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Squeaky Wheels' position on road shoulders and Council Candidates' responses to questions

Introduction

Squeaky Wheels asked the candidates in this fall's election to the Bainbridge City Council about their positions on road shoulder improvements. We shared our position with them. Seven candidates replied. Our position statement and the candidates' replies are below.

Squeaky Wheels' position on paved road shoulders

Squeaky Wheels is a nonprofit on Bainbridge Island that supports bicycling. We believe paved shoulders are a practical way to make the main roads safer for cyclists, pedestrians and motorists. We believe they should be a top priority for the City along with every other safety feature of roads.

Many roads lacking paved shoulders have become less safe due to increasing traffic. We want changes that will make the roads safer for everybody travelling on their feet or cycling – whether biking or walking to work or school or local stores, or getting to the bus, or enjoying time with kids or dogs – and for people in cars who want to pass them with ease.

This is not new to the City government. According to our Comprehensive Plan, the lack of shoulders puts cyclists and pedestrians at risk, many people do not feel safe walking or cycling outside Winslow, and safety for cyclists and pedestrians is increasingly important to many islanders. Shoulders appear directly in two major goals in the plan and indirectly in others. The City has made some good shoulder improvements, including the new ones on part of Miller Road. The best ones are six feet wide.

Unfortunately City action has slowed or stopped. The Council's newest plan is to talk for another ten years about "sustainable" transportation goals – which include making it easier and safer to walk and cycle - with no action.

We think this is a mistake. Shoulders are simple. No action means no safety improvement. For ten years it probably means a safety decline due to increasing traffic.

Questions for City Council candidates

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?
2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?
3. If not, why not?

Candidates' responses

Kevin Fetterly, Kirsten Hytopoulos, Kol Medina, Anthony Oddo, Michael Pollock, Leslie Schneider and Grayson Wildsmith responded to the questions. Sarah Blossom and Ashley Matthews did not respond. Matthews withdrew from the race.

Blossom

No response.

Fetterly

Your questions...

Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

Absolutely, we should implement the entire Core 40 plan, plus the cross island trails to make connections.

If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

The City spends \$4.2M on outside consultants and lawyers. It would be reasonable to cut that number in half, so that we could spend \$2.1M per year on road shoulders, trails and sidewalks. At that rate, the Core 40 could be implemented over 15 year timeframe. Grim forecast? no... we just need to start. Make progress every year. More "do", less "paper pushing".

Hytopoulos

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

We have two distinct populations to address: (1) current cyclists for whom better shoulders may suffice and (2) all those potential cyclists (including children) who won't bike unless we make real safety improvements. I favor waiting for the recommendations of the Sustainable Transportation Initiative to see where real bike lanes are feasible and practical, and where they aren't, I support paving shoulders.

2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

I'd love to answer that question but doing so outside the context of the STI findings, existing capital plan, budget limitations, and projected funding sources, wouldn't be credible.

I support doing what we must to make biking safer and more attractive to as many people as possible as soon as possible. Once the work of the STI is completed, however, I would give priority to addressing the needs of current cyclists who face real danger in their daily travels.

Creating the kind of non-motorized system we need in light of ever increasing emissions and car traffic will require substantial funds. Securing those funds will require an intensive, creative marketing campaign that clearly illustrates the benefits to current cyclists, potential cyclists as well as to those who will never use a bicycle for transportation or recreation. It will involve a change in all our thinking and a willingness to work together in a collaborative manner. The reality is we don't have a choice - our car dependence is endangering our health, our environment and our future and that's the message we must bring to the community in a unified voice.

Matthews

No response.

Medina

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

Yes. Paved road shoulders are an integral and important part of any transportation system. I'm happy that the City was finally able to build shoulders on a significant stretch of Miller Road. And I've been pleased to support the City's capital improvement plan (CIP), which includes money for road shoulders on Bucklin Hill in 2021 and Eagle Harbor road shoulders in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

I, like Squeaky Wheels, am not satisfied with the speed at which these road shoulders are getting built. The Core 40 Plan is a good plan and will be helpful to our Island. It needs to get done.

2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

The short answer is this: as many miles as our City can afford within the constraints of its limited budget and competing priorities. Realistically that will be only a handful of miles in the next few years unless a new revenue source is found, such as funding provided by a successful ballot measure.

The long answer, or the explanation for my statement in the prior paragraph, is much more complicated than can be explained within a couple hundred words. I've provided that longer answer to Squeaky Wheels' leadership and encourage them to share it freely with anyone who would like to see it. [Note: Medina's long answer is available. Make requests to president@squeakywheels.org.]

