

Neighbors want Newbury and Vermont bridges safe for bikes and peds

HILLSDALE NOTEBOOK

By Jillian Daley
The Southwest Portland Post

There's been a lot of debate centering on the Barbur Boulevard bridges project – and two local neighborhood associations are in direct opposition on the issue.

South Portland neighbors weighed in on the project in January [*Rehabilitation planned for Newbury and Vermont bridges on Barbur Boulevard,* by Lee Perlman, *The Post*, February 2013] and last month Hillsdale neighbors had their say.

The South Portland Neighborhood Association board voted in favor of widening traffic lanes while workers make repairs, but Hillsdale neighbors are going the other way. They want more room for bicycles and pedestrians.

Responding to community disapproval, Oregon Department of Transportation officials are reconsidering an initial plan to do major bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements while repairing the Newbury Street and Vermont Street bridges next year, said ODOT spokeswoman Jilayne Jordan. Hillsdale wants those major improvements.

The Newbury and Vermont bridges support Barbur Boulevard and are just south of the Southwest Capitol Highway on-ramp. The bridges are not in immediate danger of failing, but with-

out the repairs, ODOT would institute weight restrictions barring heavy trucks and buses, Jordan said.

Along with the structural repairs, the project will include improvements for walkers and bikers – just not to the extent that the Hillsdale Neighborhood Association asked for during its February meeting.

Neighbors approved a motion to submit a request to ODOT to either build new bridges or make traffic lanes smaller, so a bike lane or larger sidewalk could be added.

"It was our desire to have immediate action to help accommodate pedestrian bicycle space," said Glenn Bridger, the association's transportation committee chairman.

Jordan said repairing the bridges rings in at \$5 million, and replacing them would cost \$25 million. That's most of the annual project dollars for the ODOT region that covers Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Columbia and Hood River counties.

If a bike lane is added, the right traffic lanes and the median separating northbound and southbound traffic would get skinnier, said Jordan, who presented the plan for the bridges during the association's meeting.

"We took that proposal out to the public and it was not received well," she said.

ODOT does plan to install taller pedestrian safety railings and repair walkways, ramps and curbs on the bridges.

More signs warning drivers to watch for cyclists are another proposed up-



The Vermont bridge is located along Barbur Boulevard at Southwest Parkhill Drive. (Post photo by Jillian Daley)

grade. The drainage grates by the ramps will be moved and covered, Jordan said.

The repair project for the bridges, built in 1934, will begin in early 2014 and last more than eight months. The construction will close lanes, but the entire road will not be shut down at any one time.

There will be a couple of weekends when southbound traffic will need to find another way to get through.

"I'd rather be inconvenienced and have the road fixed," said Mikal

Apenes, Hillsdale Neighborhood Association chairman.

The original wood caps that support the bridge on either end will be replaced with steel caps, Jordan said.

The Newbury bridge needs new concrete around its joints, which support bridge users' weight. Both bridges will be repaved.

A public hearing is tentatively planned for May. To learn more, visit www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/REGION1/pages/vermont_newbury/index.aspx.

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