



Date: Thursday, April 21, 2016
To: Southwest Corridor Plan steering committee
From: Matt Bihn, Metro
Subject: AORTA proposal concerning WES

This memo responds the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates' (AORTA) proposal presented to the Southwest Corridor steering committee at its January 11, 2016 meeting.

Mr. Jim Howell, a member of AORTA, suggested the steering committee shift its focus to upgrading the existing peak-only Westside Express Service (WES) commuter rail to all-day service light rail. He stated that this option would significantly reduce traffic congestion and have fewer environmental and construction impacts compared to the high capacity transit options currently under consideration. He suggested the SW Corridor project be paused until such a date that enough funding is available for the optimal transit option, which AORTA envisions as a light rail operating in a tunnel under much of the corridor.

Improvements to WES, which operates between Wilsonville and Beaverton and includes stations in downtown Tualatin and downtown Tigard, were deliberated and removed from consideration by the Southwest Corridor steering committee on October 22, 2012, for the following reasons:

- WES serves circumferential travel demand in this corridor but not demand along the spine of the corridor.
- Improvements would only serve the limited locations that already have WES service, and would not sufficiently support identified land use goals within the Southwest corridor.
- Capital improvements required for all-day operations alongside existing freight rail, including double-tracking and safety elements, would result in highest property impact magnitude of options studied.

The WES corridor (Beaverton to Wilsonville) ranks as a Near Term Regional Priority Corridor in Metro's High Capacity Transit System Plan. As such, the steering committee agreed that WES merits further analysis as part of a corridor study separate from the Southwest Corridor Plan.

In addition, the improvements to WES service would not meet the Southwest Corridor Plan's purpose and need. The Project Purpose states:

The purpose of the Southwest Corridor Transit project is to connect Tualatin, Tigard, Southwest Portland, and the region's central city through a high capacity transit project and appropriate community investments in a congested corridor to improve mobility and create the conditions that will allow communities in the corridor to achieve their land use vision.

A project improving WES service or converting WES from commuter rail to light rail would not connect Tualatin and Tigard to Southwest Portland or the central city. Nor would it address several of the specific project goals included in the Purpose and Need that apply to areas within the Southwest corridor, including:

- Increase multimodal transportation options and improve mobility in the corridor
- Serve the existing and projected transit demand in the corridor
- Improve transit reliability in the corridor
- Complete multimodal transportation networks in the corridor

Finally, the project partners' land use visions are the foundation of the Southwest Corridor Plan. The HCT alignments currently under consideration were developed to support local land use plans. While a project on the WES alignment would have many benefits, it would not support implementation of local land use plans in Portland or in the Tigard Triangle, where WES does not operate.