

Officials approve new method for building the Sellwood Bridge's replacement

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Multnomah County Commission last month approved a new approach to construction of a new Sellwood Bridge, one that relies on moving the existing bridge to a slightly new location and using it while a new span is built.

Previous plans call for building half of a new bridge immediately north of the existing span, then demolishing the existing bridge and using the new structure for traffic movement while adding to it.

The new plan, as presented by project manager Ian Cannon, calls for moving the existing bridge to a new location a few feet to the north, while the new bridge is built in the old location in a single phase.

Cannon said the new approach could save \$5 to \$10 million in expense and up to a year in construction time.

The technique has been used "half a dozen times worldwide," Cannon said. "It's not a new technology. It just has to be done with care." Another advantage, Cannon said, is that it creates greater separation between through traffic movement and the construction work.

Asked by County chair Jeff Cogen if there are "downsides" or risks to the procedure, Cannon said, "The biggest risk is whether we can get the permits in time to do what we need to do." He later added that it will probably be necessary to condemn and acquire one



This photo illustration shows the deck arch design of the proposed Sellwood Bridge. (Post file photo courtesy of Multnomah County)

housing unit in the River Park condominiums on the east side.

At a hearing last month, only one person spoke against the proposal. Transportation activist Jim Howell claimed that a better and cheaper course would be to pursue a new alignment for the new bridge, taking it to the north.

Cannon responded that adopting Howell's idea would involve reopening the planning process for the project, which would eat up any construction cost savings it might offer. However, at the urging of Commissioner Deborah Kafoury, Cannon agreed to investigate Howell's idea.

Also last month, consultant Mike Acre of David Evans and Associates discussed possible cost savings to compensate for the defeat by Clackamas County voters of a \$5 annual surcharge expected to generate \$42 million.

Most of the savings involve forgoing elements of a new interchange with Highway 43 on the west side of the bridge. Acre said the County is considering using one right-turn lane on the west side off-ramp instead of two-- a change he said was "not desirable but doable."

Another is to adjust traffic signal timing to accommodate the traffic demand at any given time of the day.

Acre said he and other staff have discussed these ideas with Portland and Oregon Department of Transportation officials. "No one said they were fatally flawed," he said.

The County is also seeking a grant from the federal Transportation Improvement Grant for Economic Recovery (TIGER) program. Such grants are typically in the range of \$15 to \$25 million, but can run as high as \$60 million, he said.

Barbur Corridor Planning

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Commission chair Andre Baugh said, "This is a good time to look at this corridor, and we really need to look at it comprehensively."

Baugh noted that adjacent property, by and large, consists of relatively small parcels rather than "a big set of developments. The key is community involvement."

Baugh said the study should look at potential future open spaces and "how it connects to other communities."

Senior planner Joe Zehnder said the growth estimate is based on projections by Metro, and recent studies say its extent may be exaggerated. "We've never done one quite like this before," Zehnder said. "It should be a lot of fun."

Editor's Note: In December 2010, Metro was awarded a \$2 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration to analyze alternatives for improving transit in the corridor that includes Barbur Boulevard/ Highway 99W and Interstate 5.

Southwest Hills partition

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property owners, and is chair of the Portland Development Commission.

City Auditor LaVonne Griffin-Valade, in response to an inquiry, told The Post that the applicant's status had nothing to do with the use of Helm on the case.

There is a vacancy at this position, she said, and for that reason the City has contracted for the services of Helm, who has since presided at other cases. Helm's decision on the appeal is expected by late June.

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