

County Commission approves steel deck arch design for new Sellwood Bridge

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

In late January, the Multnomah County Commission unanimously approved a design for a new Sellwood Bridge, one with a brand new west side approach system with lower cost and less environmental impact than a proposal approved late last year.

As before, the bridge will have a Deck Arch design, with an open top deck free of superstructure. It will probably be made of steel, although County planners are still considering concrete as a material.

The biggest new change is the west side interchange. In place of a large, roundabout curve to take traffic to southbound Highway 43 without stopping, there will be a series of traffic signals. Reducing the "footprint" of the bridge will reduce by more than half the needed excavation into the hillside to the west, reducing the "rock cut" from 88,000 square feet to 40,000.

Another change is the elimination, for now, of tracks and an approach ramp for a future streetcar line on the bridge, at a saving of \$5 million and \$6 to \$8 million, respectively.

County spokesperson Mike Pullen said that these items could be added later. Interestingly, Portland Mayor Sam Adams has been a consistent proponent of streetcars but has also called for ef-

orts to reduce the Sellwood Bridge's cost.

The changes reduce the cost from \$331 million to \$290 million. Project manager Ian Cannon told the Commission that the changes "retain functionality and safety for all modes of transportation, and reflect a community consensus."

The changes were endorsed by the project's Community Advisory Committee. Heather Cook, a Sellwood resident and member of the CAC, thanked the Commission for "listening to the CAC." She did urge them to "commit to" rather than merely "consider" a series of projects on the east side designed to ensure safety for all modes.

Diana Richardson, a Sellwood commercial property owned, was more critical. The construction work will involve the temporary displacement of some of her commercial tenants. "It would be a hardship for them," she said. "Some just won't return, and that would be a hardship for me."

Terry Parker, a consistent critic of non-auto transportation, complained that such interests had had a disproportionate voice in the design of the project. He applauded the removal of the streetcar facilities, but also called for narrowing of pedestrian and bicycle lanes and the elimination of viewing areas on the bridge.

The Commission gave lavish praise to everyone involved in the project. Commission Chair Jeff Cogen, who had feuded openly with Adams and accused



A new steel deck arch design (with the provision for using concrete if necessary) was approved by the Multnomah County Commission in January. (Photo courtesy of Multnomah County)

the mayor of blocking the project, gave a brief acknowledgement to "our partners the City of Portland." Cogen added, "This brings us much closer to actually getting a new bridge."

Commissioner Deborah Kafoury said, "We're doing what the public wants us to do." However, she urged staff to continue working with Richardson to have the least possible impact on her and her tenants. "We've bought a lot of good will with this project," Kafoury said. "We need to continue to retain it. Even with compensation, displacement is a hardship."

Cogen said that staff is seeking to gain a solution without using property condemnation, and aiming for a "win-win" solution. Pullen later told *The Post* that the CAC would probably reconvene in March to look at design details for the bridge. Construction should begin by late 2012, Pullen said.

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Staff from the Portland Bureau of Transportation and the Bureau of Environmental Services will be on hand to present background information and design options for public review and comment.

This project provides a great opportunity to improve pedestrian connections between SW Barbur Blvd and Multnomah Village, in addition to improving safety for both

pedestrians and bicycles. Current funding should allow for improvements on the north side of Multnomah Blvd between SW 21st and 31st Ave. in conjunction with the Bureau of Environmental Services sewer main project. The project also intends to develop a design concept for the entire corridor up through Multnomah Village to SW 40th Ave for future construction phases.

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