

## Burlington Walking Work Group Comments on Draft Transportation Plan

To: Burlington Mayor Bob Kiss  
City Council Chair Kurt Wright  
Public Works Commission Chair Robert Alberry  
Planning Commission Chair Peter Potts  
DPW Director Steve Goodkind  
Planning Director David White  
DPW Transportation Planner Dan Bradley  
DPW Bike-Pedestrian Planner Nicole Losch  
NPA Steering Committee Members

Date: September 11, 2007

Thank you for soliciting input on the August 31 draft of the Burlington Transportation Plan "Moving Forward Together." As you may know, the Burlington Walking Work Group was formed as a result of the successful citywide Pedestrian Summit of May 2006, and has met regularly over the past year. For more on the Walking Work Group: <http://www.burlingtonwalks.org/>

The Burlington Walking Work Group is pleased with some components of the draft plan including its focus on transportation choices, reducing the mode share of single-occupancy vehicles, and creating neighborhood speed limits. However, we see a number of substantial deficiencies that we urge the City to resolve.

Most significantly, we believe there is the need for a more focused Pedestrian Plan for the City of Burlington, a Plan that builds on work done in the Transportation Plan, but provides more specific policies and implementation strategies designed to ensure that Burlington is the most walkable city in New England.

**\*\* The Transportation Plan should include as a priority recommendation the prompt preparation of an accompanying Pedestrian Plan for the City.**

We would urge the City Council, Public Works, and Planning Commissions to commit to developing a Pedestrian Plan to be completed by June 2008. We do not believe this would need to be a costly, or time-consuming undertaking, but could build on work done for the Transportation Plan; and draw on results from the 2006 Burlington Pedestrian Summit, the comprehensive AARP Livable Community report, and utilize

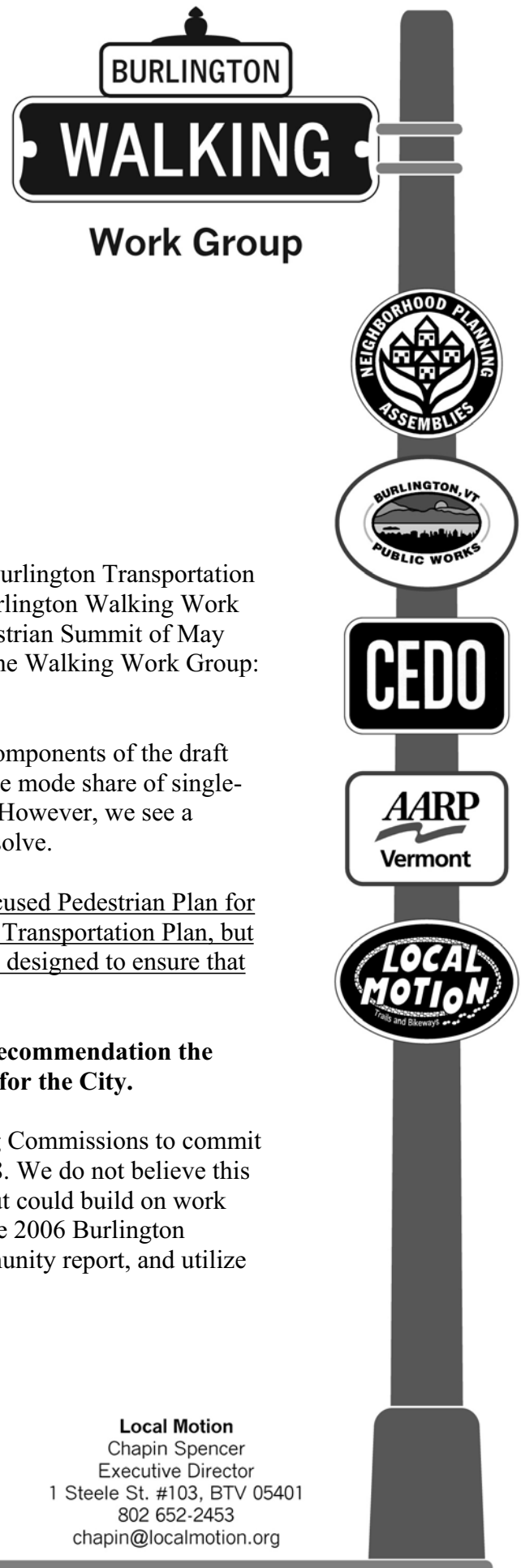
*One Step at a Time*

For more information, contact:

**CEDO**  
Ita Meno  
Community Development Specialist  
149 Church Street, BTV 05401  
802 865-7172  
imeno@ci.burlington.vt.us

**Public Works**  
Nicole Losch  
Bike/Ped Planner  
645 Pine Street, BTV 05401  
802 865-5833  
NLosch@ci.Burlington.vt.us

**Local Motion**  
Chapin Spencer  
Executive Director  
1 Steele St. #103, BTV 05401  
802 652-2453  
chapin@localmotion.org



input from ad-hoc groups such as the Walking Work Group. The end result should be clearly articulated strategies -- short and long-term -- for meeting pedestrian needs.

