

## **OVERVIEW**

The purpose of the Richland Downtown Connectivity Study is to advance the City Council’s vision for a pedestrian-friendly waterfront and downtown, while maintaining or enhancing the vehicular travel flow through downtown. The J-U-B ENGINEERS, Inc. team will develop, evaluate and prioritize street improvements in the area of George Washington Way (GW) between Williams Boulevard and Bradley Boulevard, a one-mile stretch. Ultimately the findings and recommendation will be presented to City Council for selection of a preferred approach.

Key stakeholder interviews along with a community advisory committee (CAC), targeted business district meetings, community survey and public open house are designed to foster transparency and open communication and provide the opportunity for meaningful public involvement in the alternative development and selection process.

The Langdon Group, a division of J-U-B, conducted 30 interviews in July 2019. Stakeholders, as determined in coordination with the City, represented a range of interests (list below). The assessment did not include every interested party, but did include representation from a diversity of perspectives.

The majority of stakeholders interviewed are highly supportive of an inviting, welcoming downtown core that serves as a destination to draw residents and visitors with improved, non-motorized mobility connectivity. However, as a whole, stakeholders commented that this vision is in tension with the idea of maintaining or enhancing the current traffic flow on GW through the study area. Differing opinions were expressed over whether pedestrian improvements should discourage commuter drivers from using GW. The degree to which stakeholders offered solutions depended on the degree that they believed the congestion on GW could be decreased through a potential alternative (described below), as well as the outcome of the North-South Transportation Study.

From the assessment alternatives and themes for an inviting downtown emerged, described below in the comprehensive summary. The identified alternatives can serve as a starting place for discussion with the CAC and the larger public involvement effort. Themes warrant further discussion to determine the degree to which concerns and concepts raised are viable within the sideboards of this study or are more appropriate in an ancillary effort.

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## **METHODOLOGY**

Conversations were conducted with a set of predetermined questions, yet informally to allow the stakeholders to drive the direction and discuss the issues that were most important to them; therefore, the resulting summary includes themes, not quantifiable data. This report is intended to provide a window into the opinions, issues, and concerns that exist among the diversity of stakeholders. Notes are made to identify comments and ideas that were mentioned on multiple occasions.

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## STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED

- Planning Commission Member
- Parks and Recreation Commission Member
- Youth member, Parks and Recreation Commission
- Economic Development Committee Member
- Ben Franklin Transit
- Bike Tri-Cities (two members)
- Pedestrian Advocate (interviewed with Bike Tri-Cities walking tour interview)
- Pacific Northwest National Lab
- Energy Northwest
- Uptown Shopping Business Improvement District
- Parkway Business Improvement District
- Columbia Basin College
- Washington State University-Tri-Cities (two staff members)
- Port of Benton
- Farmers Market Board
- Police Department
- School District (two members)
- Sterlings Restaurant
- Red Lion Hotel
- Boost Build
- U.S. Department of Energy
- Kadlec Regional Medical Center (two staff members)
- Fuse
- Gravis Law
- Tri-Cities Regional Chamber
- Visit Tri-Cities/ TCVCB

Total Stakeholders interviewed: 30

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## COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

### Proposed Alternatives

The following represents potential design alternatives for advancement for discussion in the public involvement process.

***Direct traffic to Jadwin*** – Shifting the majority of traffic to Jadwin was shared as a potential path towards converting GW from a commuter route to a quieter, pedestrian friendly “Main Street.” However, concerns were also expressed that Jadwin already has existing safety issues for pedestrians and that pushing traffic volume there would exasperate the current situation. Concerns also centered on

Jadwin becoming a barrier for neighborhoods, a future Columbia Basin College campus and parking areas to access downtown destinations and the waterfront. The Jadwin Avenue/Gillespie Street intersection was mentioned as particularly problematic.

Stakeholders indicated that the key to this alternative's viability is defining the downtown core. If the walkable downtown core is east of Jadwin and centered on GW and the waterfront, then this alternative is more viable. If the downtown core extends west of Jadwin, this alternative becomes less viable.

