



THE BUREAU OF **PLANNING
& SUSTAINABILITY**

Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

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October 1, 2021

Dear Mayor Wheeler, Commissioner Rubio, and Commissioners Hardesty, Mapps, and Ryan:

The Planning and Sustainability Commission (PSC) was briefed on the Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge project on February 23 and July 23 this year, as well as periodically in years prior. We are grateful to staff from Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), and Multnomah County for their ongoing efforts and coordination.

We recognize that financial considerations are forcing the Multnomah County team to contemplate significant design changes. To align with Portland's goals on climate, equity, and accessibility, it's essential that the bridge redesign preserve:

- The widest possible bike/ped path for each direction, even if that means narrowing the bridge space for vehicles.
- A ramp connection(s) designed for all users from the bridge to the Eastbank Esplanade and using existing sidewalks with recommended accessibility improvements as the westside connection to Skidmore or Old Town destinations.
- Minimal or no delays to transit service in the westbound direction.

Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge has a great deal of promise and opportunity to build a resilient bridge that meets our city's emergency preparedness, connectivity, and climate goals. What it doesn't have right now is enough money to build it. While the County's \$300 million might seem a hefty chunk of change, it falls rather short of the \$600-800 million price tag of the project as currently considered. Most capital projects encounter some measure of "value engineering" between the design and implementation phases, but this project's fiscal squeeze is all the tighter with the absence of anticipated funding from the failed 2020 Metro Regional Investment Measure.



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During the July briefing, project staff returned to the purpose of the project when considering cost saving measures. We appreciate that staff have stated clearly that seismic design criteria will not be reduced, which is of critical importance.

Policy Context

In addition to withstanding an earthquake, this new bridge must serve Portland's long term transportation needs, which are inextricably linked to our climate, health and equity goals.

- Transportation sector emissions in 2018 were 6% over 1990 levels and continue to climb as a share of total emissions, rising to 43% of total emissions in Multnomah County.
- If we do not achieve our mode share goals, we will see the impact in the form of increased auto congestion. The city is already seeing some of these effects and its impacts on our carbon emissions and air quality.
- Our bicycle mode share has decreased since the adoption of the Bicycle Master Plan and is a long way from our 25% goal.
- Bike commuters have lower median income than car commuters (and transit commuters have lower median income than either).

Recommendations

With the city's mode share and climate goals in mind, following are our three requests in light of the proposed cost saving measures currently under consideration:

Ensure the maximum width bike/ped cross section in each direction

The width of a bridge is a significant cost factor. We understand that all avenues need to be explored to consider cost savings, including the originally proposed 20 foot cross section; that said, it is our hope that the bike/ped portion of the cross section be greater than the proposed 15.5 feet on each side. That may be a little wider than the Tilikum Bridge cross section, but that, too, was a capitulation of width from design to implementation and one that feels too close for comfort with bicyclists using the pedestrian space to pass other bicyclists. Given the Burnside Bridge's central location as well as Portland's walking and cycling mode share goals, and given that a Jersey barrier would call for shy distance from someone cycling next to it, we hold a concern that 15.5 feet would prove insufficient.

Safeguard the ramp connection to the Eastbank Esplanade

Anyone walking, riding or rolling with a device who has tried to take the elevator to/from the US Congresswoman Darlene Hooley Pedestrian Bridge (aka "The Gibbs Street Bridge") only to find it under maintenance with stairs as the sole remaining option can speak to the vexing limitations of a stair/elevator pairing without a ramp connection. Even when fully functional, an elevator



from Esplanade to bridge would assure wait times and limited bike capacity. The Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade is a key cycling, walking and rolling corridor. It is a designated Major City Bikeway and the Burnside Bridge is a designated Major City Bikeway. Let's ensure this critical connection is reliable, safe, and enables the hundreds and thousands of car-free trips we need each day in the Central City.

Prioritize transit travel westbound

As noted in the Central City in Motion final report, "Traffic delays in the Central City — particularly when high volumes of people are crossing the Willamette River — ripple throughout the system, reducing reliability and increasing travel times for bus riders throughout the entire region." While an auto lane can accommodate up to 850 people per hour, a dedicated transit lane can accommodate up to 2,000 people. Bus lanes protect buses from traffic delays to improve transit service, ridership and people moving capacity. This is exactly why the existing eastbound Rose Lane, the flagship of the emerging Rose Lane system, is so valuable and must be included in any Burnside Bridge travel lane configuration. As for westbound transit services, we understand that preserving the option for a future dedicated westbound transit lane becomes compromised when reducing from five to four lanes, but we still urge westbound transit as a priority. At the bare minimum, we urge that there be no transit travel delay impacts to westbound transit services if a future westbound Rose Lane cannot be accommodated.

To meet our transportation and climate goals, we need to grow both our transit and bicycle mode shares significantly and to make walking and rolling safe and convenient for everyone and all abilities. We also look forward to seeing how universal design is prioritized in this project as it evolves. Financial constraints pose a challenge at this moment, but we are reminded that this is an enduring legacy project.

The PSC would be delighted to support your efforts in helping to meet our long-term transportation and climate goals in any way we can as this project develops further. Thank you for your consideration and efforts.

