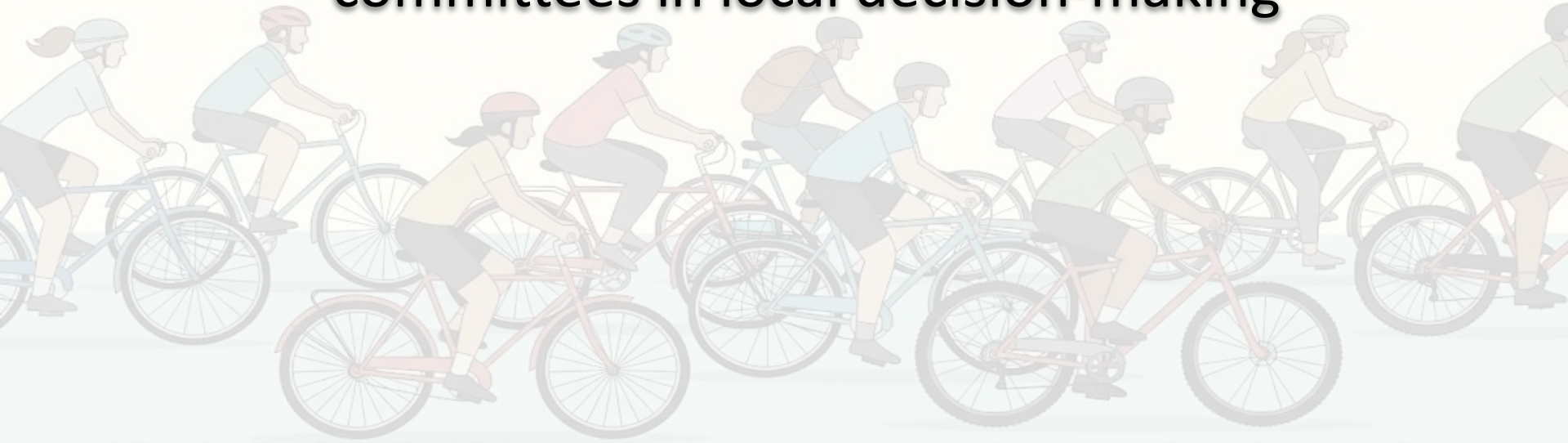
The Policy Peloton:

The role of bicycle & pedestrian advisory committees in local decision-making



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Overview

- What are Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Boards (BPACs)?
- Study context/design
- Key findings
- Interpretation
- Next steps



Local governments make decisions

Decision makers don't know everything

Get knowledgeable citizens involved in policy-making process

Citizen Advisory Boards

BPACs Specifically…

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Boards
  - Other names: Active Transportation, Bicycle, Pedestrian, Multimodal, Complete Streets,...
  - Defined by ordinance or resolution
    - An official part of the government process
    - Advisory board to municipal Councils but often also work with staff
    - Comprised of volunteers appointed by Council



