



Portland has a reputation as being one of the best cities for biking in the country. But while investments over the past several decades have been focused on downtown and affluent close-in neighborhoods, low-income communities and communities of color in the greater Portland region have been historically marginalized and underinvested in when it comes to transportation. Deliberate and discriminatory transportation, planning, and housing policies in the region have led to the displacement of people of color and low-income renters, and they face the biggest risk to their health and safety as they travel to school, work, places of faith, and other neighborhood destinations.

With support from Kaiser Permanente, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership has a regional policy manager, Kari Schlosshauer, working to advance safe and equitable active transportation in the Portland area. One way to ensure sustainable, long-term change is through the Portland area's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which is led by the regional metropolitan planning organization known as Metro. The RTP is a blueprint to guide investments for all forms of travel – motor vehicle, transit, bicycling, and walking – and the movement of goods and freight throughout the greater Portland region. The RTP includes a policy section that outlines the vision, goals, and targets for the transportation network, and a project list that allocates anticipated funding to current and future transportation projects over the next 25



years. The RTP is updated once every 4-5 years, and this is a significant opportunity for active transportation advocates to influence how much funding goes to biking and walking projects, and which projects are prioritized.

With Portland Metro's RTP due for an update in 2018, advocates were optimistic that the process would lead to a robust list of active transportation projects. "Metro has a climate-smart strategy and created an equity-focused work group that has guided and shaped the RTP process," said Kari. With positions on the equity and safety work groups, Kari, along with other transportation and environmental justice advocates, was able to push for the RTP to include strong measures prioritizing equity and safety – areas where RTP policy had fallen short in past updates.

Kari participated in regional Leadership Forums that highlighted voices from community leaders on transportation priorities, with a specific focus on the needs and impacts of and to community members whose voices are not frequently heard in the "transportation system" discussions. The Forum lifted up the voices of those who are often most concerned about crossing the nearby arterial street safely, to get their kids to school or themselves to their transit stop, or the local air quality impacting their health as a result of diesel truck emissions.

The Forum conversations yielded seven key takeaways that would help refine the RTP project lists to better meet regional goals in the next 25 years. These guiding principles would ensure that people can get around to where they need to go, and that the region is prioritizing safety for people on foot, affordability, and the prevention of involuntary housing displacement from transportation investments.



RTP Guiding Principles

1. We can make more near-term progress on key regional priorities – equity, safety, travel options, and congestion.
2. This is an opportunity to reduce disparities and barriers that exist for historically marginalized communities.
3. Prioritize projects that focus on safety in high-injury corridors.
4. Accelerate transit service expansion.
5. Tackle congestion and manage travel demand.
6. Prioritize completion of biking and walking network gaps.
7. We must continue to build public trust through inclusive engagement, transparency, and accountability.

But when the regional transportation agencies submitted their project lists, advocates realized that proposed regional projects fell far short of their vision for a healthy, equitable region. As part of the RTP process, Metro ran an analysis of the projects that were submitted to determine how they would help the region achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the policy section of the RTP. According to the analysis, the resulting project list would not help the region make near-term progress toward equity, safety, climate, and congestion goals. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the project list did not adequately prioritize marginalized communities with the greatest need, and would not reduce disparities and barriers to mobility.

“When advocates asked whether these priority projects would help the region meet safety, congestion, and equity goals for our communities, the answer was resoundingly ‘no,’” said Kari.

Kari organized with community leaders and other local nonprofits through the Getting There Together Coalition, a group co-founded by the Safe Routes Partnership in 2017 to advocate collectively for increased funding for equitable, safe, and affordable transportation options and infrastructure. While the Getting There Together Coalition had not been directly tracking the RTP process until Kari pulled them in, the group recognized that the RTP project list would guide and shape regional transportation priorities for the next few decades. Kari and the Getting There Together Coalition wrote and submitted a letter to Metro outlining the project list’s shortcomings and misplaced priorities:

“[A]s highlighted by Metro’s own project list analysis, the current list and investment strategy show that as a region we are not, in fact, planning to build a transportation system that will help us meet our goals by 2035 - most troubling, our equity, safety, climate, and congestion goals will not be met.”

As a result of the coalition’s sustained advocacy, and partnerships with other regional transportation agencies such as PBOT that were also dissatisfied with the original project list, Metro asked all of the



transportation agencies to go back to the drawing board and resubmit a project list that better aligned with the RTP priorities and goals.

“The vast majority of local agencies made significant changes to their re-submitted RTP Project Lists, notably identifying more safety projects and moving more pedestrian and bicycling projects up to be built in the next 10 years, rather than the 10-20-year time frame. This will result in near-term increased revenue toward transit, walking, and bicycling projects, and help the greater Portland region achieve its equity, safety, and climate goals, benefitting community members who need it the most with more travel choices,” said Kari.

The revised and adopted list designates \$770 million for active transportation projects in the first ten years – an increase of \$95 million over the draft list – with 90 percent of projects located in an equity focus area. As a result, the greater Portland region will see dozens more biking and walking projects over the next decade, giving community members safe, healthy, affordable mobility options that benefit all communities.