

# Controversial Portland to Lake Oswego streetcar route passed by both city councils

By Lee Perlman  
The Southwest Portland Post

After hours of debate as to whether they should jointly build a new \$458 million streetcar line, divided Portland and Lake Oswego city councils gave a less than resounding "maybe."

The seven-member Lake Oswego council heard from more than 90 citizens in a hearing lasting more than three hours, and a week later held a debate among themselves lasting almost as long, before voting four to three to approve their share of a \$470,000 feasibility study for the proposed line.

The next day the Portland Council heard from more than 20 citizens (including several Lake Oswego Councilors and residents) before approving the study by a four to one vote.

Even its proponents agree that the proposed line is an unusual streetcar project. Typically, such vehicles are "circulators" that help people navigate dense urban neighborhoods, traveling

at an average speed of five miles per hour.

The proposed line would be a regional facility traveling between cities through the unincorporated, wealthy and ultra-low density Dunthorpe community. It would travel on the Willamette Shore right of way, an abandoned rail line purchased jointly by several governing bodies for \$2 million in 1988.

Between the route's few Dunthorpe stations, unimpeded by other traffic, the streetcar could reach a speed of 55 miles per hour.

Although the right of way is one of the main selling points of the project, the proposed route would depart from it through part of South Portland, traveling for about a half-mile along Southwest Macadam Avenue.

This is in response to area residents and businesses, who argue that here a Macadam route will have less adverse effect on existing housing, and more catalytic encouragement toward development, than Willamette Shore.

As with other streetcar projects, it is



The Portland Streetcar stops near Portland State University. (May 2007 photo courtesy Wikipedia)

considered to be as much of a development tool as a transit mode. Supporters say that past projects have produced far more development, at greater density, along streetcar routes than other parts of the same neighborhoods.

In this case, project staff claims that new development near the line in South Waterfront has the potential to bring in as much as \$7 million a year in new property taxes, and more than \$5 million in System Development Charges.

As to the expense, proponents say that \$80 million of this represents the current value of the right of way. They hope to get the Federal Transit Administration to pay for 60 percent of the cost, and to use the right of way value as part of the local match, bringing Portland's share of the cost down to just \$30 million in cash.

In Lake Oswego, streetcar supporters

say that the route is the missing ingredient to make the projected Foothills high-density development work. Many opponents believe this to be the case, and are against the project for this reason.

Nor are the suburbanites alone. Last month the South Portland Neighborhood Association board gave a divided, and half-hearted, vote of support to the project.

One of those who voted against it, Jim Gardner, said he feared the project would be an impetus to increase the zoning density in the Johns Landing area. "Johns Landing could become another South Waterfront, with 325-foot towers blocking views and more traffic," he said.

At Lake Oswego opponents questioned many aspects of the project, including its costs. Project manager

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