

Mayoral Transition Team Report

Walkability-Traffic-Parking

COMMITTEE CONTEXT OVERVIEW

In Pensacola, an urgent need has emerged to focus on how to make our roadways, neighborhoods, and city more walkable, bikeable, and livable for all citizens — pedestrians, cyclists, drivers of automobiles, and all forms of alternative transportation.

Two centuries ago, engineering experts designed a state-of-the-art street network built upon Pensacola's waterfront. That system set the standard for creating a walkable infrastructure. Unfortunately, decades of suburban sprawl, misguided engineering, deferred maintenance, and inattention have left the aged infrastructure that makes up this system in poor condition.

The deterioration and engineering of our streets and infrastructure continues to deliver disruptive consequences for our City: unsafe roadways that lead to increasing pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and deaths, unreliable transit, poorly lit roads, poor parking management, and crumbling sidewalks.

This situation was not created overnight; it occurred over many years. To make a lasting change, we as a community need to shift how we think about our streets. The issue is not how we build more roads; it is how we maintain and rebuild what we have, and ultimately, create a 21st-century network of Complete Streets that are accessible for all users. Indeed, solving this problem will require more than patched roads or repairing deteriorated sidewalks, it will require a completely new approach to how we think of our roadways and how we can ensure they accommodate all citizens and means of transportation.

As we look toward the future, there is a pressing need to further modernize our roads, transportation system, public works, and utilities. The approach we need will require: an assessment of our assets and resources, smart operational planning, appropriate funding, community involvement, high-functioning government departments and leadership, and a long-term commitment to systemic change. Long-term success will depend on our ability to address the root causes of the challenges. The solutions will require feasible, forward-thinking projects and ideas that are designed to protect and preserve our City and create sustainable infrastructure for future generations.

COMMITTEE CHARGE

The charge of the Walkability, Traffic, and Parking pillar was to evaluate the various proposals and plans that have been developed, consider innovative practices in infrastructure improvements, and develop a set of recommendations that will create sustainable, equitable infrastructure systems that will improve our local and regional economies, improve the quality of life for all of our citizens, and enhance the safety and security of our beloved city.

These particular issues are among the foremost priorities for citizens. The Pensacola MSA is among the most dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists not only in the State of Florida, but the entire country — with more pedestrian and bicyclists injuries per capita than New York City and Chicago, combined. If we are to continue to grow and thrive as a city, we must rethink our policies, processes, and priorities.

PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

For more than three months, the transition team has been charged with collecting, analyzing, and interpreting ideas, suggestions, and data to inform our recommendations. We have researched thousands of pages of past studies and documents and borrowed ideas from other sources and municipalities, including Pensacola's peer cities.

We acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, but our hope is that through an inclusive fact-finding mission based around data and innovative ideas, we can continue to spark a civic conversation that will assist you and the City Council in setting a successful course for Pensacola.

PUBLIC INPUT

The approach and evaluation process began by interviewing community stakeholders to solicit and gather public input from a diverse and varied degree of perspectives throughout the City of Pensacola. Hundreds of citizens submitted ideas and participated in several public input sessions to inform, listen, and collect public input.

The public input process was complemented by interviewing City staff, department heads, and inter-governmental staff who are responsible for operations that have an impact on the issues of transportation, public safety, urban planning and design, parking management, and infrastructure. Interviews were conducted with the following departments: Police, Fire and Rescue, Public Works, Engineering, Parks and

Recreation, the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Downtown Improvement Board, Escambia County Area Transit, Escambia County, West Florida Regional Planning Council, and Florida Department of Transportation, among others.

Each department and agency provided additional information during interview sessions. During the interviews, input was freely solicited for staff to express their thoughts, comments, and concerns about the current state of roadways, parking, traffic, and walkability within the City of Pensacola.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Context:** Biking and walking benefit health, the economy, quality of life, and the resilience of the local environment. Being physically active 30 minutes a day reduces risk of heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases. Access to multiple transportation options in historically underserved low-income neighborhoods, including many communities of color, reduces health disparities and costs for families. Bike commuting leads to fewer sick days, with businesses often seeing improved sales next to bike lanes and traffic calming measures. Cities promoting bike infrastructure also see property values increase and attract more young people. Pensacola has over 250 miles of roadways, but less than 5 miles of bike lanes, further justifying our extremely high rate of pedestrian and bicyclist accidents. Initial steps to operationalize the Complete Streets Program within City government have shown promise but will require dedicated efforts to come to produce meaningful results.

Recommendation: Adopt a Complete Streets ordinance and develop a design manual that meets current NACTO standards or adopt the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide. Adopt Vision Zero pledge to reduce and eliminate pedestrian and bicyclists injuries and fatalities. Reestablish Bicycle Advisory Committee as a Complete Streets Committee under the Office of the Mayor, City Council, or a newly-created City office or department.

