

Minutes
SMILE Transportation Committee Meeting
6:00 PM, 01/17/24 via Zoom

In attendance: Grant Huling (Chair), Vikki DeGaa, Elaine O’Keefe, Judi Davis, Max Schwarz, Duff Hall, Brandon Namm, Scott Kelly

Minutes of the 11/15/23 meeting were approved. They are available at <https://sellwood.org/2023-transportation-committee-minutes/>.

Llewellyn Elementary Drop-Off Safety: Grant reported that on 01/23/24, a group of PBOT representatives representing Safe Routes to School and Parking Enforcement would be walking the Llewellyn Elementary campus observing morning drop off patterns. This meeting will also be attended by Grant, Llewellyn Principal Pam Gwynn, and Tina Osterink. The goal is to modify drop-off patterns if warranted (e.g. convert SE 14th Ave to one-way traffic in front of the school) in the interest of pedestrian safety.

14th & Bybee Intersection Improvement: Grant provided an update on the dual improvement projects for the 14th & Bybee intersection. DJM Development provided a Schedule of Completion to PBOT on 01/15/24, which anticipates a 03/01/24 start date for the asphalt resurfacing, island construction, and crosswalk painting that will transform the intersection. As previously stated in October, PBOT is planning to make its improvements (narrowing Bybee as it approaches the curve from the South, signaling the crossing ahead, and removing parking on one side of 14th for Fire Marshall compliance) at the conclusion of the school year, so as to not interfere with drop-offs.

No Right on Red Request at 13th & Tacoma: Grant reported that PBOT, in an update to its Vision Zero (no pedestrian fatalities) goal, has begun a pilot project of making right turns on red illegal at certain intersections around the City. Grant asked if the Transportation Committee might want to request that an intersection in Sellwood-Moreland be added to this pilot project, in particular 13th & Tacoma, where a pedestrian crossing Tacoma was recently hit by a car turning on red. Thoughtful discussion ensued, with Scott providing more clarity on the existing traffic controls at this intersection. Judi noted that it could contribute to more cut-through traffic as cars avoid Tacoma – cut-through traffic from Tacoma being a longstanding issue of concern for the Transportation Committee. Scott said that, anecdotally, when there was intersection traffic that affected right turns from 13th onto Tacoma, there seemed to be more cut-through traffic. Note seeing a strong interest in pursuing this potential project at this time, Grant proposed that it be tabled. He said that he thought it was good for the Committee to be thoughtful about potential unintended consequences, as there are always trade-offs with traffic management.

Reducing Neighborhood Cut-Through Traffic from Tacoma: Grant said that he had sat down recently with Brandon, a resident living at 16th and Umatilla who is concerned about unsafe traffic along Umatilla. Grant asked if this is something that the Transportation Committee would like to advocate for. Brandon spoke about the issues experienced, with Umatilla being the street fronting the North side of Sellwood Middle School, and the significance of Umatilla being a neighborhood greenway. A discussion ensued that covered the

history of Sellwood Bridge cut-through traffic, potential tactics the Committee could use, and how geographically specific to be in framing the problem.

Scott noted that PBOT conducted a 2017 traffic study. Brandon noted that Grant had sent him more recent data that Abra McNair at Safe Routes provided, which unfortunately showed that in raw cars-per-hour terms, calming was not warranted. Grant said that he thought this spoke to the usefulness of a petition, as the numbers alone would not move PBOT. Scott asked if Umatilla residents would support calming measures, and noted that the residents living just to the North and South of Umatilla could oppose calming at Umatilla alone, if they felt more traffic was being directed to them. Scott, a former Transportation Committee Chair, noted that PBOT had been in favor of built calming devices such as those now on Spokane, or at 13th & Umatilla, but that the SMILE Board did not support it, as there was sufficient community pushback.

Elaine cautioned that this would be a large project to take on, with potential pitfalls. She said that stop signs are highly regulated and that attempts to modify their placement should not be pursued. Grant said that was not what Brandon and he had been discussing, and that greenways have limits on stop sign frequency. Elaine said that there had been several big neighborhood meetings and “not a lot of love for” traffic calming in the area. She said to anticipate that not everyone will be in favor of it.

Grant asked if the issue should be framed as cut-through traffic more broadly or if the Committee’s actions should focus on Umatilla. Max said that focusing on Umatilla seemed best, while “contextualizing it” in the history of Sellwood Bridge cut-through traffic, including the 2019 “Phase 1” speed bump installations West of 13th.

Grant proposed a side meeting for anyone interested in pursuing it further. Ahead of the meeting, (which took place 02/03/24 at Blue Kangaroo, attended by Grant, Brandon, and Judi) Brandon would prepare a draft petition language. Grant would send the Judi’s 13th Ave petition to help guide Brandon’s language. Grant also said he would reach out to the principal of Sellwood Middle School, as an important stakeholder (this took place in early February).

Meeting Frequency: Grant suggested meeting monthly instead of semi-monthly, due to the number of projects underway. All were in favor. This meeting was the first conducted via Zoom, since the re-formation of the committee in 2023, and all agreed that remote meetings, at least sometimes, are useful. Grant suggested alternating in-person and via Zoom, if it doesn’t get too complex. The next meeting will be February 19th, via Zoom, again, due to flooding at the SMILE Station.

ATTACHMENT
Petition to Calm Vehicle Traffic on SE Umatilla St.

02/03/24 draft
Post-Blue Kangaroo meeting edit
Not yet distributed

Petition to Calm Vehicle Traffic on SE Umatilla St.

The undersigned Sellwood-Moreland residents are concerned about commuter cut-through traffic on SE Umatilla Street, particularly between 13th and 17th Avenues.

A Neighborhood Greenway and Safe Route to School

SE Umatilla St. is a neighborhood greenway, which PBOT defines as a roadway meant to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists. The area has elevated pedestrian use due to Sellwood Middle School, several apartments, and adjacent businesses. According to PBOT, neighborhood greenways “form the backbone of Safe Routes to School.”¹ Additionally, neighborhood greenways are meant to be “quiet and comfortable places for people to walk and bike due to a number of engineering strategies.”² However, a 2020 PBOT study noted that too many people are using neighborhood greenways on their morning and evening commutes. We the undersigned believe that SE Umatilla St. is not meeting PBOT’s standards of safety and comfort along neighborhood greenways.

Sellwood Bridge Access Management Project

PBOT has recognized that commuter cut-through traffic is a major issue for Sellwood-Moreland. In 2019, the Bureau attempted to mitigate this with Phase 1 of the Sellwood Bridge Access Management Project, installing speed bumps along SE Umatilla St. from SE 6th Ave to 13th Ave as well as on other streets. There has not been a Phase 2.

Our Request

Because commuter traffic through our neighborhood remains a safety and livability problem, we are requesting that PBOT define and initiate a Phase 2 Sellwood Bridge Access Management Project, centered on SE Umatilla St. Many engineered options are available, including diverters or narrowing the road with bicycle protectors. These solutions will be designed by PBOT, with a robust public input process.

Exhibits [not yet created]:

Exhibit A - Petition Signatures (fields: name, address, phone, email)

Exhibit B - Annotated Map (to highlight: Tacoma, Umatilla, Greenways, label key buildings like apartments and school, speed bumps from 2019 PBOT improvements).

Exhibit C – PBOT Traffic Counts

¹PBOT, “What are Neighborhood Greenways?” <https://www.portland.gov/transportation/what-are-neighborhood-greenways>

² Ibid.