



Puget Sound Regional Council

**2024 FHWA REGIONAL COMPETITION: PROJECT SPONSOR FOLLOW-UP  
QUESTIONS**

AGENCY: City of Tacoma

PROJECT: Puyallup Avenue Corridor Improvements with Pedestrian Access to Fife

**Question #1:** Please identify the existing disparities or gaps in the transportation system or services for the identified Equity Focus Areas above that need to be addressed. Describe how the project is addressing those disparities or gaps and will provide benefits or positive impacts to these equity populations by improving their mobility.

**Answer #1:**

The project is addressing safety disparities, mobility disparities, and health disparities for identified Equity Focus Areas including people of color, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes. This response includes two sections, one identifying the existing disparities and the other summarizes how these disparities will be addressed by this project.

**Identification of Existing Disparities or Gaps**

The project is addressing disparities and providing benefits to the project's equity populations by improving mobility for the area's residents, which are more than 50% people of color. Nineteen percent of the population is Hispanic/Latinx and 8% of the population identifies as Black. A 2022 study published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine found that Black Americans are twice as likely to be killed while walking than white Americans. Hispanic/Latino pedestrians face a 1.5 times higher risk than white pedestrians (Raifman and Choma, Disparities in Activity and Traffic Fatalities by Race/Ethnicity). The project will include reconstructed and widened sidewalks as well as addressing missing links, all which allow for better and safer access for these impacted populations to patronize businesses and utilize transit and/or biking options made possible through the project's improvements.

The project is addressing disparities faced by the project area's population of which more than 20% of the population are people with disabilities. A 2022 "Disability and Pedestrian Road Traffic Injury: A Scoping Review" focused on the greater risk people with disabilities face when walking and rolling, while highlighted the need for additional research (Schwartz, Buliung, Daniel, & Rothman, Health & Place – Volume 77). A 2015

study found that pedestrians in wheelchairs face a 36% higher risk of being killed than pedestrians overall (Kraemer & Benton, “Disparities in road crash mortality among pedestrians using wheelchairs in the USA: results of a capture–recapture analysis”).

The project’s mobility- and livability-based improvements are addressing disparities faced by the project area’s population of which more than 50% of the population are people with low or no incomes, many of who are intersectionally marginalized into two or more marginalized groups, due to relationships between what modes people choose or have available to them, income, and disability. PSRC’s “Who Walks and Bikes in the Puget Sound Region?” 2017 data sheet highlighted that 43% of people living in households making less than \$25,000/year walked 5+ days per week, compared to 15% for those making \$25,000-\$49,999 and 23% making over \$50,000. The WA State Legislature’s Joint Transportation Committee (JTC)’s 2022 Non-Drivers Study’s survey of nondrivers ages 18+ in Washington State found that nondrivers were more likely to be lower income. Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents reported having a disability or condition that prevents or limits their driving ([leg.wa.gov/JTC/Pages/Nondrivers.aspx](http://leg.wa.gov/JTC/Pages/Nondrivers.aspx)).

It is also important to note that while the residents of the project area identify with many of PSRC’s Equity Focus Areas (EFAs), public transit riders make up a significant portion of the regular visitors to the neighborhood and are also likely to belong to one of the EFAs at a higher rate than the regional average. Although there are myriad of transit routes that serve the area, the pedestrian and bicycle facilities needed for marginalized groups to access critical public transit are often inadequate or entirely absent. Sidewalks are narrow, inaccessible and/or missing in places. Curb ramps are often inaccessible and/or missing. Crossing distances are overly long, lack adequate safety features, and are excessively spaced apart. Only three of the existing 16 intersections have marked crosswalks and only two have APS, creating safety and accessibility challenges for transit riders with disabilities and those without access to a vehicle in getting to and from their pick-up/drop-off locations. There is a need for greater pedestrian accessibility to support increasing transit use and transit-oriented development planned for (and already occurring in) the area.

