

## The Oregonian

### With Google Fiber on the horizon, Portland weighs process for placement of utility cabinets

*By Mike Francis*

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the rollout of Google Fiber's high-speed internet service in Portland -- if it happens -- will be the placement of an estimated 200 utility cabinets across the city.

Siting of such cabinets has triggered controversy elsewhere, including Seattle, San Francisco and Greensboro, N.C., where residents protested the intrusion of the boxes in their yards and neighborhoods.

(The anticipated rollout of Google Fiber in Portland isn't a sure thing. The Portland City Council cleared the way with a vote this week, but Google has said it won't pick its next high-speed internet cities until around the end of the year.)

Alex Bejarano, a manager for the Development Services Division at the Portland Bureau of Transportation, said Thursday the city is still working through the process it hopes to adopt for siting the utility cabinets. He suggested it might be the way the city currently approves the placement of utility poles: The utility seeks permission, meets certain requirements set by the city, and the city issues a permit.

He said the city currently issues from 2,000 to 3,000 permits a year. When a company seeks a permit, the city passes the application to other bureaus that may be affected, then responds within five days.

Under such an arrangement, the public wouldn't necessarily be consulted about the placement of individual cabinets. But Bejarano said the company already requires applicants to show, at a minimum, good-faith efforts to create an easement when they seek to put a utility cabinet on private property. That means talking with landowners.

While individual boxes may be placed through an administrative process, the public will be consulted about the adoption of such a process. Stakeholders such as neighborhood groups will be invited to weigh in, he said. It's also possible that a new rule governing the placement of cabinets will reach the agenda of the City Council, where the public will be invited to comment.

Typical concerns about the utility cabinets focuses on their clunky appearance, the potential that they will create obstacles on public rights of way or that they will reduce property values. And sometimes, in rare cases, the boxes have been known to explode.

### Southeast Portland's Foster Road will lose auto lanes for bike, turn lanes as part of safety plan

*By Joseph Rose*

Hoping to make one of Portland's high-crash corridors safer, the City Council has unanimously approved a \$5.25 million plan to remove two of Southeast Foster Road's four automobile through lanes.

In what amounts to one of the city's most aggressive road diets to improve traffic safety and livability, the streetscape refurb will add two bicycle lanes and a middle turning lane on Foster from Powell Boulevard to 90th Avenue.

The Portland Bureau of Transportation said the changes will make the 40-block stretch of busy road, which connects Interstate 205 to inner Southeast Portland, more of a "Main Street destination" than a highway.

At the same time, PBOT engineers say the changes will slow traffic by only about three minutes at peak hours. The Oregonian has asked for an explanation of the methodology used by engineers to develop that prediction.

Some 24,000 automobiles a day use that stretch of Foster.

"Every stretch of a major street is a neighborhood street for some people and a commuting or freight route for others," said City Commissioner Steve Novick, who oversees PBOT. "The people for whom Foster is a neighborhood street between 50th and 90th are very supportive. Some people who live farther out and drive through are not."

However, Novick said he hopes critics of the plan will consider the students of Arleta School and other schools along Foster, where many kids now have to cross a four-lane street "one way or the other to get to school."

Indeed, a parade of Foster neighborhood residents showed up at Wednesday's hearing at City Hall to praise the the proposal.

Construction is scheduled for 2016.

Foster Road is one of the city's so-called "high crash corridors," meaning it is one of ten areas in Portland that has the highest need for safety improvements. In the past decade, the 40-block stretch of Foster, which is a major commuting connector between Interstate 205 and downtown Portland, has seen more than 1,200 crashes and eight fatalities in the past decade.

PBOT expects a 20 percent reduction in all crashes after the project is completed.

The streetscape plan also calls for wider sidewalks as well as more trees and lighting.

Funding for the project is coming from \$3 million in federal grants and \$2.25 million in urban renewal funds from the Portland Development Commission's Lents Urban Renewal Area.

## **Portland's minimum wage: \$15 per hour minimum wage proponents lobby City Council**

*By Andrew Theen*

Justin Norton-Kertson admits he was "kind of surprised" that members of the Portland City Council said anything Wednesday in response to his public testimony about a \$15 minimum wage for Portlanders.

But the co-founder of 15 Now PDX, the activist organization that's lobbying for Portland and the state to push for a dramatic increase to the minimum wage, did get an unexpected response.

Oregon state law preempts local municipalities in setting the minimum wage. Norton-Kertson said the city needs to push state lawmakers to remove the preemption and allow cities to set their own wages.

