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CLARK COUNTY COUNCIL
COUNTY MANAGER

To: Chair Sue Marshall and Members of the Clark County Council
From: Joel Christiansen (Vancouver Bicycle Club, Advocacy Director)
Date: September 28, 2026
Re: Comment on the Comprehensive Plan Transportation Element in Support of Clark Communities Bicycle Pedestrian and Advisory Committee's Recommendations

Chair Marshall and Councilors,

The Vancouver Bicycle Club (VBC) writes in strong support of the recommendations submitted to you by the Clark Communities Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) and to ask the Council to consider additional commitments that would make those recommendations stick.

VBC is one of the largest and longest-standing recreational and community cycling organizations in Southwest Washington. VBC's mission is: **"To enjoy and spread a passion for safe cycling in Vancouver and Clark County through group and event rides, giving, and community service."** We have been a presence in the community for over 54 years. Today we're about 600 riders strong, and last year our members rode over 136,000 miles together across more than 700 group rides. We have rides going out nearly every day of the week, year-round, at paces and distances for every level of rider, many of which are open and accessible to VBC members and non-members alike. We ride all over the Vancouver metro area — the City of Vancouver, Clark County, and elsewhere throughout the region. Every July we host our signature event, the Ride Around Clark County, with routes for every kind of rider from an all-abilities explorer route up to a 100-mile century. We are the people who experience the county's active transportation network exactly as it is built: excellent in places, disconnected as a whole, and unsafe in many predictable, well-known locations.

BPAC Chair Zilavy's letter identifies the right next steps; we want to emphasize what this all looks like from our perspective, and what in our view must support these steps so real solutions are successfully implemented. Our central point: the transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan is a matter of safety, and we ask the Council to judge it on whether it makes it possible for people to live, work, and move around within Clark County without a car, and without being killed or seriously injured on dangerous county roads.

When BPAC delivered its annual update to the Council on May 6, 2026, VBC members filled the room. Three councilors spoke candidly about the state of the county's active transportation network, asked BPAC for specific projects to push through the pipeline, and invited BPAC to engage with the Council more than once a year. We support the work BPAC is doing in this regard, and we agree with BPAC's emphasis on the foundational issue at hand: not just which projects, but how the county can realistically fund, prioritize, and track them.

Our meetings with stakeholders, attendance at public and private meetings, participation in community events, and review of media coverage and public records all reveal an undisputed

truth: there is an urgent and unmet need for human-scale infrastructure in this county. Clark County is growing, traffic volumes are growing with it, and the network for walking, biking, and rolling was not built for the population the county has today, let alone the population it is planning for and will inevitably experience in the future. That is not the failure of any single project, budget cycle, or Council. It is the accumulated result of decades of individual decisions that in too many cases treated the driver as the only user worth designing for and everyone else as an afterthought. Each of those decisions looked small at the time. Together they produced a county where a trip to a school, a park, a store, or a bus stop is often unsafe or effectively impossible for anyone not in a car. This also produced a situation that is practically and financially untenable. As City of Vancouver Manager Lon Pluckhahn explained to this council last summer, "the urban growth area was either going to bankrupt the county or bankrupt the city[.]" KOIN 6 News, Aug 1, 2025.

Problems built over decades are corrected over decades, which is exactly why the transportation element of the County's Comprehensive Plan update matters. A comprehensive plan is one of the few moments when a county can change its defaults. The choices made in this transportation element will determine what gets built, and what quietly becomes impossible to build, for a generation. We are asking the Council to treat that as the opportunity it is, so that Clark County remains a livable and pleasant place to be as it grows, and not simply a harder and more dangerous place to get around.

Everything that follows is, at bottom, about safety. The gaps in the county's network are not merely inconvenient. They are where people get hurt and a source of disconnection in our communities. A missing sidewalk puts a pedestrian in a travel lane. A bike lane that ends at a bridge or an intersection delivers a rider into merging traffic at the exact moment the road becomes most dangerous. An unsignaled crossing on a five-lane arterial asks a child, or someone using a walker, to judge gaps in 45-mph traffic. These are not accidents in the sense of being unforeseeable. They are the predictable output of design decisions, which means they can be anticipated, prioritized, and prevented.

We would add that safety does not depend on how many people walk, ride, or roll today. A resident who never intends to walk, bike, or roll still has an interest in a county where a teenager can get to school without a car, and where drivers themselves are not the last line of defense against roads and other infrastructure designs that put pedestrians in harm's way.

