

**Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates**

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*Also known as OreARP • Oregon Association of Railway Passengers*



Date: June 7, 2012

To: N/NE Quadrant Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC)

By: Jim Howell, Planning Director, AORTA

Subject: I-5 Broadway/Weidler Interchange Improvement Plan

We sincerely urge you and our local political leaders to choose “No Build” as the preferred alternative for this extremely flawed Facility Plan for “I-5 Broadway/Weidler Interchange Improvements.” As it stands, this project smacks of the outrageously defective Columbia River Crossing—badly envisioned and highly overpriced.

While local, state and federal policy all promote the highest environmental values—reduction of greenhouse gases, vehicle miles traveled, fuel consumption, air pollution, urban sprawl, and global warming—it is inconceivable that ODOT and PBOT would promote a billion-dollar freeway-widening project in the middle of Portland at the Rose Quarter.

Let’s be honest. The N/NE Quadrant Project has been promoted as a local street and neighborhood improvement plan when in fact it has actually been an excuse to promote a freeway-widening venture. It will require massive demolition and reconstruction of major arterial overpasses with huge disruptions to neighborhoods and local traffic patterns while providing practically no benefits. It’s CRC Lite by any serious analysis.

Where is the wisdom in spending hundreds of millions of dollars to demolish, then replace, perfectly good infrastructure in order to temporarily relieve some local traffic congestion when the same money

could be used to repair miles of crumbling city streets?

The City of Portland has meekly accepted Metro's and ODOT's flawed traffic demand- forecasts, which are the reason this unsustainable project has progressed so far. Now is the time to reevaluate these forecasts as well as the bigger regional transportation picture that should include a more robust public transportation component.

So far Metro has not proposed a viable public transportation alternative to I-5 through the metropolitan area. MAX provides this alternative in the east-west plane between Gresham and Hillsboro, despite the significant bottleneck in downtown Portland. On the other hand, the north-south I-5 corridor has only the Yellow Line providing efficient high-capacity transit service north of the Rose Quarter—currently to the Expo Center and eventually to Clark County. But there is no plan to extend it southward to the edge of the metro area.

Whenever the concept of extending MAX south from the Rose Quarter has been raised at public meetings, members of the project team dismiss such comments as not germane to the prevailing local planning study. Yet widening I-5 at the Rose Quarter is being undertaken—not to fix a local traffic problem—but primarily to correct a bottleneck in an interstate freeway.

The message here flies in the face of agency environmental values, raising the idea that freeways are more important than public transport, a clear double standard.

Please put this flawed I-5 Broadway/Weidler Interchange Improvements Project on the shelf and quit spending limited public funds for expensive consultants until Metro and TriMet get their acts together and develop a regional public transportation system with an effective north-south light rail corridor that will actually reduce traffic demand, specifically on these interchanges and systemically on all the region's freeways.