

Date: May 31, 2024

From: BEST's Franklin Boulevard Design Review Team

To: Rob Inerfeld, Eugene Transportation Planning Manager
Jenifer Willer, Eugene City Engineer
Matt Rodrigues, Eugene Assistant City Manager

Cc: David Roth, Lane Transit District Director of Mobility Planning and Policy
Pat Walsh, Lane Transit District Chief Marketing Officer
Jameson Auten, Lane Transit District Chief Executive Officer

Re: Key questions re Franklin Boulevard Transformation

Dear Rob, Jenifer, and Matt:

Thank you for the City of Eugene's recent presentation to our group, and more broadly thank you for your efforts to improve the Franklin Boulevard corridor.¹

This memorandum reflects the Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation (BEST) Franklin Boulevard Design Review Team's (DRT) current understanding of the City's concept for the Franklin Boulevard project. It also presents key questions about the design. The DRT invites City staff to respond to this document. Specifically, the DRT requests that City staff provide feedback in a timely manner on the DRT's understanding of the project and provide as much information as possible to address the questions included in the "Key Questions" portion of this document.

We have also included additional questions in Appendix A. These questions reflect discussions within the DRT up to this point. Responses to any of these additional questions may be useful but should not be considered urgent.

The DRT will use the City's responses to assist in generating more fine-tuned findings and recommendations to assist the City as it moves forward with the project.

¹ [Franklin Boulevard Transformation](#).

Summary of City's Efforts

We appreciate the City's **purpose** is to address existing **transportation needs (problems)**. In brief:²

The proposed investments will recast a deteriorating former state highway into a complete urban street, changing Franklin Boulevard from an automobile-dominated arterial to a multimodal urban street, prioritizing safety for people walking, biking, and riding the bus rapid transit (BRT) and promoting transit-oriented development (TOD).

Many of these problems today are validated by BEST's survey of **public views**.³

We further appreciate the City's ideal **vision** for the corridor.⁴ The City articulates four **goals** towards that vision:⁵

1. *Transform Franklin Boulevard from an unsafe automobile-oriented thoroughway to a safe, multimodal street that works for the neighborhoods along the corridor and in the region.*
2. *Reinforce Franklin Boulevard as the spine of the regional EmX system.*
3. *Strengthen connections for all modes across and along Franklin Boulevard.*
4. *Reconstruct Franklin Boulevard to be consistent with adopted plans, and consider environmental impacts and cost.*

The City offers **objectives** — we'd call them design principles — for achieving each goal.⁶

More pointedly, the City articulates several sets of **evaluation criteria**:

Draft ⁷	Revised ⁸
<i>Pedestrians</i>	<i>Safety for People Walking</i> <i>Mobility and Access for People Walking</i>
<i>Bicycle Travel</i>	<i>Safety for People Biking</i> <i>Mobility and Access for People Biking</i>

² [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), August 2023, "Executive Summary," p. i. See also "Study Overview," p. 3; "Purpose" and "Transportation Needs (Problems)," pp. 12–14; and in much more detail "Chapter 3: Existing Corridor Conditions 2019–2022," pp. 14–41.

³ BEST, [Better Streets for People and Businesses: Franklin Boulevard](#), 2023.

⁴ [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), August 2023, "Executive Summary," p. i. See also "Corridor Vision," p. 5.

Note that the vision is primarily based upon the work established by the [Walnut Station Specific Area Plan](#), July 2010.

⁵ [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), August 2023, "Executive Summary," p. ii. See also "Design Goals and Objectives," pp. 5–7.

⁶ [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), August 2023, "Design Goals and Objectives," pp. 5–7.

⁷ [Draft Project Overview](#), January 2019, "Project Goals, Objectives, and Evaluation Measures," pp. 7–8.

⁸ [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), 8/23/23, "Evaluation Criteria," pp. 54–55.

