

# Should future light rail line run along Barbur Boulevard or Interstate 5?

## SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PLAN

By Erik Vidstrand  
The Southwest Portland Post

The Metro community advisory committee met on July 10 to understand and comment on the analysis of the proposed light rail routes from Portland to Tigard.

The committee met at Portland Community College's Sylvania campus. "We realize we don't have all the information yet that you need to comment," said Eryn Kehe, Metro communication specialist.

"We don't have property impact studies or costs yet," Kehe continued. "Second drafts of the plan will be coming out after the draft environmental impact study is completed in January."

Matt Bihn gave a presentation on the proposed route alignments. "Light rail could transition to run adjacent to I-5 at four locations which is being studied in the environmental review."

The light rail line could run down the center of Barbur Boulevard. "The adjacent route would lie approximately 200 to 275 feet from Barbur Boulevard," said Bihn.

A third option is an adjacent Interstate 5 route, and the fourth option would transition to Interstate 5 at Custer Street.

According to the project staff,

sidewalks and bike lanes are missing on various sections of Barbur Boulevard. The spacing of protected pedestrian crossings is also insufficient.

"Vehicle, pedestrian, and bike widths are not to state or city transportation standards," Bihn said.

"If the light rail is approved to be constructed adjacent to I-5, auto and bike lanes, as well as sidewalks, will remain unchanged," said Bihn. "Some pedestrian crossings will be added for stations and there will be fewer traffic and property impacts."

"On the other hand," Bihn said, "a center-alignment would rebuild bike lanes, add sidewalks, trees, and lighting, and Barbur would continue to have two lanes in either direction.

"But an improved Barbur will require more land and property acquisitions and traffic impacts."

Bihn explained that Federal Transportation Agency funding eligibility is uncertain for redevelopment along Barbur Boulevard since federal funds are normally designated for light rail construction only.

Discussion from the committee members turned to the development of the Barbur Concept Plan which calls for the state highway to transition to a civic corridor.

The biggest question was should the highway be kept for cars mainly, or should it be redeveloped for pedestrians and bicycles to coexist



This Portland MAX Yellow Line train demonstrates what light rail down the middle of Barbur Boulevard might look like. (Photo by Dan Haneckow)

with motor vehicles?

According to Bihn, a civic corridor is a comprehensive linear plan for large commercial areas. The West Portland Crossroads (where Barbur Boulevard crosses Capitol Highway) has been designated as such. Safety was the biggest concern of the evening.

"The (Barbur Boulevard alignment) seems to increase barriers to both bicyclists and pedestrians," said committee member Roger Averbek, who represents Oregon Walks and the Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

"At the moment," Bihn said, "anyone can cross Barbur anywhere and this makes Barbur very unsafe. We plan on a variety of safety components including crossing gates and lights."

"If the adjacent route is chosen," Averbek asked, "could there be local funds to be used and matched with federal funds?"

"No," said Bihn. "If the feds don't recognize it as critical improvements, then there isn't any funding."

Bihn said that there could be an opportunity to build up a buffered separation, or berms, from car lanes and the bike lane.

Arnie Panitch, who represents TriMet Committee on Accessible Transit, asked if the adjacent route erases the Barbur Concept Plan.

"The concept plan clearly assumes that light rail will be on Barbur," said Jim Gardner of South Portland.

Tim Dickey, an at-large member, challenged Gardner's assumption. "It has not been evaluated," he said. "It doesn't make it null and void."

It is still too early to decide these issues, Kehe responded.

According to the most recent briefing book, a center-running alignment through the intersection of Barbur, Interstate 5 and Capitol Highway (the crossroads) would require complete reconstruction of the intersection and existing bridge over Interstate 5.

If tracks run adjacent to Interstate 5, the alignment would then cross over Interstate 5, Capitol Highway and Barbur Boulevard on a new light rail structure and the existing crossroads bridge would remain in place.

The Portland 2035 Comprehensive Plan, passed in June 2016, builds upon the Barbur Concept Plan to designate the central Barbur corridor from Terwilliger Boulevard south to the Barbur Transit Center [near Taylors Ferry Road] for mixed-use and transit-oriented land uses instead of the highway commercial uses prevalent today.

It states that the key finding is that future high capacity transit is a necessary ingredient to the vision.

Someone asked, "What does the adjacent plan look like?" Bihn replied that at most it could look like what is now along Interstate 84 in the Hollywood district.

Would there be any potential for development if adjacent route is chosen?

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