**GW/Jadwin Couplet** – Those in favor of the couplet alternative expressed that their preference was due to a belief that this alternative would alleviate congestion on GW and create the conditions necessary for a pedestrian-oriented downtown core. Those against the couplet expressed that they did not believe the configuration would affect the speed of drivers and worried that existing conditions that do not feel conducive to create a downtown core would be left unchanged. Additional concerns involved uncertainty about how customers would access businesses along GW and Jadwin. Concerns also involved existing issues with the effects of street closures near the waterfront for City events and concern that these issues would be exasperated with a couplet.

**GW Pedestrian Overpass** – Support for a GW overpass was expressed if anchored to a parking structure at the GSA parking lot. Most stakeholders saw an investment in such infrastructure as unlikely to be worth the cost due to an overpass being seen as inadequate to address the variety of existing concerns along GW. Stakeholders voiced that while an over or underpass might address waterfront connectivity it would not address, or could even worsen, current conditions on GW that make walking or bicycling feel neither safe nor inviting. Stakeholders added that if either was to be implemented that an underpass or tunnel could provide needed shade and would need to be strategically placed to build upon downtown destinations that draw people to the study area. Other considerations shared:

- Possible way to connect the riverfront trail with the Parkway.
- People often want to walk the shortest distance and may not want to walk up the stairs.

**Enhanced Transportation and Street Design Features** – Stakeholders consistently expressed support for pedestrian and bicycles infrastructure but varied in the types of improvements they preferred. Bulb-outs, green strips, narrowed lanes, reduced speed limits, and raised speed hump crosswalks were shared as ideas for physically and psychologically slowing vehicle traffic to increase bicycle and pedestrian safety. Stakeholders also focused on the following design features as potential solutions that are not necessarily dependent on changes to the roadway network:

*Bicycle Lanes and Infrastructure* – Considerations shared:

- Necessary to increase the safety and inviting nature of biking along GW as a downtown core.
- Bicycle lanes were indicated to be marked, with green paint, sharrows and with clear signage about the roles of bicyclists on the road.
- Issue with people parking in existing bike lanes.
- Increased bicycle parking downtown.
- Improved ability to transition from bicycle to transit.

- Stations with pumps for flat tires and tire repair needs.

*Sidewalks* – Sidewalks were noted as a place to increase connectivity, particularly between downtown and the Uptown Shopping Center, at Williams, either as new construction or to be widened. Additional considerations shared:

- Need for sidewalks to be clearly delineated from the street, with a more distinct curb.
- Green strips to buffer cars and bicyclists/ sidewalks.
- Development requirements for a sidewalk buffer.
- Issue with people parking on the sidewalks → Need for a clearly delineated curb.
- Increased shade.
- Strategic use of sidewalk furniture.

*Crosswalks* – Considerations shared:

- Flags consistently described as dangerous and ineffective.
- Multiple suggestions were made to replace current crosswalks with a flashing signal that could be triggered by a pedestrian button.
- Additional crosswalks were requested at mid-block crossings, with stakeholders noting that often the blocks in downtown Richland are too long and distinctive walking between destinations.

*Street Trees and Public Art* – Considerations shared:

- Consistently stated as a positive way to change the street profile of GW was favored across all stakeholders.

*On Street Parking* – Considerations shared:

- Potential option to create a downtown feel for GW.
- If bicycle lanes are to be added, on street parking was indicated to be between the car lane and bicycle lane.

***Additional Traffic movement ideas*** – Considerations shared:

- Encourage traffic to move onto the bypass.
- Jadwin and GW intersection as a roundabout.

## Themes

The following themes emerged as ideas or concerns expressed by multiple stakeholders with connectivity to the topic of an inviting downtown but not specifically tied to alternatives.

***Pedestrian Mall*** – A pedestrian only area was overall expressed to be an asset for the community, residents and visitors alike. The Parkway was stated to be a likely candidate for a pedestrian mall, with emphasis on the need to strategically ensure that parking can be met through the use of better

utilization of existing parking venues. For a long-term vision, suggestions involved an expanded pedestrian mall with a closed Knight Street between the Parkway and John Dam Plaza and continued walkability between Jadwin and GW to the Uptown Shopping Center. Further, stakeholders expressed a potential use to connect this study with economic development (expanded farmers market, wine tasting, etc.) and the Richland Creative District group. Stakeholders saw the future vision of the old City Hall building as integral to building a downtown core and potential pedestrian mall.

***Pedestrian Paths/Trails*** – Considerations shared:

- Urban Greenbelt Trail – need for maintenance and improved signage.
- Additional paths were considered useful if provided connectivity to clear destinations, similar to the path along a creek inside the Kadlec Medical Center campus.
- Improved connections to the riverfront path.

