

Albina Vision, Inc.  
26 November 2018  
RE: I-5 Caps at the Rose Quarter

#### Problem Statement

ODOT proposes to construct concrete caps/lids over I-5 as part of the safety project being completed in the highway corridor. The caps are currently conceived as open space to benefit the community. The cap design is preliminary but even at this early stage there is cause for concern.

Parts of the configuration and geometry of the caps reflects the freeway below rather than the urban grid of Portland. As currently conceived, it is an engineering and structural solution rather and does not embody positive urban design and open space design principles. The resulting open spaces consist of odd remnants and are currently rendered as landscaped spaces with outdoor seating surrounded by swirling traffic and infrastructure. Without clear, defined edges and a role in the urban fabric these spaces are likely to be an attractive nuisance and quite possibly a security concern for the community.

#### The Albina Vision

One of the core goals of the Albina Vision is to physically stitch approximately 94-acres of underutilized urban land between the Willamette River and I-5, including the Rose Quarter, Portland Public Schools Headquarters property and surrounding land, back into Northeast Portland. I-5 in its current configuration physically cuts the Albina Vision land off from the NE Broadway and Weidler commercial corridor and established residential districts in NE Portland. The Albina Vision sees the caps/lids proposed by ODOT as an important opportunity to rebuild a successful, active, urban fabric while accommodating modern pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular infrastructure. The most successful way for the caps to benefit the community is to configure and structure the freeway caps such that they can support multi-story development now and in the future.

#### Key Observations

1. Additional unprogrammed open space over the freeway in this area is unneeded when the nearby parks and plazas proposed as part of the Albina Vision are considered.
2. Active streets with edges defined by buildings and programmable open spaces provide places that are lively and secure. The proposed open spaces will not be an active, lively and secure connection between Lower Albina and Northeast Portland.
3. Buildings along NE Broadway, Weidler, Vancouver, Williams and Hancock overpasses will provide a population to activate these streets.
4. The structure of the caps as currently designed, with a 300 pounds per square foot live load capacity, is sufficient to carry two-story buildings – with design adjustments, the caps have the potential to carry much more.
5. Proposed bike infrastructure incorporates large switchback ramp structures using large areas of otherwise buildable land. If these transitions were integrated with existing streets, cyclist travel distances would be comparable, the infrastructure would be less overwhelming, less costly and preserve potential building sites.
6. While the freeway is currently a source of noise and air pollution, this project won't be complete until 2027 and as the vehicle fleet incorporates more electric vehicles over the next 20 years, these factors will be less relevant in siting urban housing and other uses adjacent to freeway infrastructure.

#### The Albina Vision Request

The Albina Vision asks that ODOT and PBOT undertake an urban design, engineering and cost evaluation of reconfiguring the design of the proposed freeway caps so that they can serve as building sites for multi-story buildings as part of establishing a beneficial urban design solution for the area.