

# Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

*Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland*

1001 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 500  
Portland OR 97204



March 27, 2020

Mayor Ted Wheeler  
Commissioner Chloe Eudaly  
Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty  
Commissioner Amanda Fritz

RE: Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project Conceptual Design Report (Draft)

The Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) recently received a project briefing on TriMet's Southwest Corridor Conceptual Design Report (CDR). The report to the BAC highlighted many changes from the prior version of this project, before release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). While the Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project is viewed by TriMet as an important link in the region's network, the BAC has several concerns about this project:

- Lack of measurable goals and outcomes throughout the report.
- The plan to maintain automobile capacity throughout the corridor is contradictory to regional climate goals and VMT reduction, adds significant cost to the project, and creates large roadway cross sections which are difficult and unsafe to cross.
- Due to the low-density alignment route, bicycle access is critical to allow as many people as possible to access the MAX system without a car. Bicycles were not modeled as a transportation mode in TriMet's Station Access planning. As a result, station areas lack well-developed plans for direct, convenient, and comfortable bicycle access, including covered parking for bicycles.
- Absence of transit-oriented development and prioritization of auto parking.
- Proposed downgrading of the bicycling infrastructure in the segment listed as "North of Naito."

As proposed, it is unclear how the Southwest Corridor project will contribute to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The project maintains current travel lanes (two in each direction) despite running adjacent to I-5, which has six lanes of travel dedicated to motor vehicles. Providing increased roadway capacity through the project area is in direct contradiction to the region's goal of getting more people to choose transit over single-occupancy vehicles.

Protecting vulnerable road users is another important goal of this project. The BAC has repeatedly expressed concerns that multiple lanes in each direction on roadways contribute to an increased risk of serious injuries and fatalities. Enhanced crossing treatments such as rapid flash beacons and pedestrian refuge islands have not stopped vulnerable road users from being injured or killed on similar multi-lane roadways elsewhere in Portland. As TriMet's own plan anticipates 65% of MAX users will access the stations by walking, the BAC encourages more emphasis on station access from a safe, accessible, pedestrian perspective.

Southwest in Motion (SWIM), adopted unanimously by Portland City Council in December 2019, calls for a large number of projects that would create opportunities for people to walk and bike in their neighborhoods. A number of projects in SWIM have been identified in the CDR as high priority in conjunction with the construction of Southwest Corridor. The impact of the larger project is diminished by

calling on PBOT to self-fund the funnel for ridership, rather than including it in a multi-billion dollar regional transportation project. This self-funding requirement is also likely to result in weaker connectivity to transit stations outside of Portland, as other jurisdictions are often less able to allocate funding that prioritizes walking or riding bicycles as viable modes of travel. Many areas lack vital connections for people walking or riding bicycles, and this project should prioritize safety by funding bicycle and pedestrian facilities as supportive infrastructure to the core project.

The BAC is concerned there will be immense pressure to build many, or all, of the projects identified by the CDR along the Southwest Corridor, which will come at the expense of the remainder of Southwest Portland. Given leaders' suggestions that there is limited political will to develop bike infrastructure in the best situations, it is unlikely that there will be an identified funding source allowing the vast majority of Southwest Portland residents to safely and comfortably move without the use of a car.

The three-mile radius "bikeshed" area should include safe and comfortable routes funded through the Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project. There is no calculation in the report of how many additional residents or jobs this additional access would add, over the half-mile radius "walkshed", and the BAC recommends that the project team clearly define the additional benefits a strong bike network around station areas could bring. Southwest Portland currently has a very low number of people who ride bicycles due to the limited number of bike facilities that are perceived as safe, its challenging topography, and a lack of contiguity among bike facilities.

BAC members are concerned that station areas will primarily serve as privately owned vehicle parking lots, instead of transit-oriented development that includes multi-family housing and commercial use that supports the rider experience. The CDR fully subsidizes 2,000 housing units for automobiles along the Southwest Corridor, while only 950 affordable housing units for people are pledged. Park-and-ride lots do not support the goal of station areas as destinations and benefit a small number of users. Only 12% of users are expected to arrive by car, the lowest of any mode that TriMet estimated. Arrival by car is ranked lowest on the Station Access Hierarchy, yet the CDR reflects the most accommodations for that mode.

Finally, the street configuration on the section labeled as "North of Naito" is a downgrade from the current conditions. PBOT installed plastic wands to provide physical protection in the Lair Hill Park/Duniway Park area several months ago. Based on the CDR, these would need to be removed for emergency vehicle access, though in 2015 PBOT directed all new bike lanes to be protected by default. While this lane is not technically new, the roadway will undergo complete reconstruction, and must be built to ensure comfort for all ages and abilities. We encourage planners to find solutions that can meet this requirement, such as a wider roadway to accommodate protection, or possibly relocating auto and bicycle lanes to be separated from each other by a center-running MAX train.

Where protected bicycle lanes are planned along the route, several details could greatly enhance the quality of these facilities. Instead of a wide sidewalk with a paint-delineated bike lane, the project team could use material differences (asphalt) or slight grade separation, to give clarity on how people on bicycles and people walking use the space. A tactile difference between the spaces could alert people walking that they are no longer on the sidewalk. All facilities would incorporate accessible, universal design guidelines for people walking and rolling. In addition, the BAC recommends that any continuation of the bike lane through intersections should be designed as Type 1. Type 2 & 3 can create unnecessary conflict between people walking and biking. It is confusing whether concrete is a raised bike lane or a

sidewalk, as evidenced by Figure 4.1 in the CDR, which shows ADA tactile pavings in the middle of bicycle lanes. It is not acceptable for a project of this scope to force pedestrians and bicycle users to compete for sidewalk space, while preserving automobile capacity.

The Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project may be looking to the past rather than the future by aligning ridership to car access, rather than multimodal, transit-rich, mobility options. If the Southwest Corridor project does not fund any projects for people on foot or bicycle beyond what is required by code, PBOT may not be able to provide vital funding without reallocating funds from other project work, which could leave a gap in this \$2.8 billion project. The BAC recommends a deeper look at how the project aligns with transportation policy, equity, and climate goals, to ensure that the entire region can realize the potential of the Southwest Corridor.

Respectfully submitted,



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