The new policy would accomplish the following:

- Focus on improving health and economic equity;
- Set higher standards for street designs that are safe and accessible for people of all abilities and ages for all modes of travel — walking, biking, public transit, and driving; assuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal and state laws pertaining to persons with disabilities is essential
- Create comprehensive plans for walking, biking, and transit networks that integrate with one another and connect people to job centers, parks, schools, healthy food outlets, churches, and more;

- Include more robust public participation and accountability mechanisms in all current and future projects

2. **Context:** Parking management within downtown Pensacola has become an increasingly complicated issue, especially over the last decade as the urban core of the City has rapidly expanded. The Downtown Improvement Board (DIB) is charged with carrying out parking management operations, with five direct employees and more contract laborers and staff. It is responsible for parking management operations, promoting downtown, and increasing visitor and tourism awareness of the downtown district. Currently, a volunteer board of directors provides oversight to the DIB executive director – with no oversight from the City’s executive level. As a result, the DIB suffers from a lack of strategic planning and administration as staff focuses on daily operational issues. This current organizational structure does not reflect an efficient management model. There is a need to restructure the DIB management that would allow the Director to fully focus on operations and departmental issues – thereby increasing the efficiency and productivity of the DIB as a whole.

Recommendation: Implement immediate steps to improve user experience of parking in downtown Pensacola.

- Immediately remove, repair, and/or replace inoperable parking meters;
- Open publicly-owned and underutilized structured parking facilities to downtown employees and general public — i.e., Intendencia garage; utilize smart technologies to modernize garage facilities, such as vehicle counters and automatic lighting;
- Improve DIB management structure by recruiting and retaining volunteer board members that reflect the diversity of the business owners and residents of the district;
- Relocate DIB operations and board meetings to City Hall; utilize vacant offices to relocate staff, cutting expenses on rent, utilities, and miscellaneous costs; increase transparency by adopting City-wide public input policies; stream all meetings to City website and social media channels
- Shift parking management to a demand-based parking model, following best practices to allow dynamic pricing at public on-street, surface, and structured parking facilities;
- Eliminate mandatory parking minimums city-wide, encouraging private redevelopment of surface parking lots; incentivize mixed-use development with reduced shared-parking requirements;
- Utilize parking revenue to improve the downtown experience and to promote multi-modal transportation as an alternative to driving, with a focus on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure

3. **Context:** There are currently no staff positions dedicated to pedestrian or bicyclist safety or Complete Streets initiatives. Given the universal acknowledgment that pedestrian and bicyclist safety is the number one public safety concern in Pensacola, there is a need for greater coordination around transportation in all of its major forms.

Recommendation: Create a position within the City that's focused on bicycle-pedestrian issues, Complete Streets objectives, and walkability – properly staffed and led by a manager or director who reports to the Mayor — focused on guiding the administration and coordinating all aspects of transportation and improving the movement of people, goods, and services. The position is designed to act as a coordinating and control point for the various areas of transportation to include: 1) bicycles, 2) pedestrians 3) ADA/Universal Access 4) public transit, taxis and for-hire services, 5) parking and 6) traffic management and control.

4. **Context:** Improve the City's economy, public health, social equity, community cohesion, and quality of life by allowing people of all ages and abilities to easily and safely reach their everyday destinations by bicycle on a connected network of low-stress and protected bikeways.

Recommendation: Combine the community vision with technical expertise to create a detailed map of future bikeways and prioritization framework known as the Pensacola Bike Action Plan. Create a community-led vision for a connected network of low-stress bikeways by engaging community members from across the City and region, with a focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Within this action plan, should be consideration and pursuit of the following:

- Enact a city-wide bike to work program, offering educational events and resources for City employees, NGOs, local businesses, and other institutional partners;
- Establish a “30-mile” plan, or similar, that provides a vision for future infrastructure improvements for a connected network of bikeways; allocate appropriate funding (such as from LOST or CRA) to aggressively accomplish this plan;
- Establish a bike share system operated either with a private partner(s) or internally; collaborate with other governmental agencies or NGOs to encourage wider-use of cycling within the City

5. **Context:** Encourage walkability and bikeability throughout the City and metro area by partnering with governmental agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. The primary goal of these efforts should be to create a safe and healthy community by encouraging bicycle use through education, community events, innovative bicycle infrastructure, and community partnerships.

Recommendation: Make walkability and livability a regional effort. Coordinate with partners such as Escambia County, Escambia County Area Transportation, Escambia County School District, the West Florida Regional Planning Council, UWF, neighborhood associations, Bike Pensacola, the City Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works Department, Florida Department of Health, FDOT, the federal government, and other agencies and entities to ensure that all city and county projects connect with and/or help to complete a pedestrian-bicycle corridor network.

Among the opportunities for collaboration include:

- Pursue the establishment of a multi-modal transit hub in downtown Pensacola, in partnership with ECAT and DIB; use of the new downtown ferry terminal should be explored as a central hub for public transit, bike share, and ferry access for both visitors and local residents;
- Closer cooperation between ECAT/Escambia County and City Hall would support improved services, sustainability and efficiency. Among these opportunities include working with ECAT to review locations of all transit stops within the City, ensuring they are located within close proximity to crosswalks and multi-modal facilities when at all possible. Maintaining strong working relationships with our local partners and ensuring there is open communication on all levels will benefit Pensacola in numerous ways;
- Research has shown that bicycling and walking to school improves a child's performance in school, reduces obesity, and children who get to know their neighborhood by bicycling and walking have a better understanding of their environment and sense of direction compared to traveling by car. Partner with the School District on a revived Safe Routes to Schools program to provide child and family education and training and to serve as the conduit for prioritizing and applying for future infrastructure grant projects that support bicycling and walking