

The Daily Journal of Commerce

Broadway Corridor work to be discussed at public hearing

*By Josh Kulla
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Prosper Portland will hold a public hearing to debate the possibility of exempting the upcoming demolition of the former U.S. Postal Service campus in the Pearl District from competitive bidding.

The agency intends to rely on a construction manager/general contractor to demolish multiple buildings on the 13.3-acre site at 715 N.W. Hoyt St.

The hearing will take place beginning at 1:30 p.m. on Nov. 13 at Prosper Portland's offices at 222 N.W. Fifth Ave. in Portland. Officials will receive public comments and discuss draft findings in support of such an exemption.

If the findings are approved by Prosper Portland's board of directors, the agency intends to proceed with two requests for proposals to abate hazardous building materials such as asbestos from the old facility and demolish multiple structures.

The primary subject buildings include the main processing and distribution center (the single largest structure on the property), the vehicle maintenance facility and the electrical transformer building.

The USPS property is the single largest one that is part of the 32-acre Broadway Corridor area that spans the Old Town Chinatown and Pearl District neighborhoods. Prosper Portland recently applied to present a master plan for the Broadway Corridor before the Portland Design Commission.

Demolition of the roughly 400,000-square-foot mail processing facility is expected to start in 2021. The entire permitting, abatement and demolition process is expected to require between three to four years to complete. Construction of the first phase of high- and medium-rise development in the Broadway Corridor is expected to begin in late 2022.

Interested parties can obtain a copy of the draft findings by emailing Prosper Portland Business Operations Manager Dan Spero at sperod@prosperportland.us. Written comments on the draft findings may be submitted to Spero, also via email, no later than 2:30 p.m. on Nov. 13.

OPB

The Present And Future Of Interstate 5

*By Julie Sabatier
October 16, 2019*

As Portland's population grows, bringing more cars, more traffic and more greenhouse gas emissions, what's the future of the biggest interstate that cuts through the heart of the city?

Nearly half a million people are expected to move to the Portland area by 2035, according to the Metro regional government.

Those people — in addition to the millions who already live here — will need to get to jobs and stores and homes and schools. Many of them will end up on Interstate 5, the most important interstate that spans the West Coast, and cuts through the heart of Portland.

But what will I-5 look like? And what should it look like?

Between new lanes, tolling and a renewed effort to replace the bridge over the Columbia, there are many ideas for how I-5 could change in the coming years.

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is the state agency responsible for those changes. Even as the agency is planning for the immediate future, making efforts to reduce traffic congestion and bottlenecks, there are some significant long-term considerations that have to be taken into account when deciding what to do with the freeway. Chief among them is climate change.

“The research does show we should not have single occupancy vehicles, but that is not reality for today,” Oregon Transportation Commission chair Tammy Baney told OPB’s “Think Out Loud” in July.

“We need to be making prudent and conservative improvements that meet today’s need, but be thinking about tomorrow and how we get people out of that vehicle.”

‘Congestion Pricing’ And ‘Auxiliary Lanes’

ODOT is planning to implement strategic tolling known as “congestion pricing” and spending roughly \$500 million to add what it calls “auxiliary lanes” to the bottleneck in Portland’s Rose Quarter area. (Oregon lawmakers approved funding for that move in 2017.) The agency is loathe to label the latter a freeway expansion, but it’s hard for some to see it as anything else.

Aaron Brown is a political organizer and leader of the No More Freeways PDX campaign. He is opposed to adding lanes to I-5.

“Every bit of research we have suggests that congestion pricing in and of itself would likely solve all of the congestion on that corridor without us having to spend half a billion dollars on that stretch of freeway,” Brown said.

Congestion is a concern to all drivers who travel the I-5 corridor. It’s particularly acute for people like Chris Outen, a city driver for FedEx Freight.

“Over the last 30 years, what used to take me 30 minutes to get to now takes me close to an hour to get to,” he said.

ODOT’s Tammy Baney is concerned about commercial drivers like Outen.

“We have to make sure that we still have a system that will be able to move freight. We are an export-driven economy in Oregon,” she explained.

While activist Aaron Brown said he would like to see ODOT try congestion pricing first before breaking ground on any new lanes, the agency is pursuing both options at the same time.

