

January 25, 2018

Gary R. Christenson
Director, Planning and Community Development
City of Bainbridge Island
280 Madison Avenue North
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110

Dear Mr. Christenson:

This letter is a comment on the City's plans for Miller Road Shoulder Improvements.

Squeaky Wheels is a cycling advocacy group on Bainbridge Island. We have long advocated for wider paved shoulders on main island roads, and we are pleased that the City is making some progress on this.

We want to speak to the purpose of paved road shoulders on Miller Road and elsewhere. There are four main points.

1. Due to increasing auto traffic, many island roads that lack paved shoulders are unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians. Wide paved shoulders would make them safer.

The island's population will continue to grow, and much of the growth will be outside Winslow. One result is increased auto traffic on many roads. More auto traffic is making cycling and walking less comfortable and more dangerous. Some roads are unusable by pedestrians now, even in the vicinity of neighborhood centers that are supposed to be pedestrian-friendly. Without wider shoulders, the island will become more auto-dependent, not less, and the brave souls who walk and cycle will create frustration and hazards for motorists.

2. Maintaining safe roads in the face of growth is a core City responsibility.

In planner's terms, paved shoulders are an improvement to island roads that will restore the level of service the roads formerly provided for cyclists and pedestrians and maintain this level in the future. They will also improve the level of service for motorists who must avoid cyclists and pedestrians who are forced into the auto lanes.

Shoulder improvements are entirely consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. One could argue that the Plan requires them. See, for example, paragraphs A, B, F, G, L and M in the Transportation Element's discussion of issues, and Policies TR 2.1, TR 2.5, TR 6.1 and TR 9.3. Related to growth outside Winslow, see Policies LU 5.8, LU 5.10, HO 4.6 and HO 6.4.

3. This means that paved shoulders on main island roads are a fundamental road safety improvement to accommodate the growth the island has seen in recent years and will see in the future.

Shoulder improvements are not an optional new facility for cyclists. They are essential to maintaining safety for everyone on existing roads. As such they should be an integral part of the City's basic road program. The alternative is a future in which the roads become safe only for motorists.

Contrary to some assumptions, paved shoulders serve pedestrians as much as cyclists, perhaps more so. We would invite anyone who doubts this to take a walk on Sunrise Drive, or Eagle Harbor Drive, or Miller Road, or any other main road where the shoulder is mostly mud or ditch.

4. Some new paved shoulders will require cutting trees. The cost of reducing or mitigating tree cutting should be compared to the benefit of meeting essential transportation safety requirements.

Each and every Squeaky Wheels Board Member treasures the island's natural environment. One of the reasons we support cycling is that it is a way to get around without burning fossil fuel, and, if common, can help reduce local damage from auto travel. We recognize that autos will be the main means of transportation on the island for years to come. We simply want to coexist, so that people can drive and cycle and walk on our existing roads without hassle and fear. A future in which island roads are hospitable only to autos would be bad for the environment and the community, no matter how well forested their edges may be.

We know that the City is acutely aware of the public's interest in preserving trees. If it would be useful we would willing be help review plans for the Miller Road project and other shoulder improvements to help the City find creative solutions for reducing and mitigating tree cutting or any other environmental damage.

We were happy to hear the many statements of support for the Core 40 shoulder improvements in last year's City Council campaigns and in subsequent Council discussions. No doubt Councilmembers personally support shoulder improvements for road safety and non-motorized travel. No doubt they also heard the desire for shoulder improvements from many constituents, cyclists or not, as we have heard overwhelmingly in our conversations with islanders in the last year. We look forward to working with you and others in the City and the community on shoulder improvements to make our road network safe for all.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Peter Harris
Squeaky Wheels President
14037 Farmview Lane
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110

cc: Bainbridge Island City Council
Bainbridge Island Planning Commission