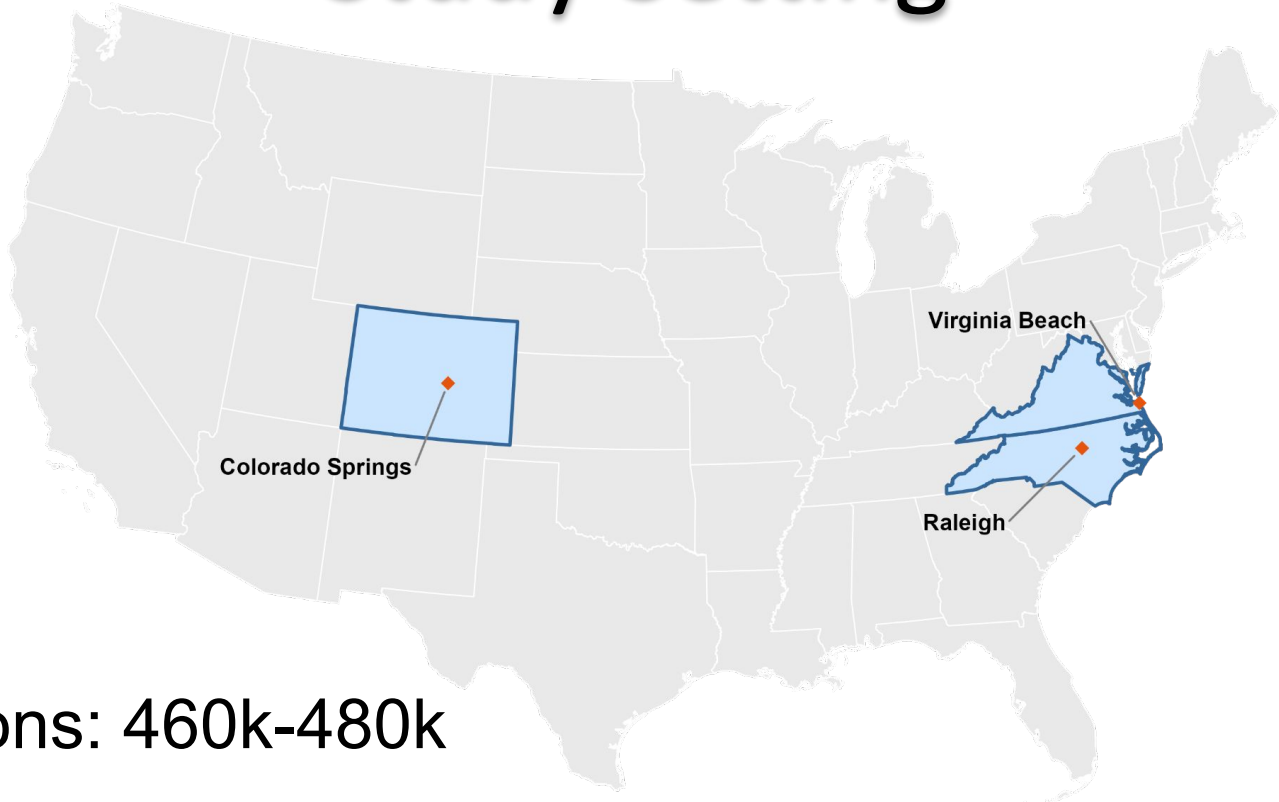
***Objective*: Learn how BPAC members perceive and navigate their role within local bicycle and pedestrian policy context.**

Research Question

How do BPAC members define their role in the context of civic engagement?

Individual vs. community interest?

Study Setting



Populations: 460k-480k

Methods

- 15 semi-structured interviews from March-June 2025 (in-person and Zoom)
- Thematic analysis
  - Interviews transcribed then coded in Atlas.ti
  - Iterative coding process with research question in mind
  - Reflexive memos to document my analysis thoughts
  - Peer debriefs with research team to discuss data and results

Participants

- Range of <6 months of service to ~6 years.
  - Most had served 2-3 years
- Non-voting members to leadership
- All have personal experience with active transportation infrastructure (preference and necessity)



Findings



Representation

"I've been asked to coffee with Council members to ask what I think about things or what people might be saying, or you know, I think they sort of will **see me as a representative of a group of people**." -P7

Spectrum of Representation

Category code	Sub-codes	Count
Individual Representation	—	3
Population-Based Representation	Age, gender, disability-status	5
	Active travel users	8
	Other groups (e.g., tourists, business owners)	2
Geographic Representation	Neighborhood, district	6
	City-wide	8
Information-based Representation	—	4
Council Representation	—	2

Individual Representation

"First I **think I'm representing myself kind of selfishly**, and I think that's when you bring on individuals, that's like the first thing there, is like you're bringing these people on because you're interviewing these people to be on these councils, **and you're wanting their perspective.**" -P13

Gender Representation

"Well, **I pride myself on bringing the voice of the female representation in our community**. And I identify the the needs of the woman is more comfortable in right? So if you meet those needs, then you're more likely to have females actively using active transportation." -P5

Active Traveler Representation

"But, I do think that our point, our, **my position on the board is to push for what is best for cyclists and pedestrians and scooter users**. And and be sort of the viewpoint that really pushes back on car dominated, car dominance 'slash' dominated, dominant thinking." - P4

City-wide Representation

"There's, you know, **over 80% of the people have said that they are, they strongly support multimodal transportation**, and sometimes I think certain people in charge think that they know what people want, and the numbers speak very loudly about what the people want. And so I feel like **it's an opportunity to lean in and reinforce, you know this document that our citizens have said, this is what we believe we want.**" -P7

"We're not parts of the city like a ward system. We are all at-large. So **we look at and speak for everyone and everywhere.**" -P8

