

# Steve Novick

Portland City Commissioner



**General approach.** Portland's Climate Action Plan demands we drastically reduce driving from current levels. The Portland Plan aims to create 20-minute neighborhoods in Portland, places where people can get around quickly and easily by walking or biking (with 70% of commute trips in 2035 by foot, transit, or bike). Right now only 27% of commute trips are on foot, transit, or bike. Why do you think more Portlanders do not walk, bike, or take transit for transportation, and what will you do to help Portland meet its goals and become an even better city to walk, bike and ride transit?

For the usual reasons: they aren't near transit, or it doesn't run often enough, or they have to transfer and the second line doesn't run often enough, or there aren't sidewalks to walk on, or the destination (job/grocery store/school) is too far away to walk, all of those things. I will support zoning policies that lead to

more 20-minute neighborhoods; there are still places in the city with long stretches of residential-only, which means shops and jobs aren't where the people are. I will support additional measures to promote density, which makes transit more viable; in some places, that will mean modifying building height limits. And I will support additional investments in sidewalks, bike lanes and transit, as feasible.



**Fair funding share.** One of every four Portland residents (about 150,000 people) is too young, old, infirm or poor to drive. Would you support a city policy to dedicate at least that percentage (25%) of PBOT's budget for walking, biking, and access to transit projects?

That sounds like a fine aspirational goal, but I confess that I simply don't know, given State law restrictions on the use of the gas tax, and the amount of PBOT funds that come from the gas tax, how feasible that is. I am willing to consider pursuing additional revenues from more flexible sources; see answer to question 5.

**Contributing to transit's success.** Transit is the backbone of our regional transportation system. The Federal Transit Administration considers a 3-mile radius around transit stops to be the catchment area for linking walking and biking to transit. While the city does not run the transit system, it provides access to transit, some of the sidewalks at transit stops, subsidizes the streetcar, and helps pay for transit youth passes. Which investments would you prioritize to support the transit system?

I'd prioritize the measures that get the most value for the least money and that serve the least well served people. I could be misinformed, but my impression is that adding sidewalks and bike lanes in some places to improve access to existing transit is cheaper than building more streetcars. I have heard an earful from outer East Siders about the lack of and need for frequent service on 122d; it seems to me that if the city can subsidize other forms of transit, it could subsidize bus service in underserved areas, too.

**Critical pedestrian investments.** For most of the last decade, the Portland Bureau of Transportation has spent about \$50,000 a year on new sidewalks, which has done little to meet long-standing needs in historically underfunded areas. Engineering requirements, right-of-way shortages, and other factors mean sidewalks are expensive to build (though compared to highway interchanges, they're very cheap). How can we create more safe space for people to walk in difficult budget times?

Last week I heard an earful from a prominent East Portlander about the failure of the city to enforce its own rules requiring developers to include sidewalks in new development. Following those rules seems like a good place to start. I have also heard arguments for creating walkable surfaces short of (and less expensive than) true sidewalks, e.g., extending asphalt past the side of the street. I don't know if that would meet ADA or other legal requirements, but it sounded worth investigating.

**Funding shortfalls and innovation.** PBOT has a \$16 million budget shortfall for 2012, and ODOT is dramatically short of funds, and falling behind on maintenance responsibilities. Meanwhile, we still lack complete networks of safe ways to get around without a car. Many economists and transportation advocates are excited about the idea of using pricing signals to improve our transportation system. Congestion pricing, demand-responsive parking rates, street maintenance fees, and internalizing the externalized costs and benefits of transportation modes (for example, the CDC estimates \$1000 in annual health care savings from every active person) are especially promising. What would you do to bring in more money for our transportation needs? Do you support parking taxes, street fees, or demand-responsive parking rates?

I am very interested in demand-response parking rates. My interest was piqued by Tom Vanderbilt's summary of Donald Shoup's ideas in "The High Cost of Free Parking." I am open to a discussion of parking taxes (on big-box stores for example) as well. And congestion pricing.

