

I-5 Delta Park: Victory to Lombard Section

Recommendations of the I-5 Delta Park Hearings Panel for the Locally Preferred Alternative

April 28, 2006

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to convey the recommendations of the I-5 Delta Park Hearings Panel regarding the selection of a Preferred Alternative for the I-5 Delta Park Project. The Hearings Panel was composed of: Charlie Sciscione, ODOT Deputy Region 1 Manager, Cathy Nelson, ODOT Technical Services Manager/Chief Engineer, City of Portland Commissioner Sam Adams, Sue Keil, Director of the Portland Office of Transportation, Metro Councilor Rex Burkholder, and Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard.

The recommendations are based on the findings of the Environmental Assessment, public comments on the Environmental Assessment, recommendations from the project's Citizen Advisory Committee and Environmental Justice Work Group, recommendations from local, regional and state staff, and input from ODOT's local, state and federal environmental regulators.

The Hearings Panel's recommendations will be sent to the Bi-State Coordinating Committee, the Portland City Council, the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation, and the Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement for Streamlining (CETAS) for review and endorsement in May/June 2006. The Preferred Alternative will be documented in a Revised Environmental Assessment that is expected to be published in July/August 2006.

Background:

The I-5: Delta Park to Lombard project was one of several highway, transit and rail projects recommended by the I-5 Strategic Partnership. It is the first of the recommended projects to be developed for the I-5 Corridor. The Columbia River Crossing Project is the next project that will be developed. The public process for that project has recently been initiated.

Over the past three years, considerable public input has been solicited and considered at all stages of developing the I-5 Delta Park Project. ODOT formed two project advisory committees, a Citizen Advisory Committee and the Environmental Justice Work Group, to guide development of the project. The advisory committees and public input have influenced the development of the purpose and need statement for the project, the evaluation factors for the project, the range of alternatives studied in the Environmental Assessment, and the recommendation of the preferred alternative.

In developing this project ODOT has also worked closely with regional and local jurisdictions, most notably with staff from City of Portland's Transportation, Planning, Parks, and Environmental Services bureaus and staff from the Portland Development Commission.

The Environmental Assessment for this project included a No Build alternative and four Build alternatives. Each of the Build alternatives proposed the same improvements to the I-5 freeway including: widening I-5 to three lanes southbound, widening shoulders and medians northbound, reconstructing the southbound Columbia Blvd. on ramp as a merge lane, and geometric changes at the Columbia Blvd. Blvd. and Lombard St. interchanges. The four Build alternatives differed from one another in the proposed changes in access between Columbia Blvd. and I-5.

This project is anticipated to be constructed in two phases. Phase I construction would include the proposed I-5 freeway improvements. This phase of construction is anticipated to begin in 2008 and be completed in 2010. Phase II construction would include the proposed changes in access between Columbia Blvd. and I-5. A construction year for Phase II has not yet been established.

Recommendations:

The Hearings Panel's recommendations are presented below and are separated into the following categories:

- ❖ Preferred Alternative Recommendation
- ❖ Recommended Changes to the Preferred Alternative
- ❖ Recommendations for Final Design and Construction Phases
- ❖ Mitigation Measures and Community Enhancements Recommendations
- ❖ High Occupancy Vehicle Lane Recommendations
- ❖ Phasing and Financing Recommendations

Preferred Alternative Recommendation:

The Hearings Panel recommends Alternative 2-Argyle on the Hill as the preferred alternative for the I-5 Delta Park Project for the following reasons:

Transportation:

- ◆ The proposed improvements to I-5, which are common to all four Build alternatives, will improve the operation, efficiency and safety of the freeway in the project area. The greatest operation and efficiency improvements will be experienced during the mid-day, evening, and weekend periods.
- ◆ Alternative 2 reinforces existing access routes, maintains familiar freeway travel patterns, and makes the least change in freeway access.
- ◆ Alternative 2 does not require traffic calming measures to encourage use of the new freeway access route.
- ◆ Alternative 2 reconstructs the Denver Avenue Bridge over Columbia Blvd., which is a long-term capital maintenance/replacement liability concern for the City and ODOT.
- ◆ Alternative 2 has the least negative traffic impact on the operation of Portland International Raceway.

