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The Southwest Portland Post

Volume No. 25 Issue No. 12

www.swportlandpost.com

Portland, Oregon

Complimentary

October 2017

Pedestrian connections considered between future MAX line and Marquam Hill

SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PLAN

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

In September, Metro community advisory committee members met to review access options up to Marquam Hill for the Southwest Corridor Light Rail Project. Metro and TriMet staff gave presentations.

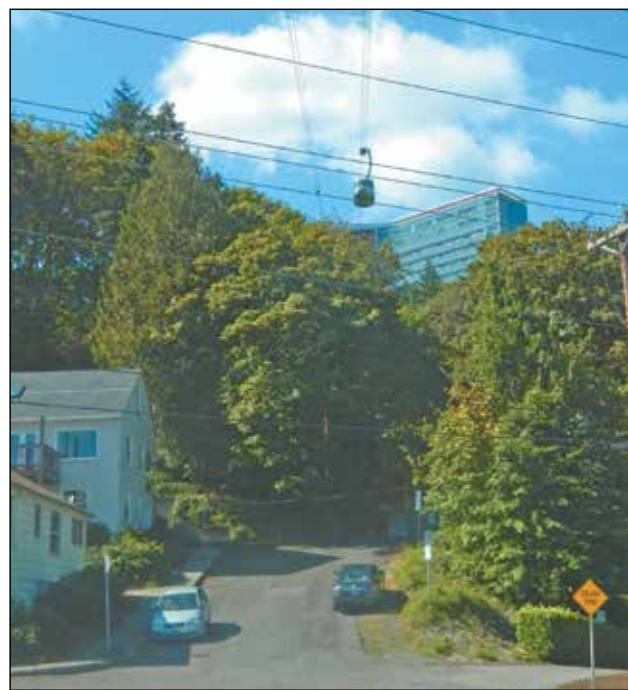
According to Eryn Kehe, the senior communications specialist at Metro, the final draft environmental impact statement is approaching completion and is scheduled to be released around mid-January.

Kehe described a ramping up of issues to be discussed in the next three months.

"The advisory committee will have time to look at this before the end of this period and vote yea or nay on the findings," Kehe said. "Not every committee member will agree but we hope to try for a consensus.

"There will then be a 45 - 60 day public comment period," Kehe said. "We anticipate getting thousands of comments."

Kehe explained that the Metro steering committee, made up of local officials, will review input from the advisory committee as well as from public comments. The steering committee will then make the final decisions.



One of the proposed MAX line stations is located at Southwest Gibbs Street and Barbur Boulevard.
(Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Kehe announced that University of Oregon students are partnering with TriMet to give perspectives on light rail corridor components.

Students will be working on exploring design concepts for pedestrian connections between the light rail line and Marquam Hill.

Potential redevelopment between Southwest 13th and 19th avenues is being considered including a mixed-use transit center and Barbur

Boulevard as a "main street" community amenity.

In August, the community advisory committee was presented with preliminary light rail route options as trains leave downtown.

Routes selected were either Barbur Boulevard or Naito Parkway. Milt Jones, the land use chair of the Homestead Neighborhood Association, in the heart of this area, stated that the association voted unanimously to endorse the Barbur alignment line over the Naito Parkway.

Stations are proposed for both routes at Gibbs Street. Access to Marquam Hill would be a bit longer coming from Naito Parkway. The aerial tram travels above Gibbs Street.

The main topic for the September meeting was addressing the various options up to Marquam Hill. Jones expressed his concern of making sure that the Veterans Affairs Medical Center is not neglected when addressing connections up to the hill.

"It's not just [Oregon Health & Science University] staff and patients using the transit system," Jones said. "[Veterans Affairs] patients are much more dependent on public transportation including those who are wheelchair-bound. I encourage the committee to keep access and service to the VA in mind."

The Homestead Neighborhood Association recommended that the route be protected from the weather, have adequate lighting, consider safety concerns, and respect the aesthetic and functional integrity of the Terwilliger Parkway design guidelines.

In 1983, the Terwilliger Parkway design guidelines were created to invoke the "forest corridor" concept.

After public input, Matt Binh, Metro project manager, presented options for the Marquam Hill connection, as it is called.

"Marquam Hill endures auto congestion and has limited parking," Binh said.

"Even the tram is congested."

Binh went over four different scenarios. Three of the four connection options would reach the seventh floor terrace of the Kohler Pavilion. According to Metro, this is the preferred location because it would provide a large, open location with multiple Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant exit points to multiple destinations.

