

Hillsdale, South Portland reach compromise over Naito Parkway plan

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

Hillsdale Neighborhood Association chair Don Baack, and longtime South Portland neighborhood activist Jim Gardner, say they may have an agreement to end a long-running dispute about the proposed South Portland Circulation Plan.

The plan, conceived in the late 1970s, would shrink Southwest Naito Parkway between Arthur Street and Barbur Boulevard from a freeway to a neighborhood collector, with standard intersections at local streets, two traffic lanes, on-street parking and lower speed limits.

The plan would also simplify the spaghetti maze of access ramps at the west end of the Ross Island Bridge. This would at least reduce some of the road barriers that have divided the neighborhood since the 1950s, and free up land for other uses.

Baack has consistently opposed the project, saying that it would cause through traffic to shift to Barbur and interfere with road access to much of the rest of southwest Portland. In addition, the current plan would replace the current direct connection to the Ross Island Bridge with a more roundabout

and time consuming route.

Although City Council agreed in principle to implement the project (without allocating funds toward its estimated \$50 million cost), Baack has continued to argue against it.

Baack has long called for two interim steps: to retain a direct connection from Barbur to the bridge, and to re-engineer Naito so that if it can be converted into "pro time parking" (wherein parking lanes become traffic lanes during rush hour) if city and state traffic engineers deem this necessary to handle traffic demand.

Baack has made a tentative agreement with Gardner to cease active opposition to the project in exchange for these concessions. Gardner told his board that the bridge connection would have the positive effect of reducing the amount of through traffic on neighborhood streets.

Board member Connie Crookham, who lives near the bridge, agreed. "I would love to remove the ramps and be able to cross Naito, but I agree with Hillsdale that sending cars north (to get onto the bridge) would equal a failure that no one would go for," she said.

As to the pro time parking, Gardner said that city engineers are likely to recommend this regardless. "I don't think

we'd be giving up much," he argued. "This gets an active opponent out of the picture, and reduces the impulse for the city to do nothing."

The matter is crucial, Gardner said, because City Commissioner Sam Adams, in charge of the Office of Transportation, has recommended spending \$200,000 on an environmental assessment for the project. "We've been trying for years to get to this first step," he said. "This is a prerequisite for any sort of federal aid."

South Portland land use chair Jim Davis, who lives in Hillsdale, disagrees, and in March he went to Hillsdale's meeting to debate the matter with Baack. "I'm tired of our neighborhood being a through route to other communities," he said later.

Most South Portland board members, with the notable exception of Davis, seemed to agree with Gardner, but no vote was taken at the April meeting. Baack told *The Post* that he is waiting for South Portland to take formal action before taking the matter to his board.

Meanwhile, the project suffered at least a temporary setback when Portland Mayor Tom Potter failed to include funds for the environmental assessment in his draft city budget.

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