Norton-Kertson and 15 Now PDX presented a petition with 1,000 signatures to City Council, and said the city can and should enact a couple policy changes immediately that would help improve the cost of living for Portlanders: mainly, pay all city employees \$15 an hour, and require contractors that work with the city to pay their workers that wage, too.

The 15 Now campaign also calls for creating a living wage tax on local businesses that don't pay employees the \$15 wage. Nicholas Caleb, a Southeast Portland resident and Concordia University adjunct professor, ran for a City Council seat and advocated for many of these issues.

City Commissioners aren't always inclined to respond to public comments before their regular council session begins, but both

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz weighed in.

Hales' spokesman Dana Haynes said "we're not fans of preemption in general," and said while the mayor didn't guarantee the city would push Salem lawmakers to remove the preemption, the issue will be pretty high on the priority list. Haynes said the City Council will likely start formulating its lobbying priorities for the 2015 Legislative session in the next two months.

Fritz told Norton-Kertson she'd asked for an accounting of Bureau of Parks & Recreation workers that make less than \$15 per hour and what it would cost the city to raise their wages to meet that threshold. It would cost the bureau \$2.7 million to raise the wages of the more than 2,000 seasonal workers who earn less than \$15 per hour, according to Fritz staffers.

The 2,000 seasonal positions aren't include in the 5,522 total positions included in the current 2013-14 budget year, according to city budget officials.

Norton-Kertson said he hopes the City Council sees the rising cost of inflation in Portland, the costs of goods, food, daily life are increasingly for everyone. "It's increasingly expensive to live here," he said, "and the minimum wage needs to be raised."

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report released in February, the Portland metro area saw the price of goods and services rise 2.8 percent in a 12 month period.

Norton-Kertson said he was "pleasantly surprised" Fritz took the time to research the issue, but added that she seemed skeptical the idea is financially possible.

Portland's neighbor to the north already made national headlines earlier this year by passing a phased-in \$15 wage. Norton-Kertson said Seattle's decision to bump the minimum wage created a sense of momentum in Portland, too.

"Only a year ago, the whole thing didn't seem political viable," he said. Now, Norton-Kertson said, there's a sense a \$15 living wage is inevitable in Portland.

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Foster Road to go on a road diet, losing travel lanes**

*By Steve Law*

Foster Road in Southeast Portland is going to be safer and slower, though it'll take a couple of years.

Portland City Council voted 5-0 Wednesday to approve a new "road diet" for Foster, which will shrink the number of vehicle lanes to one in each direction, from Foster's juncture with Powell Boulevard east to 89th Avenue. The \$5.3 million project is aimed at reducing accidents on Foster and making it more of an inviting place to walk, bicycle and shop.

Two of the four vehicle lanes on Foster will be eliminated, replaced by a middle refuge and left-turning lane and bike lanes. Sidewalks will be widened in some places and lights and street trees will be added.

Neighborhoods on the western part of Foster lobbied for the project, hoping the gritty thoroughfare can become an inviting "Main Street." Residents living in East Portland weren't so keen on the idea, because it will slow their commutes to and from downtown.

Right now, Foster "feels like a highway, so people go faster," said Matt Froman, who works at Buck's Stove Palace on Foster.

"We want people to slow down, get out of their car and notice," and stop to eat or shop, said Mayor Charlie Hales. "You don't have to speed off to some distant chain store," he said.

Eastside resident Jeff Manley opposed the idea, saying it will make traffic worse and still won't make Foster safe for bicycling.

"Cutting it down to one lane, you're going to paralyze Foster completely," he testified.

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman praised the project, saying the city has been trying to "conquer Foster" for years. However, he added, "I do have some worries about going from four lanes to two lanes." Motorists might be tempted to pass in the middle lane when Trimet buses cause traffic to back up as buses stop for passengers, Saltzman said.

In the past decade, there've been eight fatalities along this stretch of Foster, and more than 1,200 crashes, according to the Portland Bureau of Transportation. PBOT predicts the project will lead to at least a 20 percent reduction in accidents.

That's been the experience at Southeast Tacoma Street near the Sellwood Bridge since the number of lanes was reduced there more than a decade ago, said Diane Dulken, PBOT spokeswoman.

Lately, the city has been adding more road diets, though PBOT prefers to call them "road reconfigurations."