Draft⁷	Revised⁸
<i>Transit</i>	<i>Transit Safety</i> <i>Transit Mobility and Access</i>
<i>Motor Vehicles</i> <i>Freight</i>	<i>Roadway Safety</i> <i>Vehicle Traffic</i>
—	<i>Quality of Life</i>
<i>Environmental</i>	<i>Environmental Factors</i>
<i>Economic</i>	<i>Economic Factors</i>

A design workshop resulted in **design concepts** with different cross sections:

- *English Oak*
- *Median Cycle Track*
- *Tree Boulevard*
- *Edge Trees*
- *Multi-Way Boulevard*

The City used these design concepts to develop, analyze, and refine **alternatives**:

- *No Build*
- *Alternative A: Roundabouts*
- *Alternative B: Signalized Intersections*
- *Alternative C: Hybrid*
- *Modified Hybrid Alternative*

Finally, the City's **Recommended Alternative** is a refinement of the Modified Hybrid Alternative that was selected using the evaluation criteria.

Key Questions

Our preliminary review has generated a few key questions.

1. Users

Reviewing the draft and revised evaluation criteria, would the public understand these better if they were slightly reorganized around different users, taking inspiration from the **triple bottom line of sustainability**?⁹

⁹ Lane Livability Consortium, [Triple Bottom Line Analysis](#), 2013–2014.

- People / Equity
 - People walking
 - People biking
 - People rolling / using mobility assistive devices
 - People riding public transit
 - People driving
- Prosperity / Economy / Quality of Life
 - Freight
 - Businesses / Developers
 - Neighbors
 - Community
- Planet / Environment
 - Air
 - Land
 - Water

For each of the traveling users (people / equity and freight), do three sets of evaluation criteria apply?¹⁰

- Safe: No loss of life or personal harm
- Practical: Convenient and affordable
- Attractive (or Comfortable): Welcoming and enjoyable

In particular, in our subsequent review of the Recommended Alternative, we are looking to evaluate it for various use cases, for example:

- people walking north-south at Walnut Street,
- people biking east along Franklin Boulevard,
- businesses located on the south side of Franklin Boulevard,
- Neighbors living south of Franklin Boulevard,
- etc.

2. Priorities

We doubt that the needs of all users can be met equally well. There are simply too many people and businesses doing too many different things in a limited space to be able to find a design that fully satisfies everyone. We say this not as a criticism but rather to acknowledge the complexity and challenges of Franklin Boulevard.

¹⁰ See BEST, [Better Streets for People and Businesses](#).

If, in fact, not all evaluation criteria can be fully met, can the City clarify the priorities that guided what tradeoffs and compromises were made in developing the Recommended Alternative?

3. Motor Vehicle Traffic

Specifically, Goal 1 is to “transform Franklin Boulevard from an unsafe automobile-oriented thoroughway (arterial, former state highway) to a safe, multimodal (complete urban) street.”

In the language of Strong Towns, Franklin was designed a century ago as a **road**, it has evolved to become a **STROAD**, and now the City is proposing to transform it into a **street**:¹¹

	Road	Street
Purpose	Moving traffic	Building community wealth
Design Approach	Simplify, avoid complexity	Embrace complexity
Design Speed	Fast, more than 50 mph	Slow, 15 mph or less
Accessibility	Few access points	Frequent access provided
Adjacent Development	Avoid building anything	Build, build, build!
Humans Walking / Biking	No, except on separated facilities	Yes, and given priority throughout

strongtowns.org

Of course, a major difference between a road and a street is the **design speed**, i.e., how fast someone is inclined to drive based not on the posted speed limit but on the configuration of the street.¹² As the City understands, speed is a major factor in safety. A crash at 40 or 45 mph is far more likely to be fatal than one at 25 or 20 mph.¹³

¹¹ Charles Marohn, Strong Towns, “[Here Is What Vision Zero Should Really Look Like](#),” 5/13/24.

See also Strong Towns, “[What’s a STROAD and Why Does It Matter?](#)” 3/2/18.

See also Smart Growth America, “[Why safety and speed are fundamentally incompatible—a visual guide](#),” 3/15/21.