The Washington State Department of Health’s Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map “is an interactive mapping tool that compares communities across our state for environmental health disparities.” This map ranks the Puyallup Avenue Corridor Improvements with Pedestrian Access to Fife project area as facing the highest levels of environmental health disparities in the state (ranked 10 out of 10). This is due to multiple factors, including the area’s ozone concentration, PM2.5 Particulates, Diesel emissions, heavy traffic roadways, and urban heat island index. According to the PSRC Project Selection Resource Map, parts of the project location is within an Air Quality Focus Area, placing it in the top 10% of communities facing air quality issues in the region. This data further reinforces a need to support active transportation facilities, which then influence choices that have environmental benefits compared to the alternatives. Additionally, the project improvements support transit operations, access, and their ultimate use since transit in general is capable of transporting an order of magnitude more people for the same given amount of environmental impact as single-occupancy vehicles.

## **How the Project Addresses Disparities or Gaps**

This project provides an opportunity to address disparities in Tacoma's transportation system by increasing transportation options, improving accessibility, and improving safety. This project will specifically address the following disparities:

**Safety Disparities:** Given that persons of color and pedestrians with disabilities face greater risks while walking and rolling, this project's planned pedestrian safety and accessibility improvements are particularly important to address safety disparities. The project will provide a buffered bicycle facility and pedestrian improvements, including bulbouts, accessible ramps, signal improvements, wider sidewalks, and medians/pedestrian refuge islands.

At the Portland Avenue intersection specifically, the project is utilizing a highly economical solution to remove pedestrians and bicyclists from the conflicting flows of traffic and inherent safety concerns associated with the intersection by repurposing a directional grade-separated ramp serving only vehicles and buses into a shared use path with a limited-access BAT lane. This allows the Tacoma to Puyallup Trail to connect across the intersection at a separate grade and alignment from general purpose traffic, thus avoiding conflicts with the tens of thousands of general purpose and freight traffic vehicles that pass through the intersection each day.

**Access and Mobility Disparities:** Given that the project area has a higher proportion of residents with disabilities and low-income residents—who are more likely to be nondrivers—pedestrian safety, protected bike facilities, accessibility improvements, and improved public transit performance are vitally important to address access and mobility disparities. This project will help improve access to affordable transportation options that are accessible to people of all ages and abilities, increase opportunities to connect to transit, and make it easier for residents of the Downtown Tacoma Regional Growth Center to safely access daily destinations like grocery stores, jobs, and retail.

The trail component of the project completes an existing gap in the active transportation network, both on a local and regional level. The Tacoma to Puyallup (T2P) Regional Trail will connect downtown Tacoma to Fife and the Puyallup Tribe of Indians Reservation, offering people in those communities safe, active transportation access to jobs, schools, parks, and housing (existing and future) in our Downtown and Tacoma MIC regional centers and beyond. Communities along the future trail currently face disparities in transportation safety and access including long-term separation impacts from the construction of I-5 in the 1960s.

The project area's South Downtown Subarea Plan includes a recommendation to "Consider geographically prioritizing affordable housing loans to areas adjacent to high-capacity transit stations, including the Tacoma Dome Station and the LINK stations in South Downtown." This project will be crucial for the mobility of people of all abilities who need safe and contiguous access to those vital transit services. It is

City policy to continue to support affordable housing, including people without access to personal vehicles, near such transit resources. This project will create seamless connections between housing and services for equity focus area groups.

**Health and Environmental Disparities:** Landscaping to be provided as part of the project's streetscape amenities will help reduce the urban heat island effect and provide shade for pedestrians during warmer months. Transportation is the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Tacoma. Signal improvements are aimed at making traffic flow more efficient and reducing the time that vehicles spend idling at intersections. Complementary to efficient flow of traffic is encouraging active transportation use through well-designed and provided facilities as scoped for the project. Additionally, use of transit, by having accessible and connected infrastructure resulting from the project, is much less impactful to the environment as compared to single-occupant vehicle use.

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**Question #2:** Please identify the HOP typology associated with your project's location along with the policies that currently exist that fall under the 3 categories (Supply, Stability, and Subsidy) for this typology.