***Wayfinding*** – Considerations shared:

- Increased signage for existing and future paths was considered a necessity.
- Those new to town or visiting can have a hard time figuring out the existing options.

***Additional Safety Concerns*** – The Parkway and John Dam Plaza were stated to be assets to the community but due to safety considerations can be hard to access for pedestrians and bicyclists from nearby neighborhoods and parking areas. Related comments include:

- Need for increased lighting.
- Ability to safely access parks along GW.

***Economic Development*** – Seen inherently integral to the success of downtown improvements. Interest was expressed in incorporating downtown development with the development of a pedestrian infrastructure to support downtown Richland and the waterfront as a destination, with a focus on establishments that would serve to draw people to downtown and make them want to walk from business to business. This issue was emphasized in creating connections between the Parkway and Uptown Shopping Center. Increased walkability and an inviting downtown core was noted as useful for visitors, tourists from the cruise boats and business travelers who might want to extend their stay. Other considerations shared:

- Concern that low walkability for GW creates a disincentive for people to visit businesses.
- Need for city code to encourage businesses that would fit with a walkable, downtown core.

***Land Use*** - Considerations shared:

- Interest in mixed-use developments that fit with the design of an urban core.
- Suggested for City to proactively ensure that the types of businesses within a downtown core are those that draw people to the area, examples include retail or experience-based business over specific needs such as a dentist.

***Parking*** - Considerations shared:

- Suggested need for businesses to better share parking, especially businesses with customers who use parking at different times of the day.
- Need for a cultural shift where people do not expect to park directly in front of the business they visit and feel safe and comfortable walking down the block to different businesses.

**Education** – Many stakeholders expressed that drivers often seemed confused as to the role of bicyclists on the road. Stakeholders recommended that any improvements be accompanied with an educational campaign for driver’s to better understand expectations when interacting with bicyclists.

**Institutional and partner agency considerations** – Considerations shared:

- Columbia Basin College – Potential campus expansion centered on Knight Street Transit Center.
- Emergency services – Goal is for any changes in street design to not impede the movement or accessibility of emergency responders. Parallel parking was considered to be a potential blocker.

**Suggestions for on-going feedback** – Considerations shared:

- City website feature to report when a stop light does not recognize bicyclists.

**Case study communities** – Many stakeholders offered communities that overcame similar challenges as models to learn from:

- *Bend, Oregon* – Great downtown feel, the design of the city makes visitors and residents want to walk about and visit different businesses; emphasis on the connection to the Deschutes River and that Bend achieves an inviting Downtown that exists with primary roads.
- *Sunriver, Oregon* – Designed for bicyclists, great system of separated bike lanes and trails, includes tunnels; feels very safe.
- *Wenatchee, Washington* – Walkable downtown next to a river. Recent improvements were successful because they were community driven.
- *Coeur d’Alene, Idaho* – Walkable downtown next to a lake; inviting downtown that draws people to want to stop in the town; feels safe to walk.
- *Lewiston, Idaho* – Nice downtown that also serves as the main thoroughfare between Lewiston & Clarkston.
- *Berk/Gillman Trail, Seattle* – Example of an urban greenbelt trail.
- *Penticton, Lake Okanagan, Canada* – Includes two miles of lane front, a two-lane road, with a connected downtown, park pathway; city invested to fix up the area and now hosts major activities.
- *Claremont, CA* – Walking area inspiration for the Uptown Shopping Center.
- Pike’s Place Market in Seattle – Example for year-long farmers and retail market.

**Public Messaging Channels and Communication:**

- Local media (print and online, including social media channels):
  - Tumbleweird newspaper
  - Tri-City Herald

**Stakeholder Assessment Summary Report**  
**Downtown Connectivity Study 2019**



OTHER J-U-B COMPANIES

- Community email lists:
  - Business District email lists
- Facebook groups and pages
  - “20s Plenty for Richland” (page and group; multiple recommendations)
  - “Richland Residents” (246 group members; multiple recommendations)
  - Market at the Parkway (page)
  - City pages, including Richland Parks & Recreation
  - Community Watch groups
- Flyers
  - Library
  - Kiosks in the park
  - Howard Ammon Park Community Center
  - Utility Bill