¹² NACTO, *Urban Street Design Guide*, “[Design Speed](#).”

See also Marc Schlossberg, et al., *Rethinking Streets: An Evidence-Based Guide to 25 Complete Street Transformations*, 2013, “Transportation Concepts,” p. 7.

¹³ City of Eugene, [20 is Plenty](#).

If, in fact, the City is aiming to transform Franklin Boulevard from STROAD into a (complete) street, we wonder about the experiences of people and freight traveling east-west along the corridor, and how these affect the safety of the corridor:

- What is the design speed of the Recommended Alternative? The recent report suggests that the design speed will be reduced from 35 mph to 25 mph,¹⁴ which is somewhat less “STROAD-y,” but not the 15 mph that Strong Towns urges for a street.
- If the aim is to lower the speed of motor vehicles traveling east-west, will the facility be able to accommodate current and projected traffic volumes? Or is it expected that the traffic volumes will decline, either because some through traffic opts to take alternative routes or to use alternative modes?
- Finally, if people driving east-west must stop for people walking, biking or rolling to cross north-south, how does that reality affect east-west traffic flow?

Next Steps

We look forward to the City’s timely responses to our key questions. These will help us develop findings and recommendations, which we hope to complete by early July.

Thank you again for your efforts and assistance.

Regards,

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¹⁴ [Corridor Analysis and Recommendations Report](#), August 2023, “Appendix A: Alternative Evaluation Matrices,” p. A-6.

Appendix A: Additional Questions from the Design Review Team

How Does the Plan Support Project Goals?

- Placemaking elements are an important part of the project (the City includes placemaking ideas as part of Goal 1), but the current design does not provide details on what those elements will be or how they will be implemented.
 - How is the transportation network's design related to building design, active street edges, and ground floor spaces?
 - How does the proposed design activate the area at the person-scale?
 - When can stakeholders expect more concrete plans for placemaking elements?
 - Is it wise to move forward with the proposal without a firm idea of the plans for placemaking elements?
- Optimizing the EmX system is a key goal of the project (Goal 2 is to “reinforce Franklin Boulevard as the spine of the regional EmX system”), but there are elements of the current plan that do not seem to prioritize EmX.
 - To meet Goal 2, would it be beneficial to give more priority to EmX buses?
 - What is the City's latest thinking on running buses through the middle of the roundabouts, rather than around?
- In what specific ways does the proposed design support previously adopted City plans and goals? In particular, how does it address goals for the Walnut Station Area?
- How was the “Economic development pros and cons: qualitative” evaluation criteria applied? Were positive or negative impacts on large events considered?

How Will the Plan Affect Surrounding Areas?

- How does the current design account for the increasing density west of the Franklin Boulevard project area?

How Does the Plan Advance Sustainability Goals?

- Cars in the roundabouts will have to start and stop regularly to allow pedestrians and bikes to cross, which seems likely to reduce the sustainability benefits associated with roundabouts. How will installing roundabouts in such a pedestrian- and bike-heavy environment affect levels of greenhouse gas emissions?
- Does the City plan to include “green infrastructure,” like bioswales, to address increased runoff from any increases in paved surfaces along the corridor?

- Is there a plan for planting and fostering new tree growth along Franklin Boulevard?

What Resources Has the City Referenced to Inform the Design?

- What case studies has the City considered in preparing this design?
- How similar are the conditions of these case studies to those on Franklin Boulevard (e.g. number of pedestrians, level of traffic flow, etc)?
- Were the places in these case studies successful, and if so, what did they do?

What Does Project Timeline, Process, and Funding Look Like?

- What has been the City Council's role in reviewing and signing off on this project?
What is the City Council's role in this project moving forward?
- The City has noted that financial resources for this project are tight and construction prices tend to increase with time.
 - What will the City do if it does not have enough money to complete Phase 1?
 - How would being able to implement only a portion of Phase 1 impact conditions along the corridor?
 - If there ends up being enough money to complete Phase 1, but not Phase 2, how will that impact conditions along the corridor?