

Walkability-Traffic-Parking

Scope of Review

In Pensacola, an urgent need has emerged **for us** 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.

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 metro** 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.

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 borrowed ideas from other sources and municipalities.

[COMBINE PARAGRAPHS]

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.

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 contribute.

The public input process was complemented by interviewing city staff, department heads, and intergovernmental 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 **and agencies**: 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~~ **Emerald Coast Regional 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.

Key Observations

- 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 and dangerous 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.
- As a community we need to shift how we think about our streets. The issue is not how we construct more roads; it is how we maintain and rebuild what we have now, and ultimately, create a 21st-century network of Complete Streets that are accessible for all users and citizens.
- The city needs 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 in dealing with walkability/traffic/parking.
- 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 the 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. 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 explaining** our extremely high rate of pedestrian and bicyclist accidents.
- 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 **and diversity** the DIB management **in a way** that would allow the Director to fully focus on operations and departmental issues.

- Encourage walkability and bikeability throughout the city and metro area by partnering with governmental agencies, **non-governmental organizations**, 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adopt Complete Streets

Adopting the Complete Streets ordinance and developing a design manual that meets current NACTO standards or adopting the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide will be the first step to making our community safer for all modes of transportation. I recommend the Mayor also adopt the Vision Zero pledge to reduce and eliminate pedestrian and bicyclists injuries and fatalities. ~~We need to reestablish the Bicycle Advisory Committee as a Complete Streets Committee under the Office of the Mayor, City Council, or a newly-created City office or department that deals specifically with Complete Streets.~~ Working with the City Council, we should transition the Bicycle Advisory Committee to a Complete Streets Committee, which would work with and be supported by the Office of the Mayor or a newly-created City office or department that deals specifically with Complete Streets.

This 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

Improve User Experience of Parking

Implementing these immediate steps will ease citizen experience of parking in downtown Pensacola:

- Immediately remove, repair, and/or replace inoperable parking meters throughout DIB district;
- ~~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;~~
- Open publicly-owned and underutilized structured parking facilities to downtown employees and general public — i.e., the Intendencia Street garage — and utilize smart technologies such as vehicle counters and automatic lighting to modernize garage facilities;
- Improve DIB management structure by recruiting and retaining volunteer board members that **more accurately** 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; ensure meetings are held at appropriate times for maximum public participation
- 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;
- Explore feasibility of implementing common-sense reforms to regulate aggressive towing and booting practices. With regards to booting of vehicles, recommendation is to pursue banning of booting practices within city limits.

- 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 **and establishing a free downtown shuttle service.**

Create a Position Solely Responsible for Bike/Pedestrian Safety

A position within the city that's focused on bicycle-pedestrian issues, Complete Streets objectives, **multi-modal alternative transportation**, and walkability will ensure that the city's largest safety threat is addressed. This office will need to be properly staffed and led by a manager or director who reports directly to the Mayor with a focus on guiding the administration and coordinating all aspects of transportation and improving the movement of people, goods, and services. The position ~~is designed to~~ **should** act as a coordinating and control point for the various areas of transportation to include, but not limited to: 1) bicycles, 2) pedestrians 3) Complete Streets planning 4) ADA/Universal Access 5) public transit, taxis and for-hire services, and 6) parking.

Formulate the Pensacola ~~Bike Action Plan~~ Bicycle Blueprint

Combine the community vision with technical expertise to create a detailed map of future bikeways and prioritization framework known as the **Pensacola Bicycle Blueprint**. 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, CRA, **or bonding**) 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;
- **Ensure City buildings and parks have appropriate facilities for bicycles, including bike racks and repair stations.**

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~~ **Emerald Coast Regional Council**, UWF, neighborhood associations, Bike Pensacola, the City Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works Department,

Florida Department of Health, Gulf Power, 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. Where appropriate, transit stops should be sheltered and universally accessible. Maintaining strong working relationships with our local partners and ensuring there is open communication on all levels will benefit Pensacola in numerous ways;
- Lighting in our neighborhoods and along our roadways is a critical issue in our city. Nearly 8,000 streetlights exist within the City of Pensacola, with approximately 1,400 lights owned and maintained by the City and 6,500 lights owned and maintained by Gulf Power. The most recent streetlight inventory report should be utilized to aggressively work to fill lighting gaps within our most vulnerable neighborhoods, particularly our westside communities. An intelligent streetlight network should be implemented into the existing lighting network to allow staff to monitoring of outages, traffic circulation, parking spots, air quality, weather emergencies, and even gunshots.
- 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 increase sidewalk connectivity and provide child and family education/training to serve as the conduit for prioritizing and applying for future infrastructure grant projects that support bicycling and walking.

Measurable Achievement

- Success should be measured with frequent assessments and evaluations of the results from implemented infrastructure and policies, i.e. bicycle ridership, bicycle/sidewalk network mileage; pedestrian counts using protected facilities, such as sidewalks, crosswalks and multi-purpose paths; measure of students walking/biking to school; award of Bicycle Friendly Community status; statistics of bicycle and

pedestrian injuries and/or fatalities; measurable usage of public on-street and off-street parking facilities; and citizen-citizen-initiated comments via 311 or traditional public feedback.

Barriers

- One barrier was the ~~shear~~ sheer amount of diverse opinions, perspectives, and viewpoints shared from citizens on their own experiences within their neighborhoods and community on the issues of walkability, parking, and traffic. A large part of overcoming these barriers was accomplished through maximizing transparency, openness, and public input through a proactive public engagement process that spanned several meetings, dozens of one-on-one meetings with citizens and stakeholders, and via email, social media, and communication utilizing emerging media.
- Another barrier that was found to be challenging was the reality that regarding the issues of walkability and Complete Streets, the city had very few baseline metrics and a lack of consistency and continuity of city plans and staffing on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, policy, and Complete Streets planning and implementation. It's critical that the city designates a point of contact for all bike-pedestrian-related issues that communicates and collaborates with appropriate departments and agencies.