Oddo

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

Absolutely. I am a strong supporter of the Core 40. As the husband of a bike commuter, I have a personal interest in making sure we have infrastructure that is safe for all ages and abilities of bicycle riders. However, best practices for traffic safety have improved rapidly since Bainbridge developed the Core 40 vision. We need to set our sights higher than simply paved shoulders, including buffered and protected bike lanes for appropriate areas around the Island.

2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

From my perspective, the question is not how many miles of safe infrastructure we should build, but how fast we can build it. The City needs to make a significant increase in funding for nonmotorized transportation if we are ever going to complete a network that is safe and welcoming for all ages and abilities. I support a dedicated revenue stream to complete a bicycle-friendly network around the Island, including a spectrum of paved shoulders (as on Miller Road), climbing lanes (such as NE Wing Pt Way), buffered and protected bike lanes (at this point, only in Seattle), bike boxes (as in the Olympic Drive Project), and dedicated paths, depending on the context for each site.

3. If not, why not?

I think it is important to flip this question around. Why not do what it takes to keep our families safe?

Pollock

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

Yes. It is hard to understand why more shoulders haven't been paved over the years since the 2003 Non-Motorized Transportation Plan came out. Safe shoulders for walking and biking is a basic community need and very consistent with the goals and aspirations of our Comprehensive Plan. If we had paved a few miles each year for the past 15 years, we would have our primary safe transportation routes finished by now. I also would support some sort of divider between shoulders and the road, at a minimum, rumble strips. I would prioritize the recommendations of the Safe Road Initiative. Nine out of ten Bainbridge Islanders rate shoulder improvements as important. The City Council should act accordingly.

2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

I support a five-year plan for finishing the safe shoulder network along the major routes between downtown and our schools, between the neighborhood service centers and downtown, and along major arterials (about 40 miles). Very few of those miles have paved shoulders.

As we move toward a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions community, it is important that we have safe routes for non-polluting vehicles, such as bicycles, e-bicycles, scooters, e-tricycles, etc. There are a lot of emerging forms of transportation that are climate-friendly and we need to be planning our transportation network for such transportation modes, and deemphasizing planning for internal combustion engines. Let's plan for the transportation needs of 2040, not 1940.

Schneider

Improved safety for bicyclers and walkers (and e-scooter riders, since these are coming too!) is quite possibly my top priority on council. Getting as many people as possible out of their cars—to reduce greenhouse gases and traffic and to increase health and livability—is very near and dear to my heart. I have been an avid cyclist in the past. I commuted by bike to work for a few years while living in North Seattle. And I completed three Seattle-to-Portland rides in the late 1990's. Two of those STPs were with my mother, who started cycling after she turned 60 years old.

Paved shoulders for cyclists is one solution among others for achieving our safety goals. The Sustainable Transportation project—which is happening due to funding I fought for in our recent budget cycle—is going to gather data, get public engagement, and plan a network of safe connections that will guide our priorities for future projects. I understand the biking community's frustration with the time and money spent on planning. But the failure of the levy showed that there was insufficient specificity to win trust with voters, and the leadup to the decision to put a levy on the ballot showed that a majority of council was not ready to spend a majority of potential levy funds on road shoulders. I look forward to learning from world-class multi-modal planners on best practices that will 'move the needle,' both on solutions and on funding options so that we are not stuck with the slow pace of progress that we have known to date.

Wildsmith

1. Do you favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines?

- I do favor paved shoulders that will increase safety on main island roads, including those with double-yellow center lines. One of the main issues that I have built my platform for City Council around is the need for multi-modal transportation. Growing up on Bainbridge I rode my bike everywhere, I would bike to soccer practice, I would ride to school, and I even have been hit by cars while riding here on the island. The safety of pedestrians and bicyclists is a top concern of mine and one that I am very familiar with. I want to help improve our island so that people can ride or walk without having to worry for their safety.

2. If so, how many miles of paved shoulders should the City create in the next few years?

- As your City Councilman I would be in favor of legislation to improve the safety of our roads for those who prefer alternative methods of travel. Walking or riding should be available options to every islander. I believe that we can also build off of existing legislation to expand the scope of our road improvements like the Annual Roads Program.

Conclusion

Squeaky Wheels appreciates the opportunity to communicate with Council candidates on this topic and to share their views with the public.