



City of Portland Design Commission

BRIEFING MEMO

Date: January 26, 2023
To: Portland Design Commission
From: Staci Monroe Design Review
503.823.0624 | staci.monroe@portlandoregon.gov
Re: I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project - Embellishments
Design Commission 2nd Briefing on February 2, 2023

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will be presenting some of the aesthetic embellishments associated with the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement project at the upcoming February 2nd hearing. This follow-up briefing was requested by the Commission at the most recent briefing on 12/15/22 and in the joint letter from Design and Landmarks Commission dated 1/4/23 (attached).

The embellishments being presented on February 2nd are part of early work associated with the areas *outside* of the main project, at the north and south ends of I-5. The main project, which includes the highway covers, portals and ramps, local street changes, green loop integration, and openspace and public realm work, is on a later design track than these early work items (see slides 7-8 of the applicant's presentation).

The Commission also requested more detailed information and discussion of the main project elements at the prior briefing. Such briefing will be at a point in the future once ODOT has considered all the public comments received during the Supplemental Environmental Assessment review period that just wrapped up in early January, which result in some changes to the initial concept design. At the February 2nd briefing ODOT will share when they expect to be ready to return to the Commission with these critical components.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION TOPICS:

As noted above, these embellishments will occur along I-5 north and south of the main project area. Staff suggests the following potential discussion topics.

- **Location, Type, Content, Context** – ODOT worked with the Historic Albina Advisory Board (HAAB) on developing these specific embellishments. The engagement with this group, the location, type, quality and content of the embellishments all seem appropriate for the project and context.
 - *Staff encourages discussion of the scale and illumination of the Wall 15 Billboard lettering (slide 44) and the sign type and lighting for the Bridge Lettering (slides 33-34). Neither of these elements and their designs are found on or adjacent to transportation infrastructure in Portland and have the potential to establish a new language of elements along the rights-of-way.*
 - *Staff encourages discussion of any additional guidance the Commission can provide to ensure these additions are well integrated and contextual additions to the area.*

- **Sound walls** - Two sound walls are proposed along the eastern edge of I-5 between the freeway and Lillis-Albina Park and Harriet Tubman School, only one is part of this early work package. The Commission's letter to ODOT, after the briefing in 2019, included concerns with solid, tall sound walls and the impact on the visual continuity of the neighborhood on both sides of I-5. The project team was asked to consider transparent noise barriers or other alternative configurations that don't cut off views between the neighborhood. The sound walls are also located within two Scenic Corridors that support viewpoints within the park and near the school. Height limitations within these scenic corridors are 20'. The applicant has been asked to confirm the heights at the upcoming hearing to ensure the height limit is met and to facilitate discussion on the scale. The currently proposed pattern and symbols on the freeway-facing side were developed with the HAAB, and the eastern/neighborhood face will include a mural or other work developed through RACC in the future.
 - *Staff encourages discussion about the scale, height, and design of the sound walls as well as any alternatives considered by the project team.*
- **Retaining Walls.** At the December 2022 briefing, the Commission provided comments on the large scale of Wall 15, noting the scale should be minimized to avoid another sea of concrete using concepts such as terracing and changes in plane as potential solutions to study. Also recommended was using the wall surface as an opportunity to celebrate local black artists, designers, and the legacy of Jazz (and music in general).
 - *Staff encourages discussion of the large expanse of the concrete retaining walls, in general, and opportunities for local, cultural, and historic imagery.*
- **Durability.** At the December briefing 2022, the Commission provided comments on the durability and long-term maintenance of these embellishments, including the need for vandal-resistance, vandal access prevention to visible surfaces, and ease of replacement and repair.
 - *Staff encourages discussion of the long-term durability of the proposed embellishment details.*

NEXT STEPS

Discuss the right time in the project for ODOT to return to the Commission for the next briefing, which should be when the main project area is further along in design but before any final decisions are made.

Please contact me at (503) 865.6516 with any questions or concerns.

Enclosures: *Applicant's presentation*
 Joint Commission Letter to PBOT dated 1/4/2023
 Design Commission Letter to ODOT dated 4/1/2019