The first connection would consist of an on-grade path which would consist

of paths, bridges and elevators arriving at the third floor of the pavilion. A safe crossing over Terwilliger would be constructed.

The second option is identical to the first but has a recessed path which would go under Terwilliger, head to an upper elevator, and end up on the seventh floor.

"The third option," Binh said, "includes two elevators, two bridges, and an on-grade path.

"A 180-foot-long tunnel would lead from the open area to the upper elevator."

The final option has a single tunnel, approximately 450

feet long, an elevator, and a bridge. Committee members brought up their concerns including the cost of each. Costs have not been developed yet said Binh.

"The tunnel is most expensive, no doubt," Binh said. "It will involve more construction and impact trees."

Members asked if the tunnel was for pedestrian use only. Binh replied it would be multi-use.

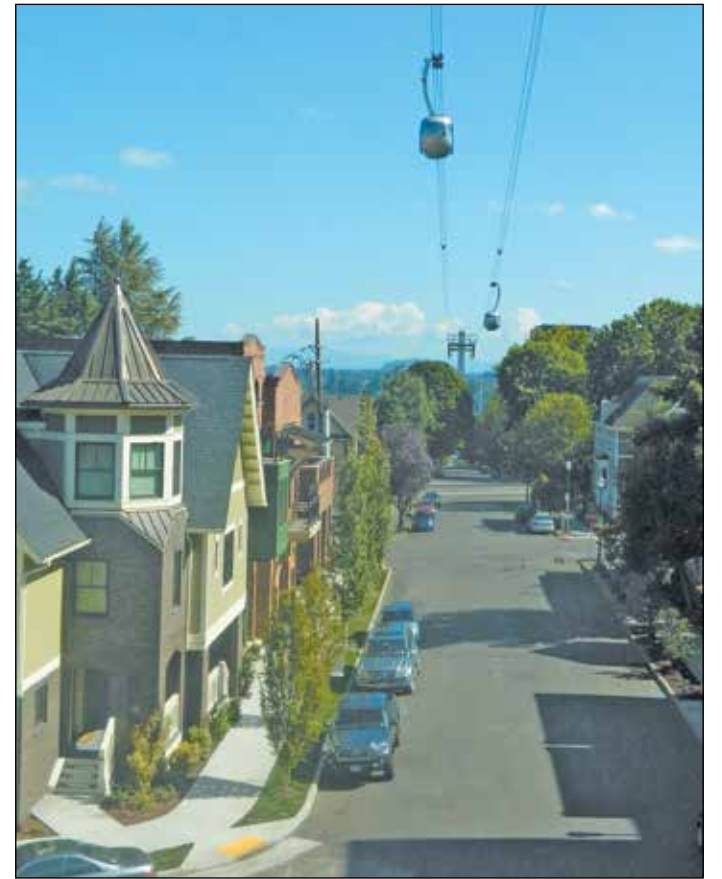
"What would be done to keep the homeless out of the tunnels?" another member asked.

Would security be necessary? Should paths be constructed with slope in mind to make it easier for people on crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs?

"All these concerns will be covered in the draft environmental impact statement," said Binh, "as well as ongoing maintenance and operating costs."

Bike corrals and bike lockers would be needed so that bicyclists would not schlep their bikes up the hill.

Tim Dickey, member-at-large, who hails from Los Angeles, described the



A view of Gibbs Street facing east from Barbur Boulevard with the aerial tram overhead. A proposed light rail station would be located at Naito Parkway in the distance.
(Post photo by Erik Vidstrand)

Angel's Flight funicular in downtown Los Angeles. Dickey said he was surprised that there wasn't a more creative aspect to get up to Marquam Hill.

Arnie Panitch, representing the TriMet committee on accessible transit, wanted to know what OHSU wanted for a route up to Marquam Hill. Brian Newman, who represents OHSU, responded that they did not like the first option.

"Others could work with some better designs," he said. "Security will be addressed."

Staff said all the options have safety issues. Even a bridge can feel very vulnerable no matter what time of year or day.

What's next for the project? Staff will speak to more people along the alignment and there will be two opportunities in October for the public to participate: Monday, Oct. 2 is the regular advisory committee meeting and a workshop will be held on Monday, Oct. 23. Both gatherings are from 6:15 p.m. - 8:45 p.m. and will be held at the Multnomah Arts Center, 7688 SW Capitol Highway.

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4207 SE Woodstock Blvd #509
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