



# City of Palm Desert Circulation Element Update

City Council Study Session  
FEBRUARY 13, 2025

FEHR & PEERS

# Agenda

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WE'RE HERE**

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# VISION ZERØ PALM DESERT



## STATE LAWS

- **SB 743 (2013):** Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) for CEQA analysis
- **SB 932 (2022):** "Vision Zero" goal and policies to improve traffic safety
- **AB 98 (2024):** Truck Routes
- **SB 330 (2019):** Objective Design Standards for Road Improvements (Housing)

2/13/2025

## LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

- University Neighborhood Specific Plan
  - University Park
- Refuge Specific Plan
- DSRT Surf
- Millennium
- Affordable Housing

## TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS + POLICY

- San Pablo Corridor
- CV Link
- Walk and Roll PD
- Vision Zero Study
- Elimination of Portola Interchange



# What is the Circulation Element?

A city-wide vision and policy framework for the transportation system.

- Set of goals and policies to guide decision making
- Roadway classifications and map
- Special consideration for bikes, pedestrians, and transit users
- Goods movement and truck routes
- Priority areas for safety improvements



## Roadway Typologies

### Enhanced Arterials

Enhanced Arterials serve vehicular traffic but also have augmented bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Emphasis is placed on enhanced pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other similar amenities. Speeds are managed through mechanisms such as narrower lanes, shorter blocks, and enhanced landscaping.

The general cross-section consists of a six-lane divided roadway, including a wide median with trees and landscaping. This facility may provide dedicated left turn lanes as well as a right turn lane where warranted. An Enhanced Arterial is designed to accommodate approximately 45,000 vehicles at Level of Service (LOS) C. A typical cross-section is provided below.

Typical pedestrian facilities found on Enhanced Arterials are wide sidewalks with landscaping and tree shading. Additionally, typical bicycle facilities provided are buffered Bicycle Lanes.

Within Palm Desert, Highway 111, between Monterey Avenue and Deep Canyon Road, is a proposed Enhanced Arterial.



Example of a buffered bicycle lane

Example of a landscaped median

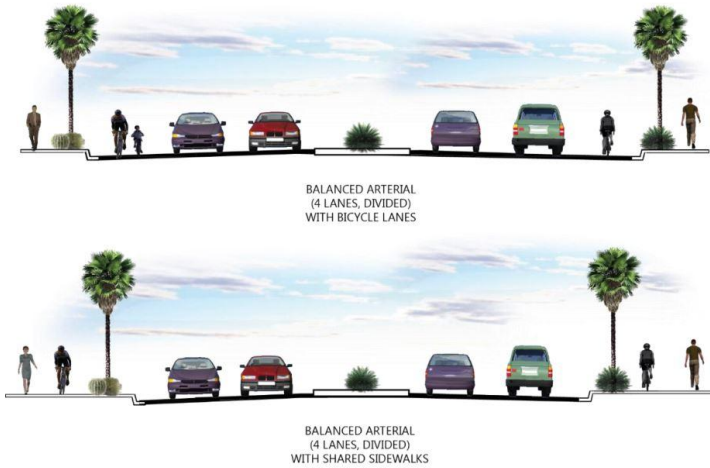


## Goals and Policies

### Goal 1. Livable Streets. A balanced transportation system that accommodates all modes of travel safely and efficiently.

#### Policies

- 1.1 **Complete Streets.** Consider all modes of travel in planning, design, and construction of all transportation projects to create safe, livable, and inviting environments for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and public transit users of all ages and capabilities.
- 1.2 **Transportation System Impacts.** Evaluate transportation and development projects in a manner that addresses the impacts of all travel modes on all other travel modes through the best available practices.
- 1.3 **Facility Service Levels.** Determine appropriate service levels for all modes of transportation and develop guidelines to evaluate impacts to these modes for all related public and private projects.
- 1.4 **Transportation Improvements.** Consider improvements that add roadway or intersection capacity for vehicles only after considering improvements