The Walking Work Group will be meeting in the coming weeks to develop an outline of key elements of a Pedestrian Plan, and will forward our recommendations in a follow-up Memo. We welcome and invite any interested individuals to participate -- contact us for meeting times or visit our web site for details.

Several of our comments below will further highlight why we believe developing a Pedestrian Plan is of vital importance.

### **Plan Unclear On Level of Pedestrian Facilities:**

Area studies such as the recent AARP Livable Community report recognize the importance of enhanced pedestrian facilities and amenities including shade trees, benches, enhanced crosswalks, countdown timers, dedicated signal phasing, lighting, and way finding. The Burlington Walking Work Group has yet to see the "Street Design Guidelines," but the sections of the Plan that we have reviewed do not lay out a clear policy for what streets and intersections should have which features. For example, what pedestrian facilities do we expect on a "complete street" or a "transit street"? The plan is much too vague in these areas.

We understand that these improvements would be costly to implement citywide; therefore, we recommend a policy to establish priority corridors for implementation. Pedestrian improvements should be a priority improvement and need not to wait until streets are completely rebuilt to implement.

Remedy: Either include specific pedestrian facility design guidance in the Street Design Guidelines section of the Transportation Plan, or provide this level of guidance in a separate Pedestrian Plan.

### **More Comprehensive List of Capital Priorities:**

Starting on page 11, some capital projects have headings and paragraphs, some are mentioned, and others are not mentioned. Where is the listing for capital upgrades to create the "transit streets"? Where is the listing for the capital improvements responding to AARP's recent pedestrian study?

Remedy: We recommend changing the title from "Capital Project Priorities" to "Capital Projects" as there has not been a prioritization process to our knowledge. We recommend the Plan be formatted to treat all listed capital projects similarly. We recommend adding to the list of capital projects to minimally include: (1) city-wide pedestrian improvements (based on AARP's report), (2) creation of complete streets, and (3) creation of transit streets.

### **Clearer Language for Prioritization of Capital Projects:**

The draft Plan “calls for these capital projects to be prioritized and pursued in the order in which they are ranked” (page 12) but it does not mention how, when or by whom. How does the City prioritize deficient pedestrian intersections?

Remedy: We urge clear language be added to the Plan that specifies the prioritization process, the decision-making entity, and the routine timeline to ensure the transparent process that the Plan recommends. The process should ensure adequate review of pedestrian-oriented projects.

### **Identify Plan For Addressing Funding Deficiency:**

The draft Plan says that current funding is not sufficient to maintain our infrastructure and mentions several possible funding sources (page 11). We agree. However, the draft Plan does not suggest a process, a lead entity, or a timeline for addressing this huge deficiency. Beyond addressing the ongoing maintenance gap, this process must also grapple with how to fund the capital projects identified in the Plan.

Remedy: The Plan should identify a lead entity to propose concrete solutions for funding maintenance and capital improvements and deliver the report by a specific date. A financing plan should be referenced to, if it is not to be included in the primary Transportation Plan document.

### **Transit Supports Walking -- Walking Supports Transit:**

The Burlington Walking Work Group recognizes the vital link between pedestrians and transit. The Transportation Plan should explicitly mention that a thriving transit network enhances a city's walkability by enabling people to do without a second or a third car, and by providing an option to traveling longer-distances by automobile.

### **Maintenance Section Should Include Paths:**

The section on maintenance talks about streets and sidewalks, but does not mention the pedestrian/bicycle pathways currently maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The city also struggles to maintain these facilities.

Remedy: Add “shared-use paths” in the list of transportation infrastructure needing better ongoing maintenance.