Neighborhood Livability:

- ◆ Alternative 2 results in the greatest reduction in traffic on existing Argyle Way and would provide the greatest improvement to the pedestrian environment along the existing Argyle Way. The volume of auto and truck traffic on Argyle Way has been identified as negatively impacting future development in the Kenton Light Rail Station area. This alternative relocates Argyle Way to the periphery of the Kenton downtown, and away from Kenton Park, downtown Kenton and the light rail station.
- ◆ Alternative 2 results in a noticeable decrease in noise levels for approximately 3 blocks of mixed use/residential properties and Kenton Park.
- ◆ Alternative 2 minimizes impacts on the planned Columbia Slough Trail.

Environmental Impacts:

- ◆ Alternative 2 has the least environmental impacts and is, therefore, consistent with City of Portland’s Type II Environmental Review requirements and approval criteria.
- ◆ Alternative 2 affects less environmentally sensitive land by expanding existing development rather than building a new bridge over the Columbia Slough.
- ◆ Alternative 2 maintains the wildlife corridor for North and Northeast Portland by not breaking up existing habitat for birds and animals along the Columbia Slough with new bridges or roads.
- ◆ Alternative 2 minimizes impacts on the existing forested riparian strip located between the N. Denver Avenue bridge and the I-5 bridge. New bridges or roads along the slough would remove vegetation and replace it with new impervious surface. This would result in a potential increase in pollutants and sediment entering the slough.
- ◆ Alternative 2 requires the least amount of new impervious surface (paving). Impervious surfaces have the potential to increase stormwater runoff, raise water temperature, and increase pollutant loading into nearby waterways.

Economic/Redevelopment Impacts:

- ◆ Alternative 2 minimizes business displacements.
- ◆ Alternative 2 has the potential to positively affect the redevelopment prospects of high density sites around Argyle Way and Interstate Avenue, provided that that Phase II is developed and funded as soon as reasonably practicable.
- ◆ Alternative 2 has the second lowest property acquisitions.

Recommendations for Changes to the Preferred Alternative:

The Hearings Panel recommends that Alternative 2 be amended as follows and that these changes be documented in the project’s Revised Environmental Assessment:

- ❖ The reconstruction of the Denver Avenue Bridge over the Columbia Slough should be added to Alternative 2. Reconstructing both of the Denver Avenue Bridges at the same time will minimize community disruption in the long term.

- ❖ The Schmeer Road realignment should be moved further south to minimize impacts to the TMT Development/Container Care property. The opportunity to move the Schmeer Road realignment further south is provided by reconstructing the Denver Avenue Bridge over the Columbia Slough.

Recommendations for Final Design and Construction Phases:

As Phase I and Phase II of the I-5 Delta Park Project go through the final design and construction work, the Hearings Panel recommends that:

- ❖ During Phase I, ODOT further investigate ramp meters and lane treatments on the Columbia Blvd. southbound on-ramp with the objective of balancing the desire for most efficient entry to I-5 for trucks with the operational needs of the ramp.
- ❖ ODOT develop Phase II improvements in cooperation with the Portland Office of Transportation to ensure that the local circulation elements (new Argyle Way, Denver Avenue Bridges and Schmeer Road) are developed with appropriate City input and review.
- ❖ ODOT ensure that development of Phase II improvements includes opportunities for public input on roadway and structures designs for local circulation elements including: the new Argyle Way, the Denver Avenue Bridges, and Schmeer Road.
- ❖ During development of Phase II improvements, ODOT continue to investigate design modifications for the new Argyle Way alignment balancing the objectives of minimizing property impacts, maximizing re-development opportunities, and optimizing transportation safety and operations.
- ❖ During development of Phase II improvements, ODOT continue to investigate design options for bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the Denver Avenue Bridges balancing the objectives of providing good bicycle and pedestrian access, accommodating freight movement, minimizing property impacts, and optimizing traffic safety and operations.
- ❖ During Phase I and Phase II, ODOT coordinate with the Portland Office of Transportation to provide for City review of the construction management plan, which will ensure the least possible business and community disruption during the construction of these improvements.
- ❖ ODOT work with the Portland Office of Transportation to vacate portions of the existing Argyle Way during Phase II construction to help the area around Argyle Way to reach its full redevelopment potential.
- ❖ ODOT and the Portland Office of Transportation develop an Intergovernmental Agreement(s) regarding the ownership and maintenance of local circulation elements of the project, the development of an access management plan for the interchange area, and the implementation of local system community enhancements.

