

**From:** Reza Michael Farhoodi [mailto:rmichael87@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 09, 2016 8:25 AM  
**To:** Planning and Sustainability Commission <psc@portlandoregon.gov>  
**Cc:** Treat, Leah <Leah.Treat@portlandoregon.gov>; Commissioner Novick <novick@portlandoregon.gov>  
**Subject:** Central City 2035 Plan Testimony re: Overton Street

August 9, 2016

Members of the Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission,

My name is Reza Farhoodi and I'm on the Pearl District Neighborhood Association board, as well as a co-chair of our Planning and Transportation committee (however, this testimony is on behalf of myself). Over the past several months, our committee has been involved in the Central City Transportation System Plan process with staff at the Bureau of Transportation. After the Discussion Draft of the TSP was released earlier this year, Mauricio LeClerc and Zef Wagner from PBOT attended one of our meetings to present on the draft, and our committee voted to send a letter in response with some suggestions to improve the plan (attached in this email). When the Proposed Draft was released in June, we were delighted to see that many of our suggestions were incorporated in the new version of the plan. While our neighborhood has been very happy with the process overall, there is one item that remains unresolved that I would like to bring to your attention.

The following is an excerpt from our March 2016 letter to PBOT:

In the past several years, the North Pearl has seen rapid growth as several new multifamily apartment and condominium buildings have been built, are under construction, or are in the planning stages. As more units come on line, the neighborhood has seen traffic grow on NW Overton Street and with it, an increase in speeding and other risky driving behavior. This is especially at issue because Overton Street is a primary bicycle thoroughfare and the area around Fields Park sees frequent pedestrian crossings. One of the problems with NW Overton is that there has been no traffic calming installed (besides a temporary *[and since removed]* four-way stop sign and diagonal crosswalk at NW 11th Avenue installed due to construction), which may stem from its traffic classifications as an Emergency Response Route and Traffic Access Street. Overton has held these designations since well before the Lovejoy-Northrup coupled was completed in 2011.

...

The neighborhood recognizes the access challenges for fire trucks traveling between Station #3 and Naito Parkway, but the lack of permanent stop control, speed bumps, or any other traffic calming along the five-block stretch of Overton between NW 9th and NW 14th creates an untenable situation that will only get worse. The 2012 Pearl

District Access and Circulation Plan stated that "**Traffic control for Overton will be evaluated as the area redevelops and traffic conditions change**". With the North Pearl area continuing to grow and fill in, it is our expectation that the city and neighborhood will work together to develop a permanent traffic control solution that improves safety and livability while retaining emergency vehicle access.

Since our letter was written, PBOT has painted two marked crosswalks along Overton at 10th and 11th Avenues, which are a welcome improvement but do not help reduce instances of speeding or other risky driver maneuvers such as unsafe passing of bicyclists along the street. To this point, PBOT has not promised any additional intervention measures to improve the existing condition, citing the street's Emergency Response classification. This is not an acceptable outcome for the neighborhood, or for anyone who has spent enough time walking across or bicycling along Overton Street, especially during commute hours.

I urge the city to fulfill its obligations from the 2012 Access and Circulation Plan by conducting a speed survey and PM peak traffic counts on Overton, and working with the neighborhood to develop sensible solutions (such as installing speed humps, or perhaps an additional, permanent four-way stop sign) to make this street safer and less stressful to everyone before more buildings in the area are completed and the problem worsens.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Reza Farhoodi  
1230 NW 12th Avenue Apt 228  
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March 31, 2016

Re: Central City 2035 Transportation System Plan Discussion Draft

Dear Portland Bureau of Transportation staff,

Thank you for your work on the Central City 2035 discussion draft of Transportation System Plan. This plan is important to chart the course towards a more sustainable, livable, and vibrant central city that provides greater emphasis on multimodal travel and safe streets. The Pearl District Neighborhood Association has worked with the city on the West Quadrant Plan to help develop transportation and land use goals, policies and implementation actions that reflect the Pearl District's high density, mixed use, urban character and represents our status not only as a residential neighborhood, pedestrian district and bicycle district, but as a major commercial and employment hub.

