use better wayfinding signage and High Street could use a “little love” as speeding cars use it to skip traffic on 99E via Singer Hill.

Stakeholder Interview #1

- Most dangerous intersection is 10th/Main, followed by 7th/Main. 10th/Main lacks pedestrian visibility and requires a “higher tech” solution than the flags that used to be there.
- Concerned about accessing the mills site from downtown, and feels both the 10th/99E and Main/99E intersections should be improved for ped/bikes.
- While supportive of adding more marked crosswalks and bike lanes (even on Main), feels the biggest need downtown for cyclists is bike parking, and is open to a well-placed bike corral, as it would encourage more biking downtown.
- Safety is the top priority when it comes to picking projects, followed by equity. One way to improve safety is by adding lighting to Railroad, which is a “scary alley” more than a street. For equity, improving ADA accessibility is critical.

- It is important to improve transit access from the higher levels to downtown, would like to see something like the trolley service that ended a few years ago.
- For bike/peds 7th, Washington, Main, 99E, and High Street coming off the hilltop are important streets for accessing downtown.
- Would also like to see elevator hours extended for the restaurant crowd, especially as the stairs are a big climb for seniors.
- High Street could use improvements for bike/peds as speeding cars use it to skip traffic on 99E via Singer Hill.

Stakeholder Interview #2

- There are far too few ADA parking spaces in the downtown area, especially near the restaurants on Main, there many places where they could easily be added, such by the courthouse, White Rabbit, and the elevator.
- While it may be assumed that potholes/cracks/lifts are a bigger problem for wheelchair users, they also impact the elderly and cane users.
- Transit users are disadvantaged and more transit lines are needed to connect downtown to the hilltop neighborhoods, possibly via South End Road and/or Telford Road.
- Improving equity should be the top factor when prioritizing projects, with safety being the second priority.

Stakeholder Interview #3

- Improving Main/99E intersection is critical for preparing the scope area for the Willamette Falls Legacy Project. Other key intersections include 10th/Main and 7th/Main.
- Businesses along Main north of 10th feel a “lack of love” generally speaking, and would appreciate better nighttime illumination.
- Safety should be the top factor when prioritizing projects in the action plan.
- Projects that serve elevator users should also be a top priority, followed by those that serve transit users.
- Perhaps the most disadvantaged populations are those who access the courthouse via the Transit Center.
- There is a lot of interest in a permanent public restroom, but a recent proposal was rejected because it would remove two parking spaces.
- The Arch Bridge is a primary pedestrian entrance to downtown, while the Amtrak station, Transit Center, and Elevator are all significant pedestrian trip generators.
- There are multiple businesses on Main who would like to see improvements to ped/micro facilities

Stakeholder Interview #4

- Improving the Main/99E intersection is critical considering the future Willamette Falls Legacy Project. Other priority intersections include 7th/Railroad, 14th/Main, 14th/Washington, 12th/99E, and 14th/99E
- Two future food cart pods at 14th/Washington will likely double the pedestrian crossings at that intersection.
- At the moment there are too many types of crosswalk designs in the downtown area.
- People with mobility challenges would find it really hard to get to Amtrak on Washington due to ADA compliance issue on west side of the street.
- While walkability in the scope is fine, the signage is inconsistent in design and this creates a sensory overload. The signage needs to be “coalesced.”
- Oregon City lacks an “active transportation culture” and improving it starts by showing people what is possible.
- Removing parking at crosswalks is a good idea to improve pedestrian visibility/safety.

Stakeholder Interview #5

- Improving the intersections along 99E to be critical, especially the intersections of 10th/99E and Main/99E. Improvements might begin with shortening wait times for walk signals.
- Seating, especially covered seating, for pedestrians is severely lacking in the downtown area.
- The sidewalks surrounding the Transit Center are too narrow for wheelchairs to use comfortably.
- Like others, Railroad is the first street that comes to mind when asked about poor nighttime illumination.
- Connectivity, especially when it comes to the Willamette Falls Legacy Project, is the most important factor when prioritizing projects in the action plan, followed by safety. It is also important to improve connectivity to the Cove along Main.
- Transit users, especially those who work downtown, are the most disadvantaged population in the scope area.
- In order to successful this project needs to include policy changes, such as Vision Zero, to prove this city is invested in this long term.
- Would like to know how a tolling program on I-205 might impact traffic on the Arch Bridge.

Stakeholder Interview #6

- Intersections along 99E are the most unpleasant to cross for pedestrians, especially 99E/10th.
- When it come to accessing the shopping Center, Main is too isolating and long to feel safe using.
- While the Oregon City bike racks (with the Arch Bridge motif) are really pretty, their color blends them in with the landscape.

