

Libbytown Traffic and Circulation Study Public Advisory Committee Meeting

Jan, 28th 2013
Portland Expo Center

In attendance:

Committee Members: Maria MacDougal, Zachary Barowitz, Christian Milneil, Fred Dillon, Channing Capuchino, Jackie Thompson, Harlan Baker, Jamie Parker, Richard Buchanan, Caroline Partlow, Mary Didonato, Skip Woods

Staff: Carl Eppich, PACTS; Jeremiah Bartlett, Kathi Earley, Bill Needelman, and Bruce Hyman, City of Portland; Lucy Gibson, DuBoiss & King; John Mahoney, Ransom Consultants; Tom Farmer, and Terry DeWan ,T.J. DeWan & Associates; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications.

Meeting started 4:05pm

Carl Eppich opened the meeting and all the participants introduced themselves.

John Mahoney reviewed a meeting with representatives from Hood. Hood's property on Park Ave is very busy and has some serious space constraints. They have operated from that site since 1918 and have recently invested in improvements to the facility. Making Park Ave a two way street would constrain their ability to get trucks out of the facility in a timely fashion as it would reduce traffic openings and possibly require them to turn into oncoming traffic.

Skip Woods, a representative from Hood, reiterated the space constraints. They currently need almost the entire width of Park Ave to allow one of their trucks to take a right turn out of the facility. There was a brief discussion about how to address this issue. The possibility of opening the Hood property up to St. James St. was mentioned but the fact that the Hood parking lot is below the level of St. James St. could complicate that.

Carol Morris presented a revised Purpose and Needs Statement based on feedback from the committee. The following changes had been made:

- Language was added to address the fact that the study area includes portions of other neighborhoods
- The goal of creating a more financially sustainable transportation network was added
- The goal of creating and improving public spaces was added
- Language was added addressing the need to recreate connections lost to highway development

Carol asked for input on the purpose and needs statement.

A committee member asked that St. John Valley be spelled out rather than abbreviated as SJV.

There were no other comments.

Follow-up NOTE: The Consultant Team and the City staff suggest that the last bullet be rephrased to: "Libbytown, as well as its adjacent areas, has tremendous potential that can be harnessed by maximizing its relationship with a revitalized, multi-modal transportation network." The purpose of this revision is to provide a proactive statement that can be more clearly used to help assess and rank the range of alternatives being developed.

Lucy Gibson presented a map of the high accident locations in the study area. Safety is the foremost concern of the project. She also mentioned that there are already some projects in the pipeline to address some of these issues.

Lucy reviewed some of the components of what goes into making a good street for all users. She presented a matrix of the design tools that have been discussed so far and their impact on different transportation modes.

- **Pedestrian friendly streets:** Pedestrian friendly streets have slow traffic speeds, high connectivity, are safe, and have numerous destinations. High traffic speeds are not actually very useful to car traffic in an urban environment. Wide roads encourage high traffic speeds but we do have to take into account the additional narrowing effects of snow in the winter. Having taller buildings, close to the street provides a sense of enclosure that helps to make even wider streets seem more manageable to the pedestrian. Lucy presented a map of the area in which the consulting team had devised a pedestrian comfort rating to evaluate conditions in the study area. It was based on a combination of traffic speed, street scape amenities, buildings with windows facing the street, and the existence of buffers between pedestrians and road traffic.
- **Bicycle friendly streets:** She noted that there is a small portion of the population that is already comfortable with biking in traffic and that there is a group of people that will never bike. Bike amenities are aimed at the remaining group of people that would like to bike but are not comfortable with being out in traffic.
- **Transit friendly streets:** The area has a good start in that it already has bus service and the transportation center. As transit users are pedestrians before and after they board transit any pedestrian improvements are transit improvements. Similarly increased density provides more potential users and destinations and so encourages transit. Having more frequent and regular stops improves transit usability. Two way streets also reduce confusion by allowing return trips to stop at the same place.

- Automobile safety requires clear sight lines and easy transitions from high speed highways to low speed local streets. Reliable streets are better than fast streets. They are more fuel efficient and can transport a higher volume of cars.
- Development friendly streets require high visibility and traffic from all modes. One street parking and easy accessibility both help encourage development. One way streets hinder this.

There was some discussion over whether two way streets should be considered good for cars. Lucy pointed out that they are less efficient but acknowledged that they have some benefits such as increasing access.

A committee member asked about why the intersection at Congress St. and the Fore River Parkway was such a high accident area. Lucy did not know the exact reason but theorized that it was because of the large amount of different traffic movements and the high speed of traffic through the intersection.

Lucy presented the preliminary ideas put together by the consulting team.