Regional Representation

"So, coming from that area, which again, I think, has been underrepresented in a lot of ways, and **just speaking up for that part of town** and and kind of knowing the district [X] councilors over the years and and letting them know that, you know we need more representation on XYZ issues like pedestrian issues from this part of town." -P6

"So this the kind of **the southeastern part** of Virginia Beach, I guess, **would be what I try to speak to**." -P15

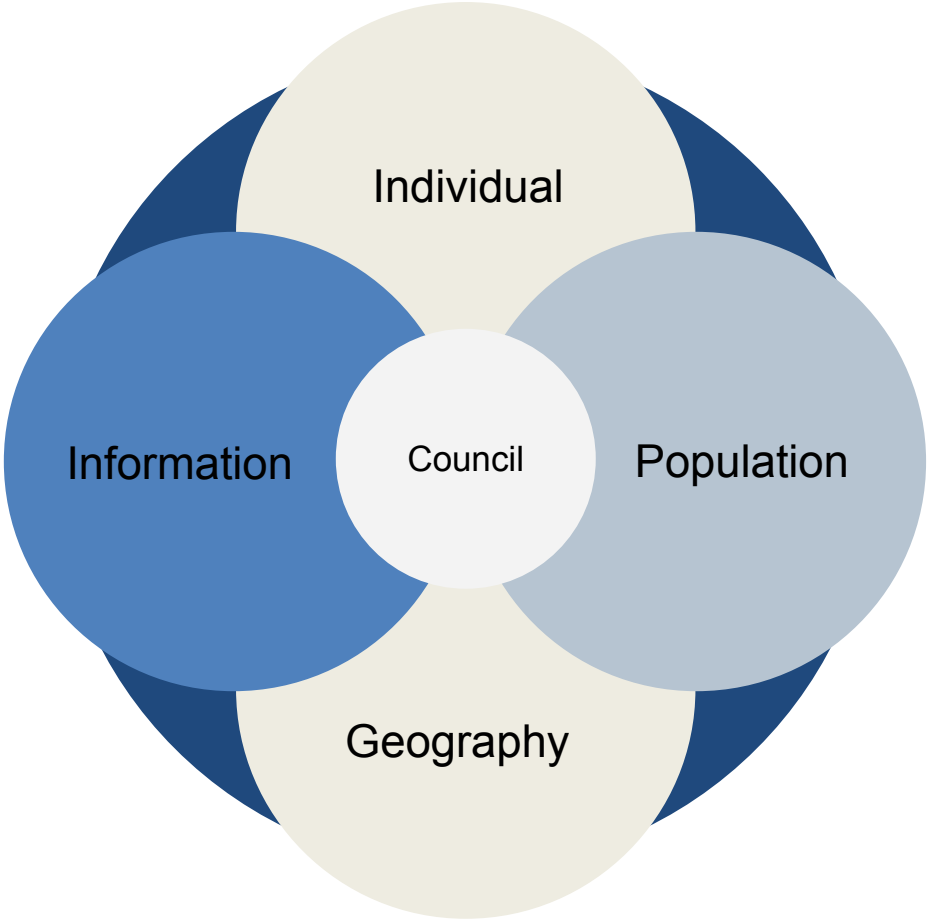
Information-based Representation

"I don't see us as vox populi. I see us as **a knowledgeable group of committed volunteers** *who are willing to put in time, effort, and use our professional expertise* **to provide City Council with information** about transportation issues that they might not have received from the staff." -P2

"I felt we needed good, rational, moderate people who could help inform our elected leaders to **make good decisions based on evidence, data, facts**. And based on values of our community." -P12

Council Representation

"And and it's an interesting dynamic because oftentimes, I mean, these are these are all public meetings, I mean, these are, you know, **we effectively operate as an extension of Council.**" -P7


Individual
Information
Council
Population
Geography

Summary & Interpretation

- Role definitions cover a range of representations
- Individual members can represent multiple groups
  - Some representation may conflict (e.g., Council and specific groups)
- Board members should be clear in communication about whom they are representing
- Policy makers should
  - Establish clarity in representation in charter documents
  - Take advantage of diverse representation to fully understand context and perspectives in their decision making.

Next steps

- Data are being analyzed to answer:
  - What are BPAC member perceptions of barriers and enablers in the policy process?
  - How does the BPAC members' knowledge and experience define their role?
  - How BPAC members perceive their influence on policy decisions

Thank You!

Questions?

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