

# Transportation partnerships can benefit all

BY GERIK KRANSKY  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Transportation, getting from point A to point B, is a simple part of people's daily lives, yet it has a complex impact on our communities, physical health and family budget. The intersection of transportation and poverty can be even more complex.

Finding the best mix of public investment, safe streets, affordable housing, economic

*Gerik Kransky is the advocacy director for the Bicycle Transportation Alliance.*

opportunity and transportation choices to improve people's lives could fill a graduate level curriculum in public policy and community development. While

people in Portland are living in poverty, our public agency partners and community leaders are actively trying to find solutions to basic life challenges of creating affordable housing and safe transportation choices.

As you read this issue of Street Roots, one such effort is underway, the development of a new high-capacity transit project along Southeast Powell Boulevard and Division Street. Our region's leaders are planning to develop new and improved transit service between downtown Portland and the city of Gresham. People living along the improved transportation corridor will receive more frequent and reliable transit service and safer options for walking and biking while facing the threat of being displaced by increasing property values.

Strategies exist to mitigate these types of impacts, and now is the time to get serious about building inclusive public process and protecting our most vulnerable populations. For example, requiring community benefit agreements among jurisdictions, contractors and developers as they invest public resources can be an effective way to reduce potential community impacts by committing resources to develop permanently affordable housing and increasing access to good

paying jobs.

For example, if a private developer buys land adjacent to the new high-capacity transit line because they think it will provide a good return on their investment, our region's leaders should ensure that a portion of that private profit is returned to the community. This can take the form of permanent affordable housing as well as guarantees that contractors provide living wage jobs, locally sourced job training programs and hire minority and women employees. We can create economic opportunities and community benefits through policies that focus both public and private investment. These benefits can accrue in addition to the improved transportation safety and options of the original project.

Many other tools will have to be used to ensure that the benefits of public investments are shared equitably and the burdens are not disproportionately placed on a select group of people. One challenge developing this type of approach is building enough power among affected residents to counterbalance the self-interest of large-scale homebuilders, some of whom push for private profit over community benefits.

One place where we can find a commitment to this type of work is found page 19 of the 2012 Portland Plan: "Where disparities in service delivery and community development programs are found, change policies and priorities to mitigate disparities ..." There are other examples of policy direction to ensure that we consider the benefits and burdens development projects have on our community's most vulnerable populations. Now is the time to put these policies into action, before the earthmovers change the landscape and pour new concrete into place.

Leaders are emerging in our community to give voice to the systemic disenfranchisement of our most vulnerable populations. In the not-so-distant past examples of improved transportation

## About this series

This commentary is part of a series that looks at the intersection of transportation and poverty in Portland's metropolitan area. It examines where we are and where we might be going and poses questions for the future of our communities.

infrastructure have resulted in disproportionate impacts in certain neighborhoods. These community-based leaders are pushing government to do more to protect people of color and low-income families.

One such group is the Welcome Home Coalition, a collection of people and organizations focused on finding solutions for people experiencing homelessness and preventing displacement. At the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, we are thrilled to be one of the newest members of the coalition, even while we work to figure out what that means for us as an organization. We are working to understand the relationship between advocating for safe and convenient access to bicycling and supporting affordable housing. Whether the solutions exist in community benefits agreements, bigger coalitions or a new approach to meeting our shared transportation and housing needs, we will keep looking for solutions.

As the new Powell/Division Transit Project moves forward, we will continue to learn from community leaders and engage with professionals in government to help develop safe and convenient transportation choices while we work to protect permanent affordable housing. The range of issues is complex and the solutions can be politically challenging, but the more we talk openly about who benefits and who pays, the closer we will get to finding equitable solutions.

## MURALS, from page 7

of a mural because I think they either thought of a community mural that's a historic sort of thing or they thought of graffiti, which for them was just a nuisance, so to show examples of what it could be just creates an environment that's more friendly to it.

A.G.: *Why is public art important?*

G.H.: For me, I think it just makes the city a better place to be. It just brings more culture, interesting things out for people to enjoy. You don't really have to seek it out in (your) every day. It's just something you can happen upon. I think visual art, performance, music, theater, I think all that stuff's just what makes the city a desirable place.

A.G.: *Are there any locations you're super excited about getting painted this year?*

G.H.: Yeah, there're a few more downtown walls than we have in the past. There's the corner of (Third) and Stark. There are two walls that are adjacent to each other that I think will really transform that block. I'm painting out on 82nd this year. I painted downtown last year, so I think it will be cool to be in a different part of town.

A.G.: *Do you have a favorite FFTT mural that's been done so far?*

G.H.: I really like the DAleast one that's over here at 840 Southeast Third. I think that's been my favorite one most recently. I really like Spencer Keeton Cunningham. He did the rattlesnake over on ADX, and he also did the second one over by the Rose Garden above the freeway there. I like black and white work a lot, and I like things that are maybe pushing the edge a bit more or are kind of weird, which is kind of reflected in my work a lot. You'd think that everyone likes the same type of thing, but that's something I learned really quickly is that I think oh, everyone's going to want this artist, but I just lay out all the artists and there's someone for everyone really.



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