## ROADWAYS

- Layered roadway network that balances different modes of travel
- Opportunities to reclassify roads based on lower traffic volumes

## BIKES, PEDESTRIANS, & GOLF CARTS

- Robust network of on- and off-street bike/golf cart lanes
- Ongoing investments (CV Link, Walk and Roll PD)
- Safety improvements near schools and senior areas

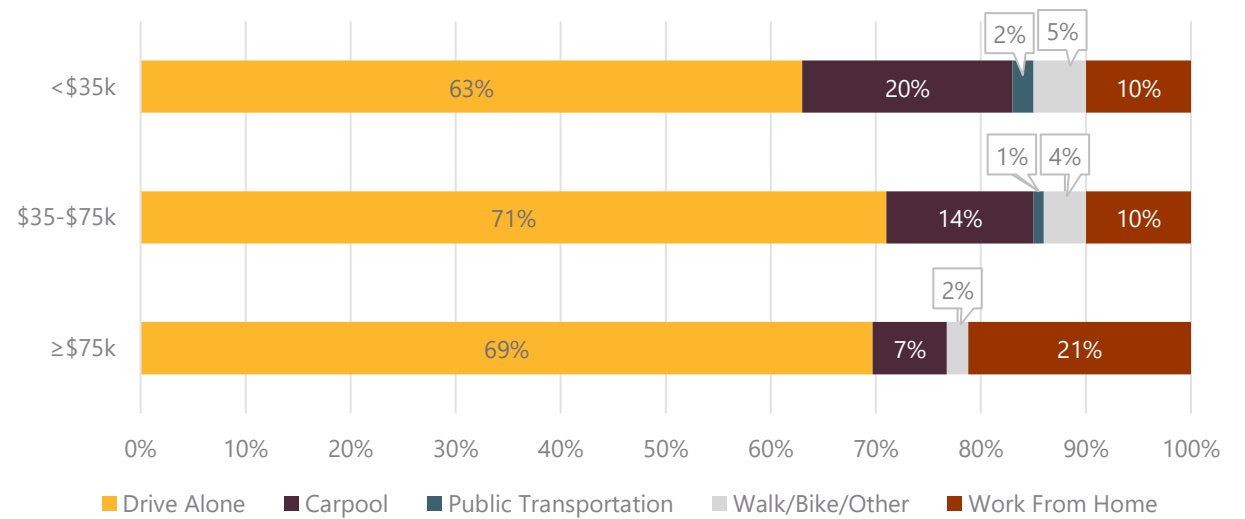
## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Operated by SunLine Transit Agency
- City plays a supportive role in transit
- Project team has met with SunLine to discuss long-term transit vision

# Transportation in Palm Desert Today

- Driving alone is the predominant mode choice for commuters across all income levels
- Traffic volumes have grown ~7% city-wide since 2016
  - *Housing Unit Growth: 6%*
  - *Employment Growth: 8%*
  - *Population Growth: 6%*

Commuter Mode Choice by Income (2022)

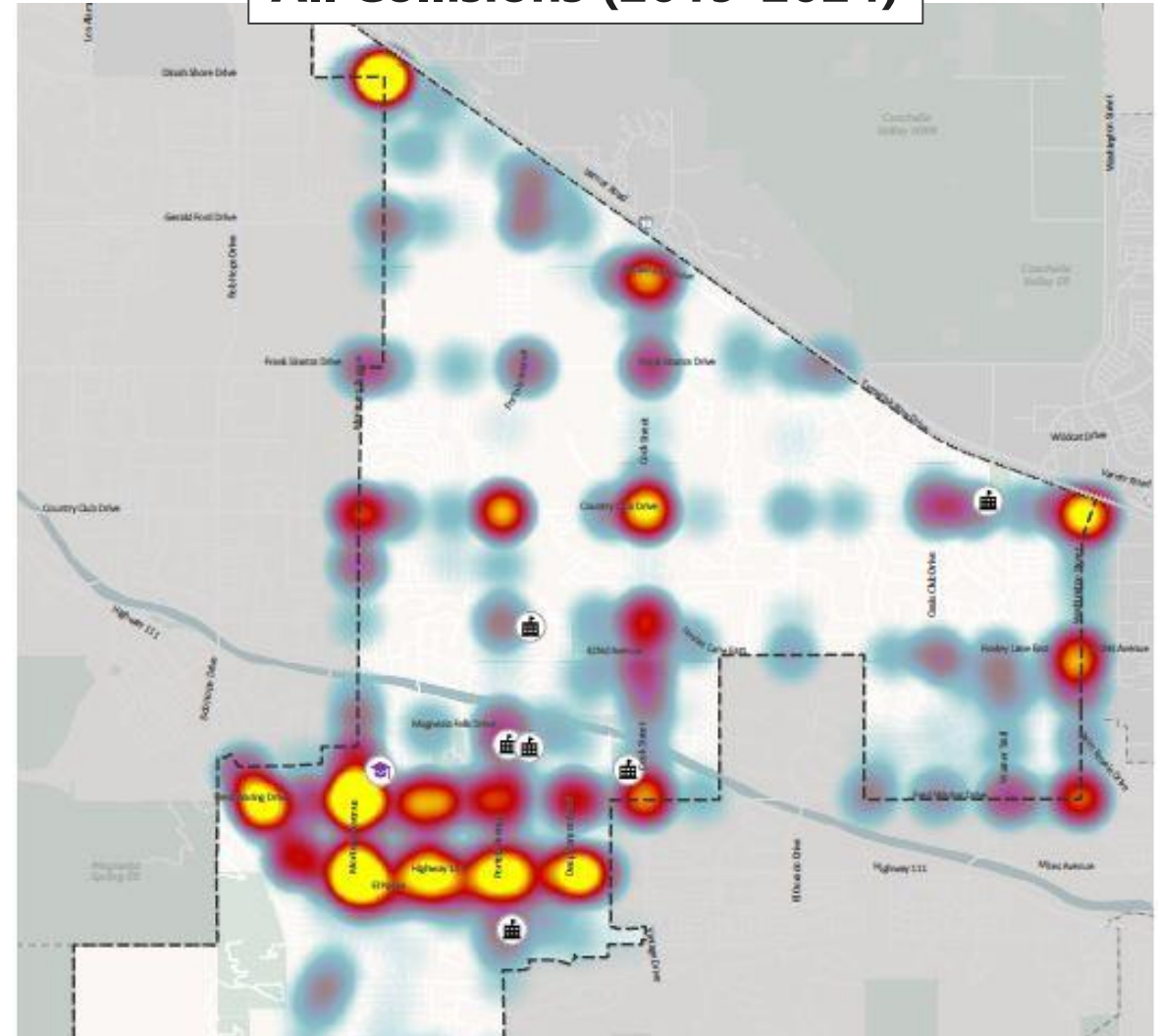




# Transportation in Palm Desert Today

- 2,984 recorded collisions from 2019-2023
  - 18 fatalities
  - 49 serious injuries
- Collisions in Downtown:
  - *Causes:* Speed (19%), Improper Turns (18%), Unsafe Start/Stop (12%)
  - *Types:* Rear End (31%), T-Bone (26%), Sideswipe (21%)
- Collisions outside of Downtown
  - *Causes:* Speed (28%), Improper Turns (17%), Unsafe Lane Change (10%)
  - *Types:* Rear End (25%), T-Bone (23%), Hit Object (17%)

All Collisions (2019-2024)



# Changes Since the Previous Circulation Element

2/13/2025





# What to Consider When Developing a Circulation Element?

- Policies MUST be Horizontally Consistent (consistent within the element)
  - *Example: "Maintain free flow vehicle travel within the City."*
  - *Example: "Become the most transit-supportive City in the State."*
- Policies MUST be Vertically Consistent (consistent between the elements)
  - *Example: "Promote mixed-use and higher-density development in Downtown."*
  - *Example: "Maintain free flow vehicle travel within the City."*
- Plan should align with funding, environmental, and political constraints
- All policies should reflect the goals and values of the City

# Considerations for Palm Desert

## CONSISTENCY & SPECIFICITY

- Update policies to align with other plans
- Clarify ultimate configuration of roadway types
- Simplify policy language and ensure all goals reflect City values

## NEW OBJECTIVES

- Minimize vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita – *reduce distance and time spent traveling*
- Increase travel choices
- Improve resiliency and safety
- Optimize existing network

## TOURISM & SEASONALITY

- Manage traffic congestion during peak season
- Determine appropriate size of roadways
- Travel options for tourists

# Topic #1: Active Transportation

## Current General Plan:

- Provide a city-wide network of bike and pedestrian facilities
- Prioritize improvements near community facilities, schools, and transit stops
- Education and awareness programs

## Considerations:

- Regional investments (CV Link)
- Local investments (Walk and Roll PD, Haystack Traffic Calming)

## Recommendations:

- Update Circulation Element to align with current projects/plans
  - E.g. Corridors with Class II buffered and Class IV separated bikeways
- Policy to evaluate bike/ped access when reviewing new developments
- Design standards for golf cart facilities (minimum width)
- Opportunities for rail connections

- AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- AB 932 (Safe Systems)
- SB 330 (Road Design Standards)



# Topic #2: Safety

## Current General Plan:

- Safe Pedestrian Routes to School and Transit
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Campaigns
- Monitor safety conditions including locations with higher collision rates

## Considerations:

- Vision Zero Plan
  - Safe Routes to Schools recommendations
  - Safe Routes for Seniors recommendations
- How to implement “regular monitoring” of safety conditions
- Safe movement of heavy vehicles

- AB 98 (Truck Routes)
- AB 932 (Safe Systems)

# Topic #2: Safety

## Recommendations:

- Incorporate goal on safety that addresses Vision Zero and Safe Systems Approach
- Safety Corridor Prioritization
  - Coordinate based on info from Vision Zero Study
- Potential Safety Countermeasures
  - Raised medians
  - Turn radius reduction
  - Pedestrian crossing improvements
  - Traffic signal retiming and visibility improvements
- Identify corridors for truck routes that avoid sensitive receptors such as residential uses and steep grades



- AB 98 (Truck Routes)
- AB 932 (Safe Systems)

# Topic #3: Roadway Design Standards

## Current General Plan:

- Conceptual roadway cross sections (do not include measurements)
- Broad policies on roadway design for non-auto users
- Consider operations and maintenance costs when planning improvements

## Considerations:

- SB 330 has prompted the City to develop specific measurements for cross section features
- Consistency with other plan elements (e.g. City Center Area Plan)

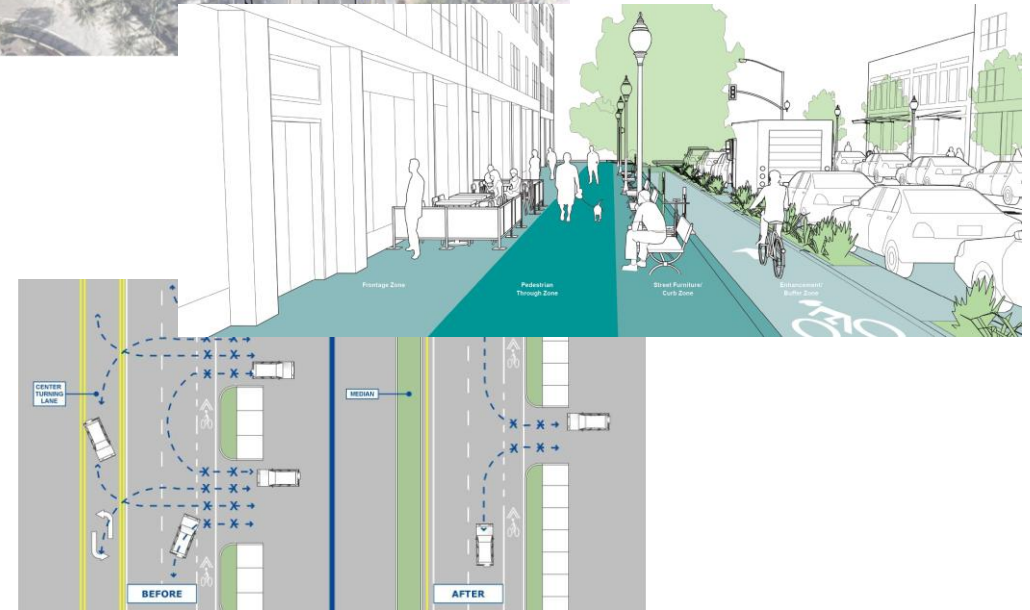
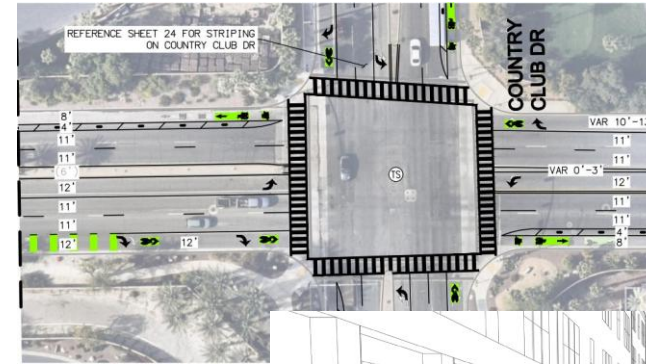
- AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- SB 330 (Road Design Standards)



# Topic #3: Roadway Design Standards

## Best Practices:

- Narrower travel lanes (11')
- Separated bike facilities when possible
- Sidewalk activation (outdoor dining, landscaping, shade facilities)
- Driveway access management

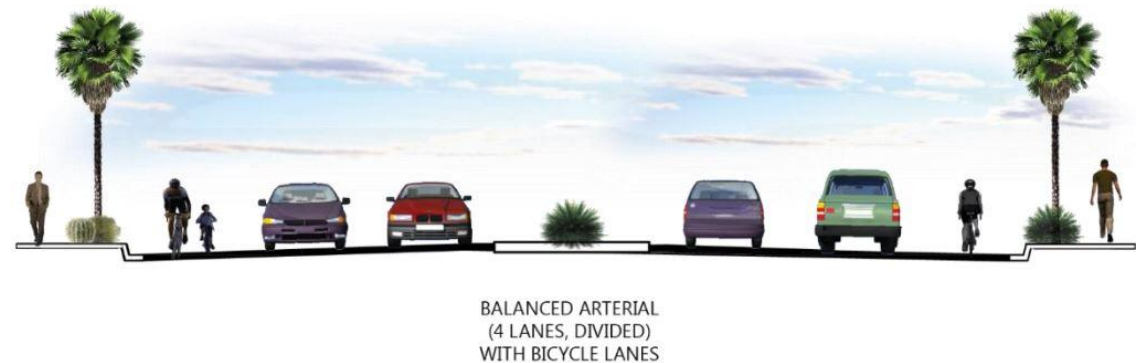
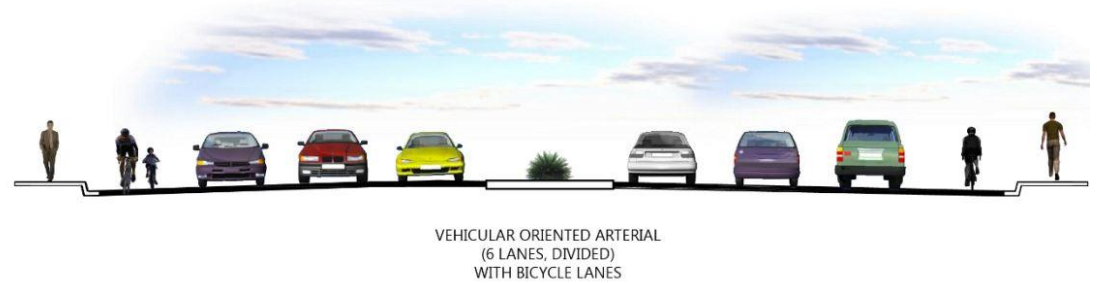


- ✓ AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- ✓ SB 330 (Road Design Standards)

# Topic #3: Roadway Design Standards

## Recommendations:

- Update cross sections with maximum desired cross section widths
- Reclassify streets based on traffic volumes and surrounding land use
  - Example: County Club Drive (Vehicle Arterial to Balanced Arterial)



- AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- SB 330 (Road Design Standards)

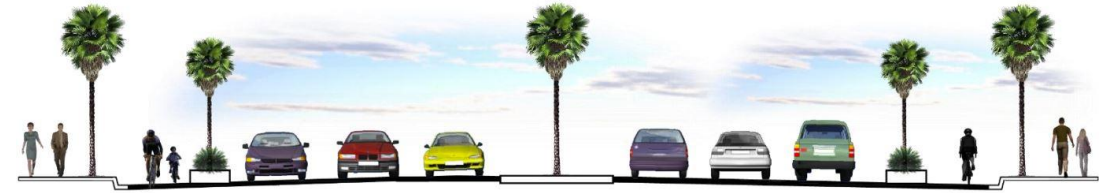
# Highway 111 Cross Sections

Circulation Element Update will provide detail and consistency.

## Opportunities:

- Frontage road activation
- Enhanced bike facilities
  - Class II bike lanes
  - Class IV separated bike facility
  - Parallel bike facility on El Paseo
- Transit-supportive infrastructure

## Circulation Element (Chapter 4)



## City Center Area Plan (Chapter 10)



- AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- SB 330 (Road Design Standards)



# Topic #4: Traffic Congestion

## Current General Plan:

- Determine “appropriate” service levels for all modes of transportation
- Consider roadway capacity improvements only after considering improvements to other modes
- Prioritize improvements to existing infrastructure (signal coordination)

## Considerations:

- Balance other priorities (walkability, compact downtown, fiscal responsibility)
- Prioritize transportation improvements on key vehicle corridors
- Accommodate growth (focusing on the northern portion of the City)

- AB 1602 (Complete Streets)
- SB 330 (Road Design Standards)

# Topic #4: Traffic Congestion

## Recommendations:

The City is proposing to update their level of service (LOS) policy which can include one or more of the following:

Policy	Description	Considerations
Peak Season LOS Policy	Policy to clarify that traffic from projects should be evaluated when traffic is highest (Jan-Mar)	-Manages traffic during the peak season -Potential to over-build roadways
Downtown Area LOS Policy	Establish a lower threshold in Downtown, recognizing widening is not feasible or desired	-Promotes Downtown walkability -Potential increased traffic in Downtown
Bike/Ped/Transit LOS	Evaluate how non-auto modes experience the transportation system (e.g. pedestrian comfort, transit speed, etc.)	-Supports other travel modes -Difficult to require projects to finance improvements

# Topic #5: CEQA and VMT

## Current General Plan:

- Leverage State Cap-and-Trade funds for transportation improvements
- Alternative Fuels for City Vehicles
- Encourage electric vehicles and neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs)

## Considerations:

- State law requires establishing a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) threshold for evaluating projects in CEQA
- Summer heat events and storm events (e.g. Hurricane Hillary)

## Recommendations:

- Establish VMT policy consistent with state law and to support environmental review
- Expand policy to support installation of EV charging infrastructure
- Adding resiliency and redundancy to the transportation system

- SB 743(VMT)
- AB 747/SB 99 (Evacuation Planning)



# Topic #5: CEQA and VMT

## VMT Policy:

The City will need to adopt a VMT threshold for CEQA. Potential threshold options include:

Threshold	Description	Considerations
Better than Existing	Requires new developments to be more efficient than current conditions	-Appropriate for areas with growth and fewer mitigation options -Less aggressive in achieving GHG reduction goals
15% Better than Existing	Requires new developments to be at least 15% more efficient than current conditions <i>(aligns with state guidance)</i>	-Appropriate for developed areas and more mitigation options -Additional projects may be considered "significant"

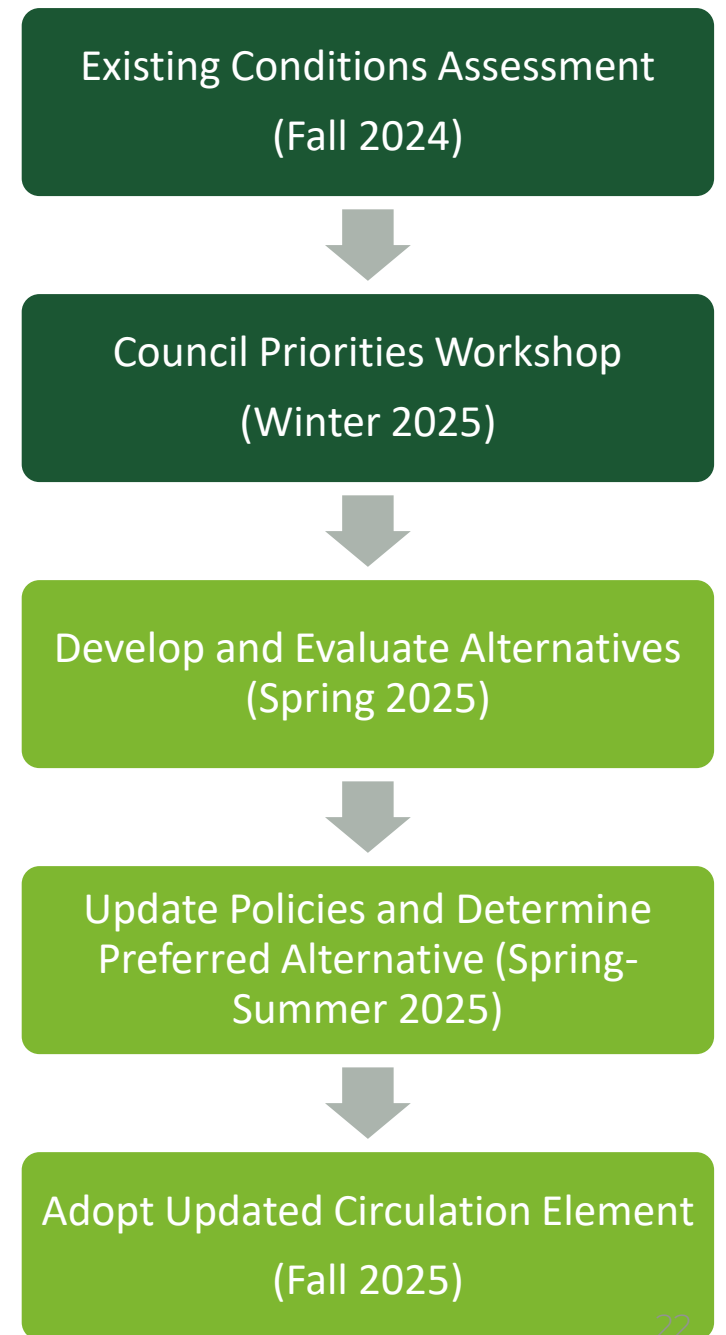
# Next Steps

City and Fehr & Peers will work to develop a set of alternatives for consideration:

- Updated priorities
- Roadway reclassifications
- Multi-modal transportation expansion

Staff will evaluate these alternatives and determine the best alternative that aligns with City goals.

Council will continue to be involved in the process.





# Questions and Discussion