“I think we need to look at all of the options that might be available to us,” said Kris Strickler, who was recently nominated to be the next ODOT director. “Congestion pricing is certainly one of those and it has proven results, but it’s still several years off and it involves cooperation with other partners at the federal level, et cetera.”

Cultural And Environmental Concerns

In addition to climate change mitigation, a group known as the Albina Vision Trust wants ODOT to consider the cultural implications of the freeway through the Rose Quarter.

When the freeway was first built, it cut through the heart of the African American community that was based there, displacing residents and business owners. Now, some see an opportunity to right some of those wrongs by creating “caps” over the freeway in the Rose Quarter area, building neighborhoods over the freeway. It’s an idea that would create what the Albina Vision Trust calls “the city’s front porch.”

“Our hope is that we can create open spaces, we can create multi-use businesses and homes, and it’s a place where people can work, play and pray,” explained Albina Vision Trust board member Michael Alexander.

Baney said that while caps are not out of the question, and she recognizes the cultural significance of the project, the kind of infrastructure outlined in the Albina Vision is “outside the existing project costs.”

When it comes to adding lanes in the Rose Quarter, one of the biggest sticking points is the freeway’s proximity to Harriet Tubman Middle School. While a state-of-the-art air filtration system makes the air inside the school safe for students, despite the freeway abutting the school building, the air outside on the playground is a different story. Eighth-grader Malina Yuen said the roar of the freeway is audible whenever she’s outside and she can often smell emissions coming from I-5, especially during warmer weather.

“As a kid you’re supposed to be enjoying your time outside and playing and having fun, but that’s being taken away from us,” Yuen said.

The Portland Public Schools board is among those pushing for a complete environmental impact statement on the Rose Quarter project. That could significantly delay the project and even affect funding. But PPS board member Scott Bailey said it’s important to assess the full scope of the project, including the impacts construction would have on the middle school.

Asked what he sees as the best possible outcome, Bailey said, “If ODOT wants to go ahead and do this project, they need to build us a new school ... in the neighborhood, away from the freeway.”

Environmental Impact Statement

Architect and urban planner George Crandall knows how powerful an environmental impact statement (EIS) can be. He was on the team that created the EIS for the Mount Hood Freeway, which was planned but never built through Portland in the 1970s.

“The money was in the bank. ... It would have been built. They assumed it was going to be built. And so it was really the EIS that stopped it,” Crandall said.

Even those who are not opposed to the Rose Quarter project have concerns.

For example, the Portland Trail Blazers would like to see an EIS, according to Chris Oxley, senior vice president of external affairs and projects for the Blazers. But incoming ODOT director Kris Strickler was vague when asked about whether the agency will go through the process to do a full EIS on the Rose Quarter project.

“Time will tell,” Strickler said.

The Interstate Bridge

The Rose Quarter isn't the only place on I-5 in the Portland area where traffic is really terrible. A commute that involves crossing the bridge over the Columbia River that connects Vancouver and Portland can take 20 minutes or 2 hours, depending on the time of day.

Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle is hoping that the renewed effort to replace the Interstate Bridge will succeed where the last one failed. She said the need is even more urgent now than it was in 2013 when the Washington Legislature rejected the plan that Oregon lawmakers and federal officials had signed on to support.

"Now we have complete gridlock throughout our city where no one can move and everyone sits and tries to maneuver, cut through the neighborhoods," McEnerny-Ogle said. "Even though they weren't headed to Jantzen Beach or headed to downtown Portland, they can't get to Safeway. They can't get to City Hall. They can't get to work."

ODOT's incoming director played a lead role in the failed Columbia River Crossing effort several years ago. Strickler said he hopes this time will be different.

"There has to be high-capacity transit as part of it," he said.

The major sticking point in the negotiations that ended in 2013 was whether or not light rail would be a part of the new bridge. Strickler said the new project will have to include either light rail or bus rapid transit.

Looking Ahead

When it comes to alleviating congestion, architect George Crandall argues for big-picture thinking that includes not just the Rose Quarter and the I-5 Bridge, but the whole region.

"Rather than this kind of piecemeal planning, we need a grand strategy," Crandall said.

Oregon and Washington have five years to show "meaningful" progress on the I-5 Bridge replacement project, to avoid having to repay the \$140 million in planning dollars supplied by the Federal Highway Administration.