Upon review of the draft, our neighborhood has several comments to offer regarding proposed plans, projects and facility designations in the Pearl District. These comments are based in part on recent plans and discussions between local residents and city staff:

#### **Reaffirm the City's Commitment to Projects in the 2012 Access and Circulation Plan**

The neighborhood worked with the city to develop several projects to improve mobility and access in the neighborhood. While several of these have been completed or are in the planning stages, there are outstanding elements that remain priorities for the neighborhood, including:

- Bikeway connection along the North Park Blocks with crossing improvements at W Burnside Street
- Improvements along NW 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, including enhanced crossings
- Lane reconfiguration on NW Naito Parkway
- Lane reconfiguration on NW Hoyt Street
- Redesign NW 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue to improve pedestrian access
- New signals along NW Northrup Street, Glisan Street and Everett Street

#### **Deliver the Flanders Neighborhood Greenway and Naito Crossing**

First proposed in the 1972 Downtown Plan, the Flanders Greenway is critical for improving east-west bicycle and pedestrian connectivity in the heart of the Central City. The Flanders link would include a new bike/ped bridge across I-405 to allow users to bypass the Glisan/Everett interchange area which is very hostile to pedestrians. The bridge would be built to withstand emergency vehicles in the event of an earthquake. In addition, the greenway would include several crossing improvements at NW 16<sup>th</sup>, NW 14<sup>th</sup> and NW Broadway and create a safe, legal crossing at Naito Parkway near the Steel Bridge and the Union Pacific Railroad Crossing. This greenway would not only serve the 7,000 residents in the Pearl District, but it would also serve the 12,000 employees that commute to the Pearl District from across the

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region. The corridor would also improve access to and from Northwest District, where there are an additional 10,000 residents and 12,000 employees.

### **Devise Comprehensive Construction Detour Policy**

The citywide construction boom have not been limited to only the Pearl District, but the scale and pace of development has made the impacts to pedestrians more acute. Frequent sidewalk closures often force pedestrians to walk multiple times in the same block, as construction companies are allowed to keep multiple travel lanes open while the parking lane is also kept open or is used for materials storage. The most dangerous condition in our neighborhood is currently located at NW 11<sup>th</sup> and Hoyt, where a construction project at the southwest corner forces pedestrians to walk along streetcar tracks. These conditions are unsafe and truly unrepresentative for a city as pedestrian-oriented as Portland, and it's time for the City to develop a rational construction detour policy that follows the modal hierarchy based on Policy 9.6 (Transportation Strategy for People Movement) of the Comprehensive Plan Update. Therefore, maintaining pedestrian routes and bikeways in a construction zone should take priority over maintaining duplicate travel lanes and parking lanes, or using those spaces as construction storage.

### **Invest in the NW 14<sup>th</sup>/NW 16<sup>th</sup> Corridor to Improve Connectivity and Safety**

This couplet is bisected by I-405 and split between the Pearl District and Northwest District, but it serves as a vital travel corridor for both local and regional traffic and deserves additional enhancements. The area around the Everett/Glisan/I-405 interchange is of particular concern because motorists are often in a "freeway mindset" when either exiting the freeway or approaching the on-ramps on NW 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, traveling at speeds that are inappropriate in a downtown urban context and endangering vulnerable road users.

- Eliminate existing bicycle lane gaps on NW 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and extend the bikeway south from NW Couch Street along NW/SW 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue to SW Salmon Street, and perhaps beyond as the Lincoln HS campus is redeveloped. This would create a southbound complement to the existing northbound bike lane on NW/SW 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, in a neighborhood that lacks north-south bicycle facilities.
- Redesign the NW Glisan/I-405 interchange area to prohibit drivers exiting the freeway onto NW 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue from turning west onto NW Flanders Street. Currently, right turns directly from the southbound off-ramp onto NW Glisan Street are banned. Instead of heeding the "three left turns" suggestion that is advised on roadway signage, many motorists heading to Northwest from the freeway instead make dangerous weaving movements that threaten the safety of other drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists. This design flaw must be fixed whether or not the Flanders greenway connection is built.
- Improve conditions on NW 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue to reduce instances of speeding and improve bicycle conditions. Currently, traffic exiting onto northbound NW 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue from the freeway often continue to travel at high speeds even after entering the urban street grid. This compromises safety at busy pedestrian crossings, such as at NW Flanders and Johnson Streets. In addition, the

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existing bicycle lane on NW 14<sup>th</sup> is often not respected by northbound drivers turning east onto side streets, which can potentially lead to right hook collisions between motorists and bicycle riders. A redesign might include a buffered or separated bike lane treatment to increase the lateral width of the bicycle lane and create a more comfortable facility. This enhancement would also reduce the width of the travel lane north of NW Glisan which can help calm traffic speeds.

### **Regrade the Railroad Crossing at NW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

To our knowledge, this location is the last remaining grade crossing along the UPRR Main Line that has not been improved in the Central City and it creates uncomfortable conditions for both bicycle riders and motorists. NW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a popular bicycle route as it connects riders between several east-west bicycle facilities, and is the main access point between Naito Parkway and Northwest Portland.