Mitigation Measures and Community Enhancements Recommendations:

With regard to mitigation measures and community enhancements, the Hearings Panel recommends:

- ❖ Implementing the full mitigation and conservation measures outlined in the Environmental Assessment including: erosion and sediment control measures, air and water pollution control measures, wetlands mitigation measures, landscaping and riparian re-vegetation measures, fish conservation measures, fencing for the Columbian Cemetery, and meaningful workforce diversity and DBE goals.
- ❖ Adding an additional mitigation measure to the Environmental Assessment for ODOT to provide technical assistance during Phase II of construction to help local businesses prepare for the construction impacts of both of the Denver Avenue Bridge replacements.
- ❖ Setting the Community Enhancement Fund for the I-5 Delta Park Project at \$1 million.

High Occupancy Vehicle Lane Recommendations:

With regard to an HOV lane or other managed lane, the Hearings Panel recommends that:

- ❖ The I-5 Delta Park Revised Environmental Assessment identify that one of the I-5 southbound lanes may be operated as an HOV or managed lane in the future between, approximately, the Marine Drive and Alberta interchanges.
- ❖ ODOT make a decision about whether or not to operate a southbound HOV or managed lane in Oregon by the time the I-5 Delta Park Project is opened to traffic, in approximately 2010. In making this decision ODOT should seek recommendations from the Bi-State Coordination Committee, JPACT and Metro Council and seek an amendment to the RTP as necessary.
- ❖ ODOT conduct additional investigation of a southbound HOV or managed lane using traffic data and traffic models constructed for the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Project in order to explore:
 - ◆ Transit service assumptions for a HOV or managed lane;
 - ◆ The length and duration of congestion on I-5, SR 14 and SR 500 with and without an HOV or managed lane;
 - ◆ The feasibility of operating the lane as a managed lane;
 - ◆ Enforcement levels needed for an HOV or managed lane;
 - ◆ How CRC Project decisions regarding future high-capacity transit, freeway, and transportation demand management would support operation of an HOV or managed lane in Oregon.
- ❖ ODOT coordinate its analysis and decision making regarding a southbound HOV or managed lane with the Bi-State Coordination Committee and appropriate Bi-State staff.
- ❖ The CRC Project continue to investigate HOV and managed lane concepts for the Portland/Vancouver I-5 corridor through the EIS.

The Hearings Panel makes these recommendations for the following reasons:

- ❖ Local, regional, state and federal policies are supportive of providing transportation options other than the single-occupancy vehicle in the I-5 corridor.
- ❖ More investigation of transit service levels, congestion impacts, feasibility, and enforcement is warranted prior to making a final decision about southbound HOV or managed lane implementation.
- ❖ Additional information about the long-range southbound HOV and managed lane system is likely to result from the Columbia River Crossing Project. The decision about implementation of a southbound HOV or managed lane in Oregon should be coordinated, to the greatest extent practicable, with the CRC Project direction for HOV and managed lanes.

Phasing and Financing Recommendations:

The Hearings Panel recommends that funding for design, property acquisition and construction of Phase II be prioritized by ODOT and the City, and a project implementation schedule for Phase II construction be established.