Option A: This option has two roundabouts; one at the Congress St./Fore River Parkway Intersection and one at the Congress St./Park Ave intersection. The two highway ramps that connect Congress St. and the northbound side of I-295 would be removed. A new off ramp from the northbound side of I-295 would connect to the Congress St./Park Ave roundabout. Variations on this option would allow for Congress St. and/or Park Ave to be two way roads.

Lucy reviewed that roundabouts are on average safer than traffic signals and that they can handle larger volumes of traffic with fewer approach lanes. They reduce speeds and handle high left turn volumes better than signals. They do require more land at the node and require signalized pedestrian crossings. A committee member mentioned that they are frequently used outside of Boston and that she found them easier to use than she expected.

A committee member asked why the plan called for two roundabouts instead of just one. Lucy answered that having a signal at the other intersection risks having it back up into the roundabout. If one intersection were to have neither a signal nor a roundabout than you could have one roundabout at the other intersection.

Option B: This option would signalize both the intersection of Congress St./Fore River Parkway and the intersection of Congress St./Park Ave. The northbound ramps to and from Congress St. would be brought together and their intersection with Congress St. signalized. This scenario would make Congress St. two way and the primary road into downtown Portland. Park Ave could be either one or two way.

Option C: This option is the same as option B but makes Park Ave the primary road into the city. Congress St. would be a smaller, two way road.

Option D: This option would emphasize Park Ave as the primary way into the city. The Congress St./Park Ave intersection would be reoriented to de-emphasize Congress St., which would remain one way. The northbound on and off ramps would meet congress at the Congress St./Park Ave intersection.

A committee member asked if DOT has been approached about the possibility of removing ramps and developing the land. Lucy answered that they had had a preliminary meeting with DOT and that they were open to the idea of removing ramps provided that it improved the safety of the interchange. They are less enthusiastic about the idea of selling the land freed up by removing the ramps. This would be a next step discussion.

At this point the meeting broke into three work groups to evaluate the different options and propose new ideas. At the end of the meeting the groups presented their findings.

Group A: This group's biggest theme was making the section of Congress St. between Park Ave and St. John St. into a neighborhood residential street. In turn Park Ave would be emphasized as a high traffic, more business oriented road. They liked the roundabout at the Congress St./Fore River Parkway intersection but were divided about the one at the Congress St./Park Ave intersection with some favoring the idea of this intersection not being signalized either. Those opposed to the roundabout felt that it would only encourage traffic to use Congress St. and that two roundabouts would be a barrier to pedestrians. They were concerned that any roundabouts created would have to be as bike and pedestrian friendly as possible. The group was interested in seeing mixed use neighborhood development near the highway to expand and strengthen the existing neighborhood. It was mentioned that if Congress St. from Park Ave to St. John St. was made one lane that there could be a two way bike route on the street. They would like to see more development along the Fore River Parkway so as to create more of a gateway to the city. Also mentioned was putting a treed median on outer Congress St as it approaches town so as to slow traffic.

Group B: This group liked Option A but had some worries about the feasibility of roundabouts, particularly at the Fore River Parkway intersection because of the potential for traffic to back up from the Mass. Ave light. They liked the idea of having no signal or roundabout at the Congress St./Park Ave intersection. It was felt that Park Ave being the two way main road was a good idea due to the train crossing on Park Ave being above grade. In turn Congress would stay one way and be made into a more local road. The group felt that bike and pedestrian connectivity should be improved throughout the area. The southbound on ramp from Congress St. was felt to be ripe for removal. The northbound ramps currently connecting to inner Congress St. could be moved to align with the Congress St./Park Ave intersection though the intersection would then require a signal. It was also felt that if congress was made one lane there would be room for a multi-use path that could connect to the transportation center. Finally they expressed a desire that any plan not make the cut through problem on the outer Congress St. side streets any worse.

Group C: This group favored making Congress St. the two way primary road into the city because of the issues with the Hood trucks turning onto Park Ave. They liked Option A and the land it freed up for development. It was felt that even with making Congress St. the major road it should still be pedestrianized and efforts taken to slow traffic. Making Park Ave between Congress St. and St. John St. into a one lane road would allow for a two way bike lanes. The group also felt that improving bike and pedestrian connectivity throughout the area is important particularly with the bike/ped issues inherent in roundabouts. They agreed with the other groups that the intersection at Congress St. and Park Ave would work without a signal or a roundabout and also shared group B's concern with the Mass. Ave light backing into the roundabout at the Fore River Parkway. There was some talk about reconnecting Sewall St. to the Transportation center and Thompsons Point.

Lucy presented the next steps for the project. First they will look at the ramps and make sure any proposals will work with DOT and the FHWA. They will then do traffic analysis of the various alternatives. The results of this analysis will be presented first to the Advