

Date: December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016

TO: Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, Finance & Governance Committee, and other Councilmembers

FROM: Eric Rogers, Executive Director, BikeWalkKC

RE: General Obligation Bond

*Thank you for the opportunity to testify at the Joint Committee last week. As you saw, there is high community interest in using the G.O. Bond to build an infrastructure platform that supports strategic City goals around mobility, economic development, housing, health, workforce retention, social capital, and equity. I submit the following written testimony for your consideration, along with BikeWalkKC's recommendations for prioritizing the bond's eventual investments.*

Committee Chairs and Members,

I applaud City staff and Councilmembers for showing leadership in addressing not only our City's significant infrastructure backlog, but also for showing leadership and understanding that community needs and priorities are changing. There is a strong and growing demand for more accessible and more equitable forms of mobility that help improve the health, safety, sustainability, economy, and quality of life in our neighborhoods.

We all need streets and bridges to get to work, school, shopping, and other services. But our peer cities and competitors are now prioritizing Complete Streets that serve everyone from the eight-year-old to the eighty-year-old, not just those with the resources and ability to drive cars and trucks. Cities like Charlotte, Memphis, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Omaha, and even Wichita are quickly outpacing Kansas City in responding to a changing market that demands walkable and bikeable neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, Kansas City faces a Billion-dollar backlog in bringing sidewalks to a state of good repair and/or adding them in neighborhoods where they do not exist. So it's no surprise our pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure are consistently at or near the bottom of the city's citizen satisfaction scores.

The condition of our built environment has direct consequences on the health of our community. The kids in school today are the first generation in American history with a shorter life expectancy than their parents, in large part because they have little physical activity in their daily lives. For the first time in history, our kids could live shorter lives than the previous generation, and the lack of safe places to walk and bike are a big part of the reason why.

### **It makes economic sense**

Bicycle and Pedestrian projects have a higher return on investment than other road or highway projects. Bike/ped projects create up to 14 jobs for every \$1 million spent, compared with 7 jobs for every \$1 million spent on roads and highways. This is because bike/ped projects are more labor-intensive than materials-heavy. They are also smaller projects that are very well-suited to the city's small, minority, and women-owned businesses. These investments build social capital that continue generating returns long into the future.

This bond is an opportunity to change our inequitable sidewalk funding policy. Today someone on a fixed income could be hit with a \$5,000 or even \$10,000 assessment on a house that might only be worth \$40,000. The economics of that do not make any sense. Imagine if each of us had to maintain and

*Our mission is to redefine our streets as places for people to build a culture of active living.*

pay for the street in front our house, not the city. That would be terrible public policy and it would be terribly inequitable. Changing this policy not only addresses an economic disparity, it also frees up residents to invest their resources in other parts of the local economy.

### **It Makes Political Sense**

Kansas City is far from the first to be considering a comprehensive and inclusive infrastructure investment. Cities large and small have been doing this for years, or even decades. And the cumulative experience from our peers around the country shows that programs with large sidewalk and biking components do better at the ballot box. In a close election, it could make all the difference.

### **We need a policy and planning framework**

The cities that are doing this successfully are starting with good public policy. They have overarching infrastructure and transportation policies with a vision and strategy that guide planning and investment. We really don't have that yet in Kansas City. We need a clear vision of how infrastructure and transportation can be used to provide a platform for broader community priorities for public health, housing, mobility, economic development, innovation, stewardship of natural resources, and social equity.

I urge you to ensure this \$800 billion investment is an inclusive investment in the social and economic capital of our community and is used strategically to make Kansas City a thriving place to live, work, and play.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.