### **Attach More Goals To Indicators:**

Some of the draft Plan's 14 indicators have measurable goals. Others do not. Why spend time measuring if we're not driving towards performance-based management? The plan reaffirms the transportation vision from the Municipal Development Plan that states “... transportation functions as part of an interconnected system which offers a range of choices that are safe, affordable, efficient, and convenient for residents, employees, and visitors alike. As a result, rail, air, ferries,

transit, cycling and walking are successfully competing with the automobile for the dominant mode of choice.”

We urge that the Plan include overall mode split goals (for the percentages of people commuting to work by either driving alone; carpooling; using public transit; or walking) -- not just goals for school students or employee participants in a Transportation Management Agency -- that could, at a minimum, be evaluated against the federal Journey To Work Census data.

The Burlington Walking Work Group suggests a year 2020 target that walking and biking trips account for 25% of the commuter traffic in the City (rather than the 18% in year 2000).

All of the indicators' goals should also be clearly spelled out in the body of the Plan.

Remedy: Establish clear, measurable goals to all indicators that reinforce the City’s adopted transportation vision so that public officials have clear targets to measure our progress. These goals should include mode split goals in an effort to reduce Single Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) usage.

### **Evaluate Burlington's Development Review Process in terms of Pedestrian Needs:**

The draft Plan does not recommend any changes to the development review process even though current projects are getting permitted with insufficient pedestrian facilities or access to public transit. In fact, one of the first actions of the Burlington Walking Work Group was to submit extensive comments on ways of improving pedestrian features of the planned Champlain Parkway (our comments are available via our web site: <http://www.burlingtonwalks.org/>).

More recently, we are troubled that the Flynn Avenue sidewalk built in front of Burlington Subaru has no buffer between it and the roadway (a truck route). The Dealer.com project on Pine Street was apparently permitted without a sidewalk on Howard Street and a sidewalk very close to the road on Pine Street (also a truck route). How are these design flaws happening? They certainly do not follow the city’s desired “Great Streets” design. Other cities have modified their development review regulations to explicitly incorporate pedestrian considerations into the review process.

Remedy: The city's development review ordinance should ensure that impacts of projects on pedestrians and pedestrian facilities (such as sidewalks and pathways) are considered when projects are reviewed -- not just the impacts that projects have on cars and traffic. The Pedestrian Plan that we call for could also contain specific recommendations for how pedestrian considerations could be better integrated into the development review process. As an alternative, the Transportation Plan should appoint a lead entity to evaluate the current development review process as it relates to transportation investments and their design, and deliver the report by a specific date.

### **Insufficient Data Collection:**

The draft Transportation Plan states, and we agree, that pedestrian and bicycle data collection is insufficient, but the plan does not call for improving data collection on pedestrian activity. The Plan states in A-13 that the city lacks a sidewalk inventory, but doesn’t call for addressing the problem.

Remedy: Either include a policy to address the deficiencies or have the Transportation Plan call for a separate Pedestrian Plan that would identify solutions. The Transportation Plan should reinforce the need for collecting and maintaining bicycle and pedestrian data such as crash data, pedestrian and bicycle count data, etc.

### **Car Sharing:**

We appreciate the most current version of the draft Plan's support for car sharing. The mention is very brief and we believe the benefits of such service should be more clearly articulated in the Plan.

Remedy: The Plan should commit the City to offering resources such as parking spaces for shared cars. Car sharing is an emerging tool for increasing mobility while minimizing auto-impacts on our urban community.

### **Keep Order of Plan Consistent:**

The transportation modes are ordered differently in the body of the plan and in the appendix.

Remedy: Order the transportation modes as they are ordered in the appendix with pedestrian needs first as every trip begins and ends as a pedestrian trip.

### **Little Guidance On Enhancing Safety:**

The draft Plan mentions that safety is the City's top priority for its transportation system (page 10), but it does little in terms of addressing how safety will be improved beyond lowering traffic speeds.

Remedy: The Plan needs to provide additional details on what specific policies and actions will help achieve greater safety for pedestrians. If this is not possible within the context of the Transportation Plan, this would clearly be one of the most important issues addressed in the separate Pedestrian Plan we are calling for.

### **Summing Up:**

The Burlington Walking Work Group stands ready to volunteer our time to assist with developing a Pedestrian Plan. We want to invite members of the City Council, the Public Works and Planning Commissions, and any interested residents to attend our meetings. Again, we greatly appreciate the opportunity to comment on the August 31, 2007 version of the City's Transportation Plan.

We urge the City to take the bold steps required to implement a progressive, urban, and non-single occupancy vehicle centric transportation vision. Only through lofty, but specific, measurable goals can we move forward and take the steps needed to attain the goals and objectives we all support!