PART I: We support BPAC's four recommendations

1. Fund the update to the 2010 Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan

We agree with BPAC that this is the single most effective step available to the Council, and we support the specific request: fund the update at the $200,000–$300,000 level identified in BPAC's letter, consistent with the recommendation already carried in Table 12 of the Transportation Capital Facilities Plan. The county is planning for 2045 while relying on an

unfulfilled plan adopted in 2010, for a county that has since changed substantially in population, land use, and travel patterns.

2. Update Title 40, including Section 40.350.015, so the code defines real facility options

We support BPAC's recommendation that the Title 40 revisions in this update address Section 40.350.015. As BPAC notes, the current code leans on in-road, six-foot bike lanes as a near-universal answer. That standard is why our members regularly find themselves in a painted stripe next to 45-mph traffic on roads where nobody would let their kid ride (which, in many places, is no longer visible due to vehicle traffic erasing those painted stripes). A stripe of paint is not a safety treatment; physical separation is, and the required degree of separation should follow from vehicle speed and volume rather than from a single default dimension. Different roadways and contexts require different treatments: protected bike lanes, buffered lanes, shared-use paths, and other context-sensitive designs. For this reason, we support BPAC's reference to the county's multimodal level-of-stress (MMLOS) standards, and we ask that those standards be adopted and applied in project design and in development review.

3. Increase the pace of bicycle and pedestrian capital delivery

We share BPAC's assessment that moving one or two bicycle and pedestrian projects forward in a given year cannot build a connected network or close the gaps that already exist. We support revising the Public Works capital selection criteria accordingly. In revising them, we ask the Council to take care not to trade away safety weight in exchange for throughput.

We also endorse BPAC's framing of the goal: a network that is safe and useful for the average person, not just for experienced cyclists. That distinction matters to us as a club, because our members are among the most confident riders in the county and even we route around large parts of it.

4. Active transportation is the practical investment in a constrained budget.

BPAC is right that constrained 20-year revenue makes prioritization more important, not less. Active transportation delivers meaningful transportation value at a fraction of the cost of major roadway expansion, and safe sidewalks, protected bike facilities, and shared-use paths give residents a real option for reaching parks, schools, businesses, and transit stops without a car. The barriers that keep people from choosing those options today are largely the product of past investment decisions, which means they are within the Council's power to change.

We would also observe that the present arrangement is not free. Serious injuries and fatalities on county roads carry substantial public costs — emergency response, medical care, lost productivity, and liability exposure — and none of those costs appear in a capital budget even though the county and its residents pay them. Safety investment is not simply spending set against a constrained budget. It reduces and offsets costs the county is already absorbing.

PART II: Additional things we ask the Council to consider

1. Adopt the Active Transportation Network as a commitment, not a map

The draft plan includes a proposed Active Transportation Network, developed to satisfy the Growth Management Act requirement for an active transportation component. We generally support an Active Transportation Network, and also understand that the particulars of this network must be adaptable with the passage of time. But a network drawn on a map and a network the county is committed to building are two different things, and that difference is most of what our comment, and BPAC's proposal, are about. We ask that the transportation element adopt the Active Transportation Network as a policy commitment to a connected countywide system, rather than as an inventory of individual projects.

Three things give that commitment meaning:

- **Connectivity as a requirement, not an aspiration.** An isolated sidewalk, or a bike lane that ends where the funding ended, has limited transportation value and creates a specific hazard at the point where it ends. The plan should direct that projects be prioritized for meaningful connections to a comprehensive active transportation network.
- **Design for people of all ages and abilities.** Safety should be the primary selection criterion, and facilities should be usable by a 7-year-old and a 70-year-old alike. This is the same standard BPAC asks for (e.g. MMLOS), and it is the difference between a network that changes travel behavior and one that serves the people already willing to ride in traffic.
- **Prioritize underserved areas.** The plan should identify where residents today have no safe walking or biking connection at all. The county's own planning materials indicate that existing bicycle facilities are concentrated in the southwestern portion of the county, which makes countywide connectivity a matter of basic geographic fairness as well as sound network design.

This is consistent with BPAC's adopted work plan, which calls for completing a countywide Active Transportation Network by closing existing gaps and providing meaningful connections to each city network. We ask the Council to give that goal the force of adopted policy.

