

Design commission approves new light rail bridge design



Conceptual images of the new Portland to Milwaukie light rail bridge. (TriMet)

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Portland Design Commission last month unanimously approved a new Willamette River bridge that will carry the proposed Portland to Milwaukie light rail line. The bridge is a key part of the \$1.5 billion project.

Starting at the current Green Line terminus at Portland State University, the line will travel through the South Waterfront to Southwest Sherman Street, cross to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, and travel through inner Southeast Portland to Milwaukie and Oak Grove in Clackamas County.

At a session two months before, the Commission had asked for minor changes, and Portland Bureau of Development Services staff had called for additional review in the future.

This time planner Tim Heron said, "All the issues raised by the Commission have been addressed," and recommended approval. This included the color of the concrete to be used ("natural, not white").

One of the few issues Commission members raised was the west side bike access ramps. Rather than the sweeping circles seen on other bridges, these will be tight switchbacks, which will compel bicyclists to go slower.

TriMet consultant Sean Batty said this was dictated by the limited space available, and was done at the urging of the Oregon Health and Sciences University and the Zidel Corporation, who donated the land for the bridge.

He added that there is virtue in causing cyclists to slow when they are entering an area shared by pedestrians.

Brian Newman of OHSU and Rick Saito of Zidel confirmed this. Newman said that OHSU will be attempting to relocate its Medical, Dental and Health schools to six square blocks of the new campus, and the bridge will make this a very tight fit.

Negotiations with the TriMet team were "not always pleasant, but everyone had their eyes on the prize," he told the Commission. The end result "leaves the public with something they can be very proud of," he said.

Batty reported that the Kiewit Company's bid to construct the bridge was \$7 million below previous estimates, \$127 million instead of \$134 million.

To the delight of the Commission, he said that this allows TriMet to restore some features that were eliminated as cost-cutting moves, including a wide place in the pedestrian path that will allow visitors to pause, admire the scenery and take pictures without interfering with pedestrian or bike traffic.

The bridge even has at its bottom

designed to serve as nesting sites for birds of prey. "Peregrine falcons on the west (left?), ospreys on the (east?) right," Batty said tongue in cheek.

Commission members enthusiastically praised the project. "The design is beautiful and well-thought-out down to condor condos," Ben Kaiser said.

TriMet will provide bike lockers on the west end, and Commission chair Gwen Millius urged them to provide enough. Beyond this, she said the refinements have "changed this from a serviceable bridge to something really awesome."



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