

Design plans for light rail line in limbo due to delays in the funding process

SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR PLAN

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The Southwest Corridor community advisory committee gathered in mid-January at the Multnomah Arts Center. Neighbors and business owners packed the small classroom and provided brief public comments before the committee was briefed on the latest updates.

Southwest Trails president Don Baack was one those who commented. He had emailed the committee about a scenario if highway tolls on Interstate 5 become a reality.

“If this happens,” Baack said, “congestion may increase on Barbur Boulevard and push increased overflow traffic in to the Hillsdale community. This will affect the light rail project no doubt.”

Chris Ford, Metro project manager, did acknowledge the anxiety and that design plans are in limbo due to delays in the funding process.

Ford explained that there would not be a \$1.7 billion transportation bond measure on the 2018 ballot sponsored by TriMet.

Instead, the lead would now be Metro and the regional government would introduce a November 2020 bond measure.

“This does not affect decisions or

our process,” Ford said, “however, this committee will most likely wrap up by summer.”

Linda Moholt, representing Tualatin Chamber of Commerce, asked what happens if voters reject the measure to fund the corridor. Ford said that the feds could say no to the project even if the bond passes.

“Construction would now potentially begin in 2023 instead of 2021,” Ford said, “with opening of the line by 2027.”

Ford reminded everyone that the previous MAX lines each endured a 20-year process.

Staff then introduced Heather Wills, a consultant with Parametrix, a multidisciplinary agency that provides services in transportation, environmental planning, and community building. Wills spent the rest of the evening providing the committee with the various topics of the federally-required environmental review process which produce a Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

“The National Environmental Policy Act [enacted in 1970] holds federal agencies accountable for their actions,” Wills said. “Before this act, there was no opportunity for the public to comment on large infrastructure projects.”

Wills explained that when Interstate 5 was built in Portland, it divided communities in Portland and there was no community involvement.

“The DEIS is a decision tool,” said Wills. “Preferences are value-based like bike paths, sidewalks, and wetlands. The final document will be

a 150-page document with appendices.”

Wills explained that the analysis will look at air quality, geology, and soils including seismic vulnerabilities. The statement is expected to take into account the entire project footprint including land needed to store supplies and equipment.

“Land use will be reviewed within half a mile of the route,” Wills said. “This includes looking at parks, trails, access to trails, schools, and community gardens.”

A committee member asked if there would be zoning changes.

“It would be transferred to a transportation conversion land-use zone,” Wills said.

Other items being considered are hazardous materials, ecosystems including fish, endangered species, wetlands, culverts, steams, and water runoff. Utilities will need relocation.

The statement will address rider forecasts until 2035, bicycle-pedestrian connections, freight routes, and emergency response. It is also expected to address noise sources such as wheel squeal, track crossings, warning bells, the actual train, and vibration.

“Noise is also measured during construction,” Wills said. “Builders will disclose construction hours.”

Wills explained visual quality, viewer sensitivity, safety, and security components including areas of isolation and crime.

“The DEIS also looks at disproportionate impacts on low-income and minority communities,” Wills said. “The Federal Transit Administration wants to have a robust review of environmental justice issues.”

Finally, the impact on the community analysis will take in mind



Ecosystem surveys were conducted last year assessing soil, wetlands, and geology in planning for the future light rail line. (Photo courtesy of Metro)

seniors, people with disabilities, and property and home displacements. Wills said specific issues cannot be solved for each displacement, though, and will be aggregated with all the necessary displacements.

Ford explained next steps.

“The good news is that you are going to get a lot of information,” Ford said. “The bad news is that you are going to get a lot of information.”

Ford said the advisory committee’s role is to recommend the route and the locally preferred alternative, but not station locations.

“There could be other committees to sit on down the line,” said Eryn Kehe, Metro senior communications specialist who facilitates each meeting.

Metro and TriMet will complete the draft environmental impact statement in the next few months. Comments on the study and the route proposal can be shared at meetings, online, email, or through letters once the 45-day comment period begins.

After comments are collected, the

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The Post has a circulation of 7,000 in Multnomah Village and the surrounding neighborhood business districts including Burlingame, Capitol Hill, Garden Home, Glen Cullen, Hillsdale, South Portland, Raleigh Hills, West Portland and Vermont Hills. The Post is published on or about the 1st of every month. Back issues are \$2.50 each when available. All major credit cards accepted.



The Post is printed on recycled newsprint using soy-based inks.

