

The Bike Buzz at the Council of Governments  
January 2019  
Carl Berkowitz

Hector Cruz, Dave Beach, Maricela Sanchez and Carl Berkowitz recently met with the Benton Franklin Council of Government's (BFCOG) Transportation Programs Manager, [Patrick Pittenger](#) and Transportation Planning Specialist II, [Erin Braich](#). Both are new to the jobs and both bring much energy enthusiasm and experience for cycling to their jobs.

**But first, some background...**

Patrick wore many official hats during his 11 year tenure at Carson City (NV) where his department was responsible for both planning and transportation. "This made it easy to coordinate things" Patrick said, something he hopes to do with his new position at COG. He also talks about cycling to work in Carson City, and is proud of its status as a League of American Bicyclist "Bicycle Friendly Community." Although Erin has lived in the Tri-Cities for many years, he learned what cycling life is like in the big city while attending college in Honolulu. Patrick and Erin both agree that while cycling in our community is good, there's room for improvement. And they both hope COG can work towards this improvement.



Many Tri-City cyclists only know the Benton Franklin Council of Governments through the well distributed 2015 'Cycling Tri-Cities' map (<http://bfcog.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Cycling-Tri-Cities-11x17-2.pdf>). Less well known is that much of the transportation planning in our community is done through BFCOG, and that this organization serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Tri-Cities area in southeastern Washington State. BFCOG also serve as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for jurisdictions within Benton and Franklin counties. Their planning activities are described in 'The Unified Planning Work Program' (UPWP), including funding recommendations by the ongoing Tri-Cities Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (Tri-MATS).



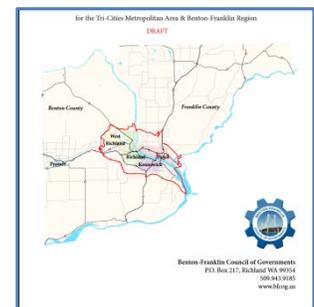
**Upcoming Bike/Ped Related COG Activities**

Patrick anticipates preparation of a revised Active Transportation Plan (ATP) will begin within the next 12 months. The last plan was approved in May of 2016 (<http://bfcog.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Draft-2016-Regional-Active-Transportation-Plan.pdf>), with extensive input from the cycling community. The ATP is a separate document from the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, although consistency and integration is necessary. This plan works to assure that regions within our area are following state guidelines in their regional transportation plans, and encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems with consideration of bicycle and pedestrian access. Although driven

by state regulations, the final document is based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans. Since the 2016 ATP was completed our area has seen amazing growth which in turn has changed many of the funding opportunities (for the better!) compared to opportunities in the past.

This rapid growth in the Tri-Cities was a concern raised at our meeting, and specifically, how land use planning was accommodating the associated changes. New neighborhoods are popping up everywhere as the Tri-Cities continue to grow. And many of these new neighborhoods seem to give cyclists and pedestrians only limited access to local shopping, schools, post offices, etc. Patrick acknowledged that this can be a problem and is personally a firm believer in 'working where you live, and living where you work'. But this is an issue somewhat beyond the charge of COG, with local land use control determined by local governments.

Erin shared information on the role COG plays in developing our local Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). This is a document with current transportation projects anticipated in the upcoming four years in the Benton-Franklin region. One of Erin's assignments is to ensure consistency between projects in the TIP and the projects in our Metropolitan and Regional Transportation Improvement Program (M/RTP). Again, funding opportunities are often built around this report.



One issue looming in the future for all Tri-City residents is air quality. Recent articles in the Tri-City Herald have noted we may be developing an ozone exceedance problem. The Environmental Protection Agency sets National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) that must be met in order for a jurisdiction to qualify for federal assistance in their transportation activities, including new streets. As a regional transportation planning organization, COG may be playing a central role in coordinating efforts by our local jurisdictions to reduce emissions from mobile sources that contribute to the production of (ground-level) ozone. As part of that effort, COG could be working further with local agencies to encourage carpooling, more use of public transportation and more walking and biking.

### **Can citizens have input for COG activities? YES!**

It's COG's official position that public participation process is a key to the success of any jurisdictional plan related to the development and implementation of transportation plans and programs. Input or questions about any of the COG programs can be directed to Patrick or Erin at [ppittenger@bfcog.us](mailto:ppittenger@bfcog.us) and [ebraich@bfcog.us](mailto:ebraich@bfcog.us). Their offices are located at 1622 Terminal Dr. in Richland, with a 'snail mail' address of Benton-Franklin Council of Governments, P.O. BOX 217, Richland, WA 99352

Many thanks to Patrick and Erin for taking time out of their busy schedules to meet with us!