**Answer #2:**

The majority of the area is within a Moderate Displacement Risk with a small portion on the west end of the project within a Medium Displacement Risk. Similarly, the majority of the area is within a Very Low Opportunity area with a small portion on the west end of the project within a Low Opportunity area. The PSRC HOP map identifies the project area housing typology as "Improve Access & Housing Choices". Tools and actions for these areas are focused on increasing housing opportunity while preserving affordability, and expanding housing access and opportunities for current and future residents.

In Tacoma, 72% of our highest risk roadways identified in our Vision Zero Action Plan are located in communities with low or very low access to opportunity, according to the City's Equity Index. As an area with very low access to opportunity – the project area faces disproportionate safety risks from high speed, high crash frequency roadways. Sixty percent of serious injury and fatal collisions in Tacoma occur on primary arterial streets like Puyallup Ave. Four total KSI (killed/serious injury) crashes have occurred within the project limits between July 2016 and November 2022. Two of the four total KSI crashes were pedestrians hit by vehicles traveling straight on Puyallup Ave on the stretch between E G St and E K St (the fatality was one of these pedestrians).

**Supply:** The project is in an area that has Supply policies in effect to encourage higher density housing and transit-oriented development. Zoning in the area consists of "Warehouse Residential" and "Downtown Mixed-Use" zoning, which encourages mixed-use development, creating an inviting streetscape for sidewalk-oriented businesses that cater to customers arriving by walking, biking, or transit. Based on review of applications for private development within the City of Tacoma's permitting database, there are

projects currently proposed and under construction that will add more than 900 new housing units for people to live in the next few years as well as almost 20,000 sf of retail development. More development applications are anticipated as the project area becomes a safer, more welcoming environment and with the pending extension of the Link light rail connection from Seattle/points north. Most of the project is within the Downtown Reduced Parking Area, where Tacoma Development code does not require a minimum number of off-street general-use parking stalls for new developments, and as a result there are only about 300 total additional parking spaces incorporated within these developments that are currently proposed. Most housing units will be reliant on transit and active transportation opportunities planned as part of this project. The City has also implemented priority review permitting for affordable housing projects.

**Stability:** The project is in an area that has Stability policies in effect that reduce the overall likelihood of displacement via the City of Tacoma's 2024 Anti-Displacement Strategy. Tenant protections focus on the relations between landlords and tenants and can help people access and retain housing. Tenant protections help address health and safety concerns, barriers in the rental market, protect tenants from unreasonable acts, and prevent unnecessary evictions. The City of Tacoma's Rental Housing Code provides protections for tenants and specific guidance to landlords who operate residential rental businesses in Tacoma. Under Tacoma Municipal Code 1.95, eligible tenant households are entitled to receive relocation assistance of \$2,000 to assist in the costs of moving in situations where they are being displaced due to significant rehabilitation, demolition, or change in use of their rented residence. The property owner is required to pay half that amount (\$1,000), and the City of Tacoma pays the remaining half (\$1,000 per unit). Development Regulation Agreements (DRA) are an optional application and review procedure intended to provide flexibility in the application of the City's development regulations so that conditions are tailored to the specifics of the proposed project and community vision in such a manner as to ensure that significant public benefits are secured. Developments that are in the Dome District area of South Downtown, that have a footprint of at least 15,000 square feet, a height of at least 75 feet, and has significant public ownership or control, or that preserves a historic structure or assists in preserving an adjacent historic structure, are eligible for DRAs.

**Subsidy:** The project is in an area that has Subsidy policies in effect to that offer a range of incentives to developers, such as the 12-year Multi-Family Tax Exemption, if they add affordable units to their development. These incentives are directed towards populations at 50% AMI or below. In the 2023-24 budget, \$2.5 million was reserved for land banking and an additional \$1.5 million was allocated as part of the 2023 Washington State legislative session. The Housing Assistance Program is a financial assistance program that provides education, supportive services, or resources to keep someone housed or help them become housed.

These Supply, Stability and Subsidy policies will help to reduce the risk of displacement as the project makes the neighborhood a more attractive place for new development by improving the streetscape and enhancing human-centered transportation. New development encouraged by the project will increase housing opportunity while preserving affordability, and expanding housing access.