



# Active Right of Way

info@activerightofway.org – www.activerightofway.org

*A community of advocates, activists,  
and professionals dedicated to safe,  
equitable and responsible use of the  
public right of way in Portland, Oregon.*

September 11, 2012

To: Planning and Sustainability Commission  
1900 SW 4th Avenue, Portland, OR 97201-5380

ATTN: I-5 Broadway/Weidler Facility Plans

Dear Planning and Sustainability Commission:

While we are generally supportive of the surface improvements proposed in the I-5 Broadway/Weidler Facility Plan, we continue to hold serious reservations about the highway widening proposal and the way the public process was conducted.

## **FUNDING PRIORITIES.**

In a time when existing maintenance obligations are increasing and funding is decreasing, spending \$400 million on widening one very short segment of freeway is something we can't afford. A freeway creates negative outcomes for community cohesion, public health, and economic development; widening it only increases future maintenance obligations. Destroying the existing structures to create even larger scars in the local street and land use grid is wasteful and not in line with local sustainability goals.

## **SAFETY PRIORITIES.**

Although this project is billed as a safety project, only the safety of the freeway has been truly considered. Crash statistics for the freeway segment are reported in great detail, but crashes on surrounding surface streets resulting from the disordered street system created by the off ramps, the chaotic driving due to congestion, and the speed of entrance and exit to the freeway were never mentioned. In particular, the effect of the freeway's presence on bicycle and pedestrian travel was discussed only conceptually. The result is to give high weight to what are usually minor freeway crashes, while minimizing the importance of surface street safety as highlighted in [Metro's State of Safety report](#). If safety is the true priority, we request that surface improvements be prioritized over freeway expansion.

## **TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT NOT CONSIDERED.**

Throughout the process, the concept of reducing freeway travel demand and increasing safety by minimizing the need for merge movements using traffic systems technology was introduced last and without further detail. When questioned, staff expressed interest in concepts, but could not provide a specific plan they had developed using such measures and could list very few measures that they had considered, omitting most state-of-the-art TDM technology and programs. This lack of attention to TDM planning is

not in line with the adopted state guidelines requiring least-cost planning, since TDM measures are usually inexpensive compared to new construction and can be very effective in reducing travel demand. We might be able to spend far less to achieve the same result, but due to staff choices not to develop this option fully, we have no idea whether this is possible or not. This is unacceptable.

### **HIGHWAYS OR NEIGHBORHOODS?**

The public process failed to create an inclusive committee or process, and did not adequately represent neighborhood-level stakeholders. While developers and business owners were well represented, the residents of adjacent neighborhoods and those displaced by the original Memorial Coliseum & I-5 projects were not part of the public process. The result is the continuation of over a half-century of the power struggle of highway planners overpowering the Albina community: Boise, Humboldt, Eliot, King, Overlook, Irvington, and Piedmont. This power struggle was recently highlighted in PBOT's Williams Avenue Traffic Operations & Safety Project, a process that was heavily scrutinized by those concerned with the racial and economic injustices experienced by members of the Albina community to this day. We are disappointed that this project continues to benefit from this imbalance of power. The I-5 Freeway, Memorial Coliseum and Emanuel Hospital have brought serious environmental burdens on Albina which must be addressed. We do not find the highway elements of this proposal to be consistent with the feedback and concerns of the neighborhoods impacted by the highway..

The I-5/RQ project scope was pre-defined to exclude a conversation about freeway ramp removal or relocation, despite staff indicating it would provide more significant safety gains than the current freeway widening proposal. Such ideas were dismissed early in the public charrette process with the comment that they were "out of scope" and no further explanation provided to stakeholders.

### **BAD FOR PUBLIC HEALTH.**

There is no getting around how toxic and detrimental I-5 is to our city's health. The highway contributes to our city's poor air quality and high asthma rates. The large concrete cover required by a freeway increases surface air temperature and reduces land available for parks and greenways. Highway off-ramps are dangerous for people traveling in the area, particularly people walking and biking, and increase injury and death due to traffic behavior. None of these public health concerns were taken into account in this process. We are not convinced destroying the current bridge structures and widening the highway to allow more cars in the neighborhood will provide a true benefit for the public good.

**HIGHWAY EXPANSION IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH DESIRED LAND USE.**

The Rose Quarter is an economic hub for the city and the amount of surface activity and transit is intense. Portland has made a significant investment in transit in the area with 4 MAX lines and a dozen bus lines meeting at the transit center, alongside the new Eastside Streetcar loop running along Broadway/Weidler. The corridor is a critical link for bicycle and pedestrian traffic and the Rose Quarter neighborhood is designated a Pedestrian District in the Transportation System Plan. We do not believe highway expansion is appropriate for supporting the type of walkable and vibrant corridor envisioned by residents and by the N/NE Quadrant Plan as a whole. The construction necessary to widen the highway is likely to halt housing and economic development in the area for many years.

Finally, this is one of the first plans prepared under the aegis of the recently-adopted Portland Plan. The Portland Plan calls for a “Healthy Connected City” and “Economic Prosperity and Affordability”, including strategies for residents to “Walk, bike or take public transportation to get where you need to go.” Beyond the surface improvements, this proposal does not support these laudable goals. We urge the planning commission and city council to fast track the surface improvements and put on hold the highway-widening proposal.

Sincerely,

Steve Bozzone & Alexis Grant  
Active Right of Way

CC: City Council, BPS, ODOT, PBOT, Portland Office of Equity