2. Name the size of the backlog and adopt a phased strategy to close it

The county's own planning work identifies roughly $490 million in active transportation needs over the next 20 years, alongside approximately $537 million in large capital projects. Those totals are drawn from the county draft Chapter 5 (Transportation) and the companion Capital Facilities Plan chapter and appendices presented to the Council at the July 15, 2026 work session. A plan that identifies a half-billion dollars of need without a structural funding or prioritization change is not a plan; it is a record of a growing deficit.

We ask the Council to direct that the transportation element describe a realistic, phased strategy for closing the active transportation gap, including expected annual investment levels. We further ask that the strategy identify how much of that need is safety-driven — crossings, neighborhood greenways, separation on high-speed arterials, and sidewalk gaps on routes to schools and transit stops — and that the safety-driven share be phased first. This gives BPAC's "increase the pace" recommendation a clear target.

3. Make progress publicly trackable.

A plan the public cannot follow is a plan the public cannot help deliver. Most of what the Council adopts in this element will be carried out over many years by staff and future Councils who were not in the room when it was written, and today a resident has no straightforward way to tell whether the active transportation commitments in an adopted county plan are actually moving.

Therefore, we ask the Council to direct that this transportation element be accompanied by accountability any resident can check:

- A published list of the active transportation projects and policy commitments the plan adopts, each with an expected phase or timeframe.
- An annual public report, delivered to the Council and posted online, showing what was funded, what was built, what slipped, and why.
- A short set of outcome measures tracked consistently over time, beginning with the measures that matter most — pedestrian and cyclist incidents, serious injuries, and fatalities, along with where on the network they occur — alongside network miles completed, crossings added, and planned gaps closed.
- A standing place on the calendar for public input on that report, whether through BPAC, an annual update to the Council, or both.

None of this requires new technology or meaningful new staff cost. It is the mechanism that lets residents and organizations like ours engage constructively and consistently rather than leaving us to second-guess. When we can see what is planned and where it stands, our comment and our public testimony can speak to the projects the county is actually trying to deliver. It also protects the Council's own work, because a documented record of progress is what keeps a 20-year plan from quietly becoming a shelf document.

4. Stop losing ground in development review and capital projects.

Too often, roadway and development projects are approved in ways that foreclose a future walking or biking connection, and the county then pays far more to retrofit it later, or never does. The cost of that is not only financial. For as long as the connection is missing, people continue to either walk and ride there anyway in conditions nobody designed for them, or to adapt their lifestyles to a built environment that requires them to depend on a car for all trips. This is the quiet counterpart to BPAC's Title 40 recommendation: better standards only help if they are required at all relevant times along the lifecycle of our city. We ask that the plan direct Public

Works and Community Development to evaluate arterial projects and developments for their effect on the planned active transportation network, and to document those evaluations. All relevant county standards should also require that new development help complete the planned network, rather than add additional disconnected fragments to it.

Conclusion: what we are asking the Council to do

Adopt BPAC's recommendations:

- Fund the update to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan at the $200,000–$300,000 level, on a defined timeline.
- Direct that the Title 40 revisions in this update address Section 40.350.015 and establish design guidance for the full range of active transportation facilities named in the draft plan.
- Revise Public Works capital selection criteria to increase the pace of bicycle and pedestrian project delivery.
- Adopt multimodal level-of-service and level-of-stress standards, and apply them in project design and development review, consistent with the Arterial Atlas and RTC's regional plan.

And consider the following:

- Adopt the Active Transportation Network as a policy commitment to a connected countywide system, with connectivity, all-ages-and-abilities safety, and priority for underserved areas as explicit prioritization criteria.
- Adopt a Transportation Element that states the size of the active transportation backlog and describes a funded, phased strategy for closing it, with the safety-driven share of that backlog identified and phased first.
- Direct staff to publish an annual, public progress report on the active transportation commitments in this plan, covering spending, projects delivered, projects delayed, and a consistent set of outcome measures led by pedestrian and cyclist fatalities and serious injuries, with a regular opportunity for public input.
- Direct staff to evaluate and document the effect of arterial projects and significant developments on the planned active transportation network.

BPAC has advised you what the county should do, and our members' experience on these roads points to the same conclusion. What matters now is whether this plan becomes a network people can actually use — and, above all, one they can use safely.

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We are genuinely encouraged by the work the Council and county staff have already put into this update, and by the direction it points. Clark County is still early enough in its growth to get this right, and the choices in front of you can lead somewhere very good: a county where reaching a school, a park, a store, or a bus stop on foot or by bike is an easy, ordinary, safe thing to do. We appreciate the Council's attention to this issue, and we will be following its progress closely.

Thank you for your service and for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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