- Bike corrals, especially ones with cameras, would be good as long as they don't block the visibility of a business. Bike corral are great for the groups of recreational cyclists who bike through the area and usually can't find a place where they can lock up their bikes together.
- Safety is the most important factor when prioritizing the projects in the action plan, followed by connectivity and demand.
- Linn is a "disaster" for cyclists and pedestrians, even if it is the best street to use to get to the hilltop neighborhoods.
- The High Street/Singer Hill crosswalk is to far away from Singer Hill. Lots of folks cross High Street before reaching the crosswalk, which is a problem because the sun at sunset is blinding there for most of the year.

Stakeholder Interview #7

- The most dangerous intersections are 10th/Main, 7th/Main, and 14th/Main, with 14th/Main being particularly difficult because of how drivers queue up.
- One problem with biking downtown is that the area lacks clear signage and facilities for cyclists. Where bike lanes are not workable, improve signage for cyclists and motorists.
- The stairs are easier to climb than using Singer Hill, even if you have a bike with you.
- Interested in finding ways to encourage people to bike to dinner downtown instead of driving, possibly by making it easier to park bikes at the top of the elevator.
- The most important factor when prioritizing projects is connectivity, as it is really important to consider OC's bike/ped connections to other cities, and the people who visit Oregon City on foot or by bike.
- When it comes to disadvantaged populations, any wayfinding sign projects in the action plan should bear in mind people who can't read English.
- Right now 7th is the best biking option when moving from McLoughlin neighborhood to hilltop neighborhoods.
- Oregon City should pick a street to improve biking connections to 3rd tier/hilltop neighborhoods.
- The best way to encourage e-biking downtown is to install a public charging station. If you have an e-bike dock on main street, all of the sudden you have an option get up to hilltop.
- An Oregon City e-bike or scooter share should also be considered.
- Nothing specific comes to mind when it comes to potential greenways, but you have to frame it as, "once you are at the top of the elevator, where do you go?" Wayfinding signage and paint are critical.
- Oregon City should think of bike improvements in the context of connecting them to surrounding bike networks, like the Trolley Trail and possibly Canby.
- Regarding TNCs: How do we make it more convenient for drivers to pick up/drop off or wait for passengers on Main Street? Does a taxi zone make sense?

- We can't dismiss Amtrak. What does it look like for arriving passengers? 17th Street crossing sounds like a good idea.

Stakeholder Interview #8

- Intersections of 14th/Main, 10th/Main, and 7th/Main, are critical due to traffic coming off of 99E and the Arch Bridge - their design is not terrible but notices drives are often confused at the intersections.
- The most important factor when prioritizing projects is improving connectivity, as improving connectivity will increase demand for other bike/ped improvements. Improving connectivity to the river walk is especially important.
- As there is no room for a bike lane on main, Oregon City should consider painting more sharrows and repainting the old ones to communicate to drivers and cyclists that bikes belong here.
- The general public would benefit from a marketing campaign on what biking facilities the city does have, especially when it comes to bike parking. Cyclists and drivers need to be more aware that cyclists belong downtown. More sharrows and signage should be a part of this effort.
- When avoiding Washington, the easiest way to get up the hill is to bike up Singer Hill or use the elevator.
- 6th greenway is a fine idea, but the stop signs could make it less convenient for cyclists. Might be room for a bike lane, or sharrow.
- One of the disadvantaged groups is younger Oregon City residents- would like to see more kids feel safe enough to bike around.

Stakeholder Interview #9

- The most concerning intersection in the scope area is Main/99E. Not only will it be critical for the future plans for the mill site, it is also currently incredibly unsafe, even when crossing main. The second most concerning intersection is 10th/Main, which is made worse by the turning lanes as they contribute to driver confusion.
- More bike parking- including lockers/corrals by White Rabbit, the courthouse, and the transit center- is a great idea, but the City has made it too difficult for some businesses to get bike racks, even if they pay for them.
- The courthouse is a great option for a corral because it is highly visible and central.
- There needs to be better bike/ped connections between the OCB area and Main Street, and painting the trestle, adding signage, and adding streetlights are three ideas for doing that.
- The city would benefit from more murals, but the mural code is too impossible to get through and must be changed.
- Cars turning on to Main or Railroad from 99E often drive way too fast and it makes it unsafe to walk to the parking on Railroad.

- Equity and safety should be the most important factors when prioritizing action plan projects.
- Transit riders, children, cane users, and wheelchair users are disadvantaged by the existing ped/bike facilities. A lot would have to change to let child bike on Main.
- Sees the need for bike parking every day in the form of bikes parked against the wall of buildings.
- Oregon City feels like a sundown town, where POC feel they have to leave after sundown. We need to change this, possible through adding artwork by POC.
- One idea is to create a walking history tour that includes OCB, Main, and the Bluffs, as it gets people used to walking downtown and marks key destinations.