**Choices and public perception.** Critics of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects mistakenly contend cyclists, pedestrians, and transit users don't pay their fair share in road taxes and other user fees. How would you make the case for allocating funds and limited street space for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects?

**Three words:** Health care costs. Rising health care costs are strangling business and families throughout America; the Portland area is no exception. If we can become the #1 city in America at controlling health care costs, if health insurance premiums go down for our businesses, it will give us a huge competitive advantage. Cyclists, pedestrians, and transit users (walking to transit and then from transit stops to your destination means walking a lot more than someone who's driving) are, on balance, healthier than just-drivers. Every time I see a cyclist, I think, "Hey, she's subsidizing my health care premiums." I will try to get that message to the general public.

**Cross-department collaboration.** There is significant concern about the silos between departments in the city – an issue that has been noted by candidates for years. A recent partnership between the Bureaus of Environmental Services and Transportation to get traffic safety benefits through smart sewer investments became very controversial. What would you have done differently? Where the goals of PBOT overlap with the goals of various other departments (for example, sustainability, equity, public safety, parks, water), what would you do to improve collaboration to most efficiently use our resources?

It seemed to me that Ryan Frank's post-mortem in the Oregonian explained things pretty well: the City was really looking for streets where bioswales, which reduce pressure on the sewer system, could best complement bike lanes. It should have been sold as a "win/win, good for sewers, good for bikes" concept. Instead, through a series of missed communications, it came out as "sewer fees for bike lanes." As far as cross-department collaboration is concerned, I think regular 'what are we doing where?' meetings between upper and middle managers in all bureaus could be very valuable, with the managers charged with identifying and implementing (or, in cases requiring higher-level buy-in, recommending) opportunities for collaboration. Maybe that already happens to a greater extent than I know, but I know that many people feel that in their neighborhood the right foot just doesn't know what the left elbow is doing.

**Traffic safety.** Traffic-related crashes are the top cause of death and injury for Oregonians aged 1 to 34. In 2011, 319 Oregonians were killed in traffic crashes, including 15 cyclists. Pedestrian injuries and deaths are a serious problem in Oregon, with one serious injury a day and one death a week. In 2010, 18 pedestrians died in Portland. Traffic speed is the leading factor in crashes (even above alcohol), and one of the largest contributors to whether a crash is fatal. Is safety the highest priority of the transportation system? If so (or if not) what policy and implications does that have, especially when it comes to slowing cars and protecting vulnerable roadway users? What specific policies and projects would you support to improve safety?

I'm not sure how to answer that first part – Safety is a very high priority, but I suppose if it were the highest priority, driving would be illegal. Rob Sadowski at BTA told me that reducing the “default” speed in residential neighborhoods from 25 to 20 mph would be a major safety step, which tracks with what Tom Vanderbilt says in “Traffic” about people losing the ability to maintain eye contact at about 20 mph; I would be willing to advocate for that. More traffic circles; more speed bumps... and I am very intrigued by the Hans Monderman-inspired “traffic calming” ideas discussed in Vanderbilt’s book: “mental speed bumps.” As Vanderbilt puts it “Put a child’s bike on the side of the road... Hang a weird sculpture.” Obviously, too, increasing reliance on feet, bikes and transit improves safety; New York has a spectacularly low rate of traffic fatalities, because nobody drives.

**CRC highway mega-project.** There has been a huge amount of pressure to build the most expensive public works project in the region’s history, the five-mile long highway project known as the Columbia River Crossing. Despite being a multi-billion dollar project, bicycle and pedestrian facilities involved are substandard, including an under-highway mile-long path that is mostly only minimum-width and a five-block corkscrew detour into Vancouver, all for a facility designed to serve the next 100 years. The project is diverting billions of dollars from other regional priorities to build an expansion that won’t solve congestion. What are your views on the mega-project? What, if anything, will you do to stop funding for this mega-project until it becomes consistent with our biking, pedestrian, and climate goals, as well as our budgetary priorities? Would you work to stop the City of Portland from lobbying for funding for it at the state and federal levels?