### **Install Traffic Signals at NW 10<sup>th</sup>/Hoyt Street and NW 11<sup>th</sup>/Hoyt Street**

NW Hoyt Street is a popular route for trucks within the district. Replacing the four-way stop signs with traffic signals at both intersections would improve east-west mobility and reduce delay for streetcar trains traveling on NW 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

### **Implement Traffic Calming on NW Overton Street**

In the past several years, the North Pearl has seen rapid growth as several new multifamily apartment and condominium buildings have been built, are under construction, or are in the planning stages. As more units come on line, the neighborhood has seen traffic grow on NW Overton Street and with it, an increase in speeding and other risky driving behavior. This is especially an issue because Overton Street is a primary bicycle thoroughfare and the area around Fields Park sees frequent pedestrian crossings. One of the problems with NW Overton is that there has been no traffic calming installed (besides a temporary four-way stop sign and diagonal crosswalk at NW 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue installed due to construction), which may stem from its traffic classifications as an Emergency Response Route and Traffic Access Street. Overton has held these designations since well before the Lovejoy-Northrup couplet was completed in 2011, yet the TSP does not propose establishing NW Northrup Street as a response route to complement the existing designation on NW Lovejoy Street. The neighborhood recognizes the access challenges for fire trucks traveling between Station 03 and Naito Parkway, but the lack of permanent stop control, speed bumps, or any other traffic calming along the five-block stretch of Overton from NW 9<sup>th</sup> to NW 14<sup>th</sup> creates an untenable situation that will only get worse. The 2012 Access and Circulation Plan stated that "Traffic control for Overton will be evaluated as the area redevelops and traffic conditions change". With the North Pearl area continuing to grow and fill in, it is our expectation that the city and neighborhood will work together to develop a permanent traffic control solution that improves safety and livability while retaining emergency vehicle access.

### **Acknowledge the Neighborhood Greenway Assessment Report and Develop Northwest in Motion Implementation Strategy**

The 2015 Neighborhood Greenway Assessment Report adopted by City Council revealed that the neighborhood greenway network as a whole in Northwest Portland does not function well because there is a

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lack of connectivity between these facilities and the rest of the citywide bicycle network. In addition, many of these greenways (including NW Johnson Street, NW Flanders Street and NW Overton Street) perform below citywide standards because traffic volumes are too high. The lack of comfortable and convenient bicycle connections could partly explain why bicycle commute mode share for residents and employees is below 10 percent, which is very low for a neighborhood as dense and centrally located as the Pearl District. To help meet citywide goals for 25% bicycle mode share, efforts must be undertaken to develop a plan that takes a holistic approach to traffic circulation in the northwest neighborhoods and prioritizes greenways for through bicycle/pedestrian travel, as approved by the Northwest District and Pearl District neighborhood associations. The city has previously discussed the following potential implementation actions:

- Develop NW Pettygrove Street as an east-west greenway with pathway connection to NW Naito Parkway via NW Overton and NW 9th (Project 20163).
- Develop a north-south bikeway on NW 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue to connect between bikeways on NW Naito Parkway, NW Overton Street, NW Marshall Street, NW Lovejoy Street, NW Johnson Street, and NW Hoyt Street. (Project 20154)
- Realign the existing greenway on NW Raleigh Street to NW Savier Street.
- Develop a pilot project on NW Johnson Street to reduce automobile volumes below the citywide standard of 1000 vehicles per day. Please note that we are concerned that the proposed emergency response route designation on NW Johnson Street between NW 19<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenues is in direct conflict with the traffic calming goals of a neighborhood greenway, and hope that it will not preclude future enhancements.

### **Improve Conditions where NW Couch Street Crosses the I-405 Northbound On-Ramp**

The intersection where NW Couch Street crosses with the I-405 northbound on-ramp has long been a concern for residents. The crossing is uncontrolled, so that northbound traffic headed to the freeway is free-flow while pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists have to wait for a gap in traffic to cross. This area is similar to the Everett/Glisan interchange where motorists on NW 14th headed towards the on-ramp will typically begin accelerating at a high rate of speed once they cross Burnside Street to merge onto the mainline interstate. However, this creates a safety hazard for vulnerable users on Couch Street, particularly pedestrians. The upcoming Downtown I-405 Pedestrian Safety and Operational Improvements Project will help somewhat by adding curb extensions and a marked crosswalk on the north side of the intersection, but more work can be done here.

### **Allocate Funding from Central City Multimodal Safety Project to Serve Pearl District Residents and Employees**

This upcoming project promises to improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists in the Central City. While protected bikeways and bridge landing improvements are very much needed in the central core, it is our hope that some resources are used towards one or multiple TSP projects to improve access to jobs and services in the heart of the Pearl District (beyond bikeway improvements on NW Broadway, which is at the periphery of the neighborhood).

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Thank you again for your efforts on the Central City Transportation System Plan update and we look forward to working with PBOT on improving the draft to reflect the needs of current and future residents, visitors and employees of the neighborhood.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reza Farhoodi'. The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a prominent star-like flourish at the end.

Reza Farhoodi

Pearl District Neighborhood Association  
Planning and Transportation Committee Co-Chair

