

Multnomah County LIT Meeting 4: Downtown Portland Corridor

Meeting: Metro Local Investment Team, Multnomah County

Date/time: July 31, 2019 5 pm-7:30 pm

Place: Portland Bureau of Transportation, 1900 Building

Purpose: Review possible projects and gather LIT feedback

Attendance

LIT Members

Arlene Kimura

Reza Farhoodi

Thomas Ngo

Staff

Matt Bihn, Metro

Tyler Frisbee, Metro

Camilla Dartnell, *Kittelson & Associates, Inc.*

Hermanus Steyn, *Kittelson & Associates, Inc.*

Jaye Cromwell, *JLA Public Involvement*

Brandy Steffen, *JLA Public Involvement*

General Public

Jessica Berry, *Multnomah County*

Sam Chase, *Metro*

Jamey Duhamel, *Office of Commissioner Eudaly*

Orlando Lopez Bautista, *OPAL*

Jesse Lopez, *350PDX*

Huy Ong, *OPAL*

Jeff Owen, *TriMet*

Walter Robinson, II, *Getting There Together Coalition*

Bob Stacey, *Metro Council*

Mark, *City of Portland*

Summary of Discussion

The discussion focused on the need for transportation investments in downtown Portland that could make it easier for people to get around, especially those who have been disproportionately impacted by disinvestment, including people of color and people with low incomes. LIT members agreed that projects needed to improve both accessibility and speed for users across the transportation system, especially in East Portland. LIT members were split between the desire to support a large project like the MAX Tunnel Study or to support smaller, more ordinary improvements like sidewalk infill. However, all agreed that the region needs an overarching vision

for transportation. Another theme of this discussion was improving health and safety for residents adjacent to these projects and resiliency of our infrastructure.

Meeting

The meeting began with a round of introductions followed by a brief review of the purpose of the LIT feedback and history of engagement around the T2020 initiative. Camilla Dartnell (Kittelson and Associates) then gave a presentation on proposed projects within the downtown corridor and the LIT members engaged in a discussion of potential projects and their priorities, facilitated by Brandy Steffen (JLA Public Involvement).

Presentation

The following summarized elements were presented regarding the Downtown Corridor (sometimes referred to as Central City):

- A summary the regional role:
 - All MAX lines and 75% of the region's frequent bus lines serve and pass through the Downtown Corridor. As the center of the Metro region, this area is the driver of the state's economy; it has the largest concentration of jobs and affordable housing in the state and it is estimated that 1/3 of Portland's future growth will occur in the Central City.
 - Regional projects are focused on traffic system management, bike and pedestrian safety, supportive alignment with local projects, and evaluating and responding to transportation capacity.
- A summary of the local role:
 - The City is charged with maintaining access and circulation to large academic, healthcare, recreational, and commercial institutions in the Downtown Corridor.
 - 18 local projects have been identified with implementation having started this summer. Project costs range from \$70-100M. Some specific projects include:
 - Central City in Motion –focused investments to transit, walking and biking in the Central City to increase the efficiency of constrained.
 - MAX Tunnel Study – a study for the opportunity to increase MAX speed and reliability by building a tunnel from Lloyd Center to Goose Hollow.
 - Ross Island Bridgehead/Naito Parkway (The Stitch) – Rebuilds westside ramps into efficient multi-modal arterial connections with Naito Parkway and reconnects divided communities with accessible, livable streets and affordable housing.
 - Connecting people & places – Investments in walking and biking infrastructure to address major system gaps and connect to regional destinations.

Tour

There was no tour associated with this meeting. It was expected that members were reasonably familiar with the corridor.

Group discussion

After the presentation, the group discussed the projects and information from the technical team. Below is a bulleted summary of comments and questions raised by LIT members, followed by responses of the technical team. Responses from Metro or Kittelson are shown as a sub-bullet. Common themes of the discussion were: equity concerns, enhancing accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists, and resiliency.

Equity concerns

- LIT members discussed the ideas of making transit competitive with driving with a special consideration of how transit can better serve riders in East Portland. Members expressed the need for a stronger narrative around equity when discussing these projects.
- LIT members discussed funding sources, and if the survey respondents represented the most affected community groups.
 - *The folks surveyed are less diverse that we would like to say; there are a lot of white males under 40. The survey was advertised on Metro's website, in the media, national and local blogs, TriMet riders, etc. The survey still going on now and we will give a summary in October after it closes. The demographic breakdown of respondents will be included.* Tyler (Metro)
- LIT members expressed interest in the possibility of re-developing the Ross Island Bridge head for affordable housing.
 - *What is in the investment measure includes the regional match. To get this money we need to show that we are fulfilling the affordable housing priorities in line with the SW Equitable Development Strategy (SWEDS).* Mark (City of Portland)
- One LIT member was concerned about housing too close to freeways and efforts to mitigate the poorer air quality and higher risk for serious health issues.
- Another LIT member asked about the quality of engagement with communities of color, non-English speakers, and people experiencing homelessness and whether it was clear to these communities the impact 10-15 years in the future.

