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Vermont Street sidewalks to be upgraded from 30th to 37th avenues

HILLSDALE NOTEBOOK

By Jillian Daley
The Southwest Portland Post

PBOT project manager Kyle Chisek shared details with the Hillsdale NA on a \$2.2 million proposed project that includes upgrades to the sidewalks on Southwest Vermont Street from 30th to 37th avenues.

Chisek also described improvements to the stormwater system at several intersections: Southwest Idaho Drive and Vermont Street; Vermont Street and Capitol Highway; Terwilliger Boulevard, Seventh Avenue and Caldw Drive; and Terwilliger Boulevard, Sixth Avenue and Chestnut Street.

Construction should not be done until a neighborhood issue is settled, said HNA board member Don Baack, also chairman of SW Trails, a group that promotes walking and biking in Southwest.

The neighborhood association submitted a letter to the Mayor's office

saying that HNA would prefer a different location for the signal Home Forward (the housing authority serving Multnomah County) has proposed at 26th Avenue, Vermont Street and Capitol Highway.

This is the site of a new entrance for Stephens Creek Crossing, Home Forward's planned housing development.

The letter says the new signal should be at Southwest 25th Avenue, Vermont Street and Capitol Highway [near Fanno Creek Clinic].

Baack said the latter site would reduce bike crashes and accommodate heavy traffic on Vermont Street. Motorists "don't see them; they pull out in front of the bikes," he said.

Baack's motion failed. Chisek said the proposed improvements would not impede the installation of a signal regardless of location.

HNA chairman Mikal Apenes said the neighborhood should not stop proposed construction because it is an opportunity to overhaul infrastructure, and neighbors will pursue the signal issue in the future.

During his SW Trails presentation,



Portland Bureau of Transportation project manager Kyle Chisek presented information on some upcoming projects at the Hillsdale Neighborhood Association meeting last month. (Post photo by Jillian Daley)

Baack said there is a gap in the bike path on Terwilliger between Chestnut and Barbur, and that gap should be filled.

Baack moved that the HNA write the

Portland City Council, Bureau of Transportation and Portland Parks & Recreation to support the path's completion. His motion got unanimous support.

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Rehabilitation planned for Newbury and Vermont bridges on Barbur Boulevard

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

This year the Oregon Department of Transportation will be doing repair work on two Southwest Barbur Boulevard overpasses. As part of the project they propose "improvements" for bicyclists which, they concede, are "not ideal."

As ODOT's Jilayne Jordan told the South Portland Neighborhood Association last month, the agency will do repairs to the Newbury bridge ("I have no idea why it's called Newbury; perhaps there were plans to build a street there") and the Vermont bridge, both south of Capitol Highway.

Vermont is "one of the few bridges in the state that has wooden caps," Jordan said. "It has deteriorated and rotted, and is starting to crack. The wood has to be replaced with steel or the bridge has to be weight restrained," meaning that buses couldn't use it. ODOT will also replace the concrete at the joints, Jordan said.

The \$5 million project will start in 2014, she said. At times the work will require restriction of traffic to one lane in each direction, she said.

As part of the project, ODOT will look at improving bicycle and pedestrian movement on the bridges. Currently they share a space that is "challenging at best and downright scary" to negotiate, Jordan said.

However, she said, "We can't fix this entirely. We can't remove the walkway without compromising the integrity of the bridge." A true fix would cost \$25 million, five times the project budget,

she said.

ODOT is offering three options: They can widen the southbound shared walkway by two feet; they can remove the center median and widen the car lanes, which are currently a substandard 10.5 feet, for shared use by bikes and cars; or they can do nothing and leave things as they are.

"I acknowledge that these are not ideal options," Jordan said.

South Portland board member Sharon Fikety said, "I'd prefer a road diet (the elimination of a traffic lane), but that's not on the table. You should widen the lanes."

Another board member, Jim Gardner, countered. "Widening the lanes won't make much difference. There's still not enough room for a car to pass a bike safely." He said he would like "at least one wider sidewalk." Another board member, Lee Buhler, said he also supported wider sidewalks.

Jordan said, "The minimum envelope for a bicyclist is three feet. If they're offered less on a path, they won't feel safe and they'd rather stay in traffic."

Fikety supported this, saying, "I don't care what you do to the sidewalks, I'm not riding on them." The board eventually voted to call for widened lanes.

Roger Averbek, chair of the Southwest Neighborhoods Inc. Transportation Committee, told *The Post* his own preference would be to remove the median and have "pro time" traffic configurations, with three northbound lanes in the morning and three southbound in the afternoon. Jordan said ODOT planned to decide on a design approach by February.