In 2012, the city reduced the number of lanes on Northeast Multnomah Street in the Lloyd District. Last year, the city completed road diets on Southeast Division Street between 60th and 80th avenues, and on Glisan Street at roughly the same cross streets. Now those streets offer traffic for one lane in each direction instead of two lanes.

Another road diet recently was approved for Northwest Everett Street between 19th and 23rd avenues. Road restriping will occur later this month or in early July, Dulken said.

The Burnside East Business Association and the Kerns and Buckman neighborhood associations are asking the city to put East Burnside from 14th to 32nd on a road diet, reducing the number of vehicle lanes to one in each direction. That's still in the discussion stage, Dulken said.

PBOT calculates the Foster road diet will tack on three minutes to the rush-hour drive through the more than two-mile stretch between Powell and 89th. Some say that's a good price to pay for reducing auto, pedestrian and bicycle accidents, and encouraging a more lively commercial strip. Skeptics note that three extra minutes each way, five days a week, add up to 25 hours a year stuck in traffic — the equivalent of three work days.

City Commissioner Steve Novick said he recognizes that being stuck in traffic an extra three minutes each time isn't a trivial matter. Novick, who oversees PBOT, said he was particularly concerned about improving safety for students at Arleta School south of Foster. Many of those students must cross the busy street to get to and from school.

The Lents neighborhood, which straddles Foster from 82nd to 89th avenues, and includes areas to the east, is split on the Foster road diet, said Jesse Cornett, chairman of the Lents Neighborhood Association. Cornett, a bicycle commuter who lives near 84th and Foster, likes the project, which will add a crosswalk near his house. "Something like this is long overdue to make sure Foster is a safer street," he said. "It slows things down; it makes things safer."

In contrast, Cornett said, "The travel times are a hard sell for, like, the janitor and the painter that live next door to me that work long hours."

Residents in East Portland, who already face longer drives to work or school, wonder why city leaders want to make it harder for them to drive downtown. Many say the city's goals of boosting bicycling and transit use don't work for them.

But a lot of folks in East Portland don't vote, Cornett said. And city councilors hear support for road diets from people who live near the vehicle lanes being eliminated.

"Every stretch of a major street is a neighborhood street for the people who live along that stretch," Novick said, "and it's a commuter or freight route for other people, and there are tradeoffs involved."

Novick suggested PBOT needs to devise a list of streets that are appropriate, or not, for road diets. "We can't assume that we're going to slow down traffic on all of them," he said.

Hales said the city isn't going to forget the motorists, but merely wants to have more of a balance with pedestrians, bicyclists and others.

Some plans like the one approved Wednesday tend to gather dust on the shelf, but money is available to pay for the Foster improvements. The city scored \$3 million in federal transportation funds, and the Portland Development Commission agreed to put in \$2.3 million in urban renewal funds from the Lents Urban Renewal Area.

Design work can now begin for the approved project improvements, Dulken says. Then the city would put projects out to bid. Construction is expected in 2016.

## **Willamette Week**

### **MAP: Where Would the New, Billion-Dollar Light-Rail Tunnels Go?**

*By Aaron Mesh*

Regional officials are starting to blanch at the potential costs of drilling a new light-rail tunnel into the West Hills.

As WW reported Tuesday, Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick and others have asked regional planning agency Metro to slow down on studying possible tunnels under Oregon Health and Sciences University, as part of a new transit line to Tualatin.

Novick warned local governments would foot half the bill on a tunnel—which could reach \$2 billion in costs, if it extends underneath the Hillsdale neighborhood.

But others are asking Metro to resurrect an even longer tunnel, which was briefly abandoned last summer as too expensive.

That long tunnel could run more than 4 miles, and have at least 3 underground stations, including beneath the Portland Community College Sylvania Campus, before emerging at the Barbur Transit Center.

"The estimated cost of the long tunnel, in 2014 US dollars, is \$1.86 billion," says Metro public affairs specialist Juan Carlos Ocaña-Chíu. "Keep in mind that the actual construction of the tunnels would start in 2022 at the earliest, so the cost is very likely to increase by the time it would be built."

WW has previously reported on how large capital projects have eaten into Portland's transportation funds—and how the tunnels of the SW Corridor project offer another test of priorities.

UPDATE, 4:10 pm:

Wondering exactly what distance each of these journeys to the center of the earth would run? Metro has also provided WW with the mileage of each tunnel option.

Short tunnel: .98 mile, 1 station

Medium tunnel: 2.77 miles, 2 stations

Long tunnel: 4.25 miles, 3 stations