Making it Easier to Get Around

- LIT members pointed out the congestion and traffic impacts in the Ross Island Bridge Head neighborhood; concerns regarding the high traffic flow through neighborhood streets and ideas about integrating the SW Corridor train station as one traffic mitigation solution.
 - *Yes, one of the goals is to separate the regional traffic from neighborhood traffic.* Karla (PBOT)

- *This would also create a more urban street form on Naito Parkway and would help address the challenging trip between PSU, OHSU, and the neighborhood.* Mark (City of Portland)
- One LIT Member stated that the Central City in Motion project appears to be rearranging the roadway, rather than expanding it. The member also asked about TriMet's contribution to this project.
 - *All the transit and transit related projects come from years of work with TriMet.* Tyler (Metro)
- There were concerns of the high demand for transit service needs and that the Everett Street project would be insufficient in creating a meaningful improvement for bus lines (due to delays at the Moda Center). A transit-only Steel Bridge would be one way to meet the needs of many service lines.
 - *The MAX Tunnel Study would examine what is happening at the Steel Bridge. This is a good question to address.* Hermanus (Kittelson)
- One LIT member asked how would PBOT's recent efforts of congestion pricing interface with the proposed projects.
 - *The T2020 process is ahead of the congestion pricing discussion, which will inform future conversations about projects. But for tolling to work we need a regional transportation system that will support the influx of people using transit. If a pricing strategy moves forward, there will be revenue that could go towards people who are impacted by the pricing. We have serious inequities and congestion that we need to address now in order to become the region we are growing into.* Mark (City of Portland)
- Short term measures like an express bus service that could go through the Central City much quicker would be great.
 - *This is a big issue for all of us; the bottle neck and the slow movement through the downtown.* Hermanus (Kittelson)
- Another LIT member stated that increasing speed *and* reliability is equally important. Increasing access for locations such as PSU, the north end of downtown by Union Station, etc. In addition, having trains at-grade has effects on transit riders and the rest of downtown.
- Many LIT members supported using the Steel Bridge right-of-way, and any other downtown space, for other transit such as the streetcar.
- LIT members agreed that the current traffic patterns are confusing and having high volumes of highway traffic in neighborhoods is not desirable.

Resiliency

- LIT Members had concerns over the lifespan of the Steel Bridge.
 - *The issue is not that the Steel Bridge is going to fall, but that it is a bottle neck.* Tyler (Metro)
- One LIT member asked, “If the Steel Bridge is not in good shape, why not just replace the bridge”?
 - *The Steel bridge is owned by the railroad; this needs a separate study to look at how we can get transit off it.* Matt (Metro)
- Another LIT member added that one of our goals is to create a region with a great sense of place that is safer, more resilient, and taking action around climate change. The bottleneck, efficiency, and reliability of transit all stand out as important pieces of the Central City in Motion Plan.

Other Comments

Brandy prompted further discussion by asking the group, “How does this compare when thinking about these (Downtown Corridor) projects vs. other corridor projects?”

Many of the responses articulated the need for the Downtown Corridor (and all corridor) projects to be guided by a larger, visionary charge in order to spur excitement and maintain Portland as a transportation leader.

- *I really like the transformative ideas of this corridor, but the budget is so limiting. We have lost the reputation of being a visionary leader with transit and I want to see a vision and bold ideas for transit; I am not seeing those right now.*
- *We need the bold and big projects. We do need the smaller projects, but without a significant visionary project then the rest of the safety upgrades are just another street. When you look at the Central City, the bold projects are clear. If as a region we are going to pay for it, we must move some of those bold ideas out of the city center and into the outer neighborhoods. We are not asking Portland voters to fund a huge transportation bill; we are asking them to vote for small projects and I think it is a mistake. We need to do both the bold and the discreet. We need to move some of the bold out of downtown AND need to do some small relatable projects that help people.*
- One LIT member stated that a big visionary idea is needed to get people excited about investing in transportation, citing the Tunnel Study and Bridge Head as having the catalytic potential. They were interested in exploring how the Eastbank freeway could be moved to re-claim some of that freeway space.
- Another member shared that the Ross Island Bridge Head project was the most exciting; they felt that this is an untapped potential for development with a chance to reconnect the neighborhood with the rest of Central City and to create a good sense of place.