

Portland Tribune

City explores Capitol Highway options

By Kelsey O'Halloran

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Over the past 20 years, the city of Portland has proposed three different improvement plans for a mile-long stretch of Southwest Capitol Highway. So far, no changes have come to pass.

But for Multnomah resident Chris Lyons and the other motorists, cyclists and pedestrians who experience the road's problems daily, the latest plan might just bring the solutions they've been waiting for.

The current improvement plan, estimated to cost \$10 million to \$12 million, would add bike lanes, sidewalks and storm water abatement along Southwest Capitol Highway between Taylors Ferry Road and Garden Home Road.

Construction is slated to begin in 2019, following a two-year design process.

"I have a couple of young kids. I'd love to be able to safely push their stroller into (Multnomah) Village or go on a bike ride in the Village," Lyons says. But to do so would require walking or biking along the hazardous stretch of highway, which currently has no sidewalks or bike lanes.

"It's just becoming incredibly dangerous for people who want to get out of their cars and use it," he says.

Lyons has advocated for Capitol Highway improvement efforts since he moved a block away from the road three years ago. He's now the Multnomah Neighborhood Association transportation chair and the leader of a neighborhood subcommittee dedicated to Capitol Highway.

Progress stalled

While Lyons didn't live in the area when the two previous plans were proposed, he's familiar with the road's history.

The 1996 Capitol Highway Plan focused on the entire stretch of Southwest Capitol Highway from Southwest Barbur Boulevard near Hillsdale to Portland Community College's Sylvania campus. The plan was broken into 21 distinct projects, which included adding bike lanes and sidewalks to the "Garden Home segment" between Southwest Taylors Ferry Road and Southwest Garden Home Road.

But Steve Szigethy, a Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) capital project manager, says the city ultimately prioritized other projects in the plan — such as the addition of sidewalks, bike lanes and intersection realignments in Multnomah Village and streetscape improvements in Hillsdale. The Garden Home segment was left unimproved.

In 2011, the city put together the SW Capitol Highway Plan Refinement Report, a federally funded planning effort to complete preliminary engineering plans for the Garden Home segment, with detailed design of sidewalks, bike lanes, intersection realignments, retaining walls and slopes, storm water facilities, tree preservation, tree planting and more. At the time, planners estimated that the resulting plan would cost \$17.1 million to carry out, Szigethy says.

Once again, the project didn't move forward, this time because PBOT didn't have adequate funds. He says a more recent calculation, updated with 2016 costs, estimates that the same project would cost \$23.9 million today.

The current plan, known as the Capitol Highway Corridor Stormwater Concept Design, is the largest improvement project funded by the city's "Fixing Our Streets" gas tax, which voters approved in May. PBOT and the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) partnered to develop lower-cost approaches and new storm water treatment options for the Garden Home segment.

Making tradeoffs

While the 1996 and 2011 improvement plans didn't pan out, Szigethy says the efforts weren't all for naught.

"The previous planning projects are still quite valuable," he said via email. "We are developing concepts based on that work, such as the priority for east-side sidewalks and the preference for a downhill bike lanes vs. uphill separated bike lane. We've been verifying and revisiting these design elements with the community over the past several months."

That said, Szigethy adds that the current plan will involve "tradeoffs," since the city doesn't have \$17 million to \$24 million available to build a standard roadway in that area, complete with sidewalks and bike lanes on both sides. Southwest Portland is a particularly challenging and expensive area for roadway improvements, he says, because of the need for storm water abatement to combat the area's tight clay soils.

Draft cross-section concept sketches of the roadway options, available on the city's Fixing Our Streets program website, show a separate sidewalk and bike lane along the entire east side of the road — from Southwest Garden Home Road to Taylors Ferry Road.

On the west side of the road, the sketches show a sidewalk that would run for about a quarter-mile from Southwest Alice Street to Southwest Taylors Ferry Road. The rest of the road's west side, from Southwest Garden Home Road to Southwest Alice Street, includes a delineated multi-use path to be shared between walkers and cyclists.

Szigethy planned to accept comments on the draft cross-section concepts by phone and email through the end of November.

The project is already partially funded, with about \$3.3 million dedicated to it from the Fixing Our Streets program and additional funding coming from the city's transportation and storm water system development charges.

Officials open new downtown homeless shelter

*By Nick Budnick
November 29, 2016*

Local officials on Friday celebrated the opening of a new homeless shelter downtown, the fifth since January— placing a new city-county venture well on its way to meeting a goal of 650 new beds before the year is out.

Before a backdrop of rows of 60 green mattresses Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury hailed the contributions of developer Tom Cody who offered six months of free space for the shelter. It's located right next to O'Bryant Square.

"I know it's easy to lose faith in the power of the individual," said Kafoury, while recognizing Cody and others. "Working together we can truly change lives."

The shelter was a project of the new city-county office A Home for Everyone, created when Kafoury took Mayor Charle Hales up on his pledge to beef up the city's housing efforts. It will be overseen by the nonprofit Transition Projects.

Hales, who also spoke, said the warmth of the partnerships behind the new project comes in stark contrast to the cold outside. But he said it isn't enough. "We need more of this."

The newest shelter will be slated for men 55 and older, or with disabilities. Kafoury said it reflects a major unmet need, noting that literally a block away a man slept on the ground under a concrete overhang covered by a blanket, a wheelchair parked next to him. "It's heartbreaking. I don't know how people can walk past that and not be moved to do something," she said.

Kafoury said the shelter effort coincided with efforts to help people avoid homelessness as well foster the building of permanent housing. She said the combined efforts and better coordination have assisted 9,000 people to tap assistance programs to keep from losing their homes and also helped 4,000 people get back into permanent housing.