My view is that when Peter DeFazio keeps on saying, in effect, “I don’t know what they’re smoking, I’m not going to be able to find the money for what they’re talking about,” people should listen. And that given what we know about the impact of tolling on traffic, you shouldn’t make final decisions on the entirety of the project until you’ve done tolling and seen the impact. I have to confess that although I was familiar with other objections to the project, I was not aware that the bike/ped aspects were substandard until I read this questionnaire. It seems to me that the primary economic argument for the project is that it would improve freight mobility; I would be comfortable with an affordable version of the project that would address that specifically. I recognize that as far as commuter traffic is concerned, there’s a lot of evidence is that “you can’t build your way out of congestion,” and that in this case the danger is you simply move the congestion point to the Rose Quarter area. I do think we need to be sensitive to the fact that you’re more likely to get Federal money for an interstate project than an Oregon-only project, and hundreds of millions of Federal dollars do create a lot of jobs, so I don’t know that we have the luxury of saying “we should oppose any version of this entirely



on the theory that if it doesn't happen we'll get exactly the same amount of money for purely local projects."

**Transportation equity.** While light rail and streetcar efforts have generally managed to find funding over the past two decades, bus investments have been cut. At the same time, transportation costs are often more than 20% of a household's budget, and many households are too poor to drive to meet all of their daily needs. How would you ensure low-income communities receive equitable investments to improve their access to transportation? How should the Office of Equity influence transportation decisions?

The Office of Equity should review both PBOT's annual budget, and proposed new major transportation projects, for "equity impact." Mayor Adams' "budget map" was a good start. I think a good rule would be, before the City agrees to help fund any significant new transportation project in a relatively affluent area (e.g., streetcar to Lake Oswego), there should be an analysis of what the same money could buy in one or more low-income areas. And I think we need to listen when people in underserved areas highlight issues of particular concern, like the infrequency of bus service on 122nd.

**Economic development.** Portland State University research has found stores adjacent to bike corrals (on street bike parking) have experienced increased foot traffic. Travel Oregon has used bikes as a significant theme in their advertising for tourists and attracting the creative class. Do you see investments in biking, walking, and taking transit as effective and efficient tools for economic development? If so, how forcefully and publicly will you make this case?

See answer to question 6. I think the strongest economic development argument for biking, walking and transit is that health care costs are strangling families and businesses; that "bending the cost curve" in health care is probably the single most important thing we can do to ensure a vibrant economic future and to give Portland an advantage in attracting and retaining business; and that bikers, walkers and transiteers are going to be healthier than those who only drive. I'll give myself as an example: I was a heck of a lot healthier when I lived in cities where I walked to subways. As to forcefully and publicly, I plan to beat this "health care costs/economic development" argument into the ground. I want Portland to bend that cost curve like Beckham.

**Past accomplishments.** Do you have any specific accomplishments improving biking, walking and transit in Oregon or other places?

I have defensive accomplishments. I worked for 1,000 Friends on "ballot title" challenges to proposed ballot measures that would have undermined the land use system which helps promote density, which in turn makes transit, biking and walking more feasible.

steve novick



**Campaign viability.** What makes you a viable candidate?

In my race for the United States Senate in the 2008 primary, I won the City by double digits against formidable opposition (a current United States Senator). A recent Portland Business Alliance poll showed that I still had favorable/unfavorable ratings of 26 to 4 in the City. I have raised nearly \$200,000 with three months to go, from over 700 donors, and will be able to have a significant media buy which will hopefully help to get that favorable rating above 50%!

**Anything to add?**

The cost of health care and the cost of cars and fuel are huge burdens on families and businesses. We can reduce health care costs NOW by promoting biking, walking and transit. Although many people will continue to need cars until we have a much more comprehensive transit system, once we build that system, the Portlanders of the future will have a lot of money to spend on other things (we should teach these things – how much cars cost and how much you would save if you could rely just on feet, bikes and transit – in school, by the way). If the country ever starts taking global warming seriously, there will be rules and regulations to reduce the use of fossil fuels; we want Portland to be out ahead of that.