Given the rapid pace of new shelters opening, a new one could be up very shortly, officials said.

"When we work together in common cause, we can do great things." Kafoury said. "I would encourage anyone in our community who wants to help to ... get involved."

Kafoury and Hales thanked numerous other businesses, nonprofits and local government leaders who came together in a few short weeks to make the shelter happen. Other partners included Kaiser Permanente, Providence Health, Portland Business Alliance, Chown Hardware and Atlas Electrical.

"We are much stronger together," said county Commissioner Loretta Smith. "We are doing the job."

Shelter success

The new partnership has accounted for four previous shelters so far:

- A 134-bed shelter for women and children in a former strip club on Southeast Stark Street in Portland.
- A 200-bed shelter for adults in the Hansen Building that once housed the Sheriff's Office headquarters at Northeast 122nd Avenue and Glisan Street
- The Gresham Women's Shelter, with 90 beds, opened in a remodeled building on East Burnside Street.
- Willamette Shelter, with 120 beds for women and couples, opened on Southeast Milwaukie Avenue in the Sellwood area.

Vision Zero plan goes to council

By Jim Redden

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Eliminating traffic fatalities is not easy. In the 17 months since the City Council adopted such a goal, 60 people have been killed in crashes on Portland streets.

In fact, fatalities increased slightly the year after the council adopted a Vision Zero goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries. As of Nov. 29, 37 people have been killed in crashes in Portland, two more than the same time last year.

But up until now, the council had only approved a goal and a few safety projects. This Thursday, after more than a year-and-a-half of work, it will finally consider a comprehensive plan for achieving it.

The Vision Zero Action Plan identifies 32 specific steps that public agencies and the community can take, intended to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries in Portland by 2025 — just about eight years from now. The council could adopt it at the end of the hearing.

The plan was drafted by the Portland Bureau of Transportation with the help of a 24-member task force. Based on research conducted over more than a year, it proposes that action be taken on four major factors that contribute to deadly crashes: street design, impairment, speed and dangerous behaviors. The three factors attributed to those involved in crashes — impairment, speed and dangerous behaviors — contributed to 91 percent of the fatalities in Portland between 2004 and 2013.

“The Vision Zero Action Plan is a data-driven, multi-agency, multi-year strategy for ending tragedies on our roadways,” says PBOT project manager Clay Veka.

Among other things, the research found that nearly 60 percent of deadly crashes in Portland occurred on just 8 percent of the city’s streets between 2004 and 2014. So the plan recommends increasing the targeted efforts beyond the current handful of high crash corridors to a newly designated High Crash Network that includes all of them. It proposes major safety projects on two streets and five intersections within the network every year.

But the proposed plan makes it clear that achieving the Vision Zero goal will not be easy. Among other things, it admits the information available on traffic crashes in Portland is incomplete and out of date. Although police investigate all deadly and serious injury crashes, their reports don’t always note street safety issues that may have contributed to them. And non-injury accidents are reported first to the Oregon Department of Transportation, which does not share the information with the city until months after the end of each year. The plan calls for PBOT to acquire comprehensive crash data in a more timely manner to make quicker decisions about safety investments.

And the plan does not include an estimated budget for completing it. That’s partly because it involves numerous agencies — including PBOT and the Portland Police Bureau— which must all get on board. And Portland must also get permission from the Oregon State Speed Board to reduce speed limits on city streets.

But the plan also says the city needs to secure a stable state-level transportation funding source dedicated to safety to make it work. Funding needs include adding traffic lights and marked

crossings to busy streets, adding more red light and speed safety cameras, and increasing the number of police officers trained to recognize impaired drivers.

The 2017 Oregon Legislature is expected to consider a new transportation funding plan. Although reducing congestion on Portland area freeways is considered a top priority, so is funding safety improvements in high crash corridors. But such a plan failed to be approved by the 2015 and 2016 sessions of the Legislature.

Traffic fatalities have both increased and decreased in Portland over the years. They totaled 59 in 1996 before falling to just 20 in 2008, then rising to 36 in 2011 and 2013 before hitting 37 last year. With a month to go this year, Veka worries the 2016 total will be even higher.

Portland is not the only city experiencing an increase in traffic deaths. In fact, the number of people who died on U.S. roads last year jumped 7.2 percent to 35,092 from 2014, the biggest increase in 50 years, according to data released in August by U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Experts blame the spike on multiple causes, including an increase in driving related to the improving economy and distractions caused by cell phones.

Vision Zero is not a new idea. It was first adopted by Sweden in 1997. Since then, 30 cities in the U.S. have also adopted the goal and plans to achieve it, including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. The Vision Zero Network collects and share information between the cities, and also helps organize such events as the World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims that was observed in Portland on Sunday, Nov. 20.

Even with adequate funding, Portland's Vision Zero goal will be hard to achieve, although progress is possible. Eight years after Sweden adopted the goal, fatalities had declined only 21 percent. By 2011, the most recent year for which figures are available, the reduction was still just 42 percent.

Vision Zero statement

Portland Bureau of Transportation Director Leah Treat's statement on Vision Zero Action Plan:

"Vision Zero is our goal because no one should be killed or injured on our streets. Our streets are not only critical for the movement of people and goods, but also for shaping our communities. They are used by people of all ages and abilities — they serve as safe crossings to the bus stop for the elderly and allow children to ride their bikes to school.

"Through education, engineering and enforcement, we can make our roads safer for everyone. Our Vision Zero Action Plan reflects Portland's intention to do just that. It is the result of a year of dedicated work by public health, public safety and community partners to identify 32 specific actions we will take to eliminate traffic fatalities in Portland. With City Council adoption and future funding, the actions in this plan will save lives."

To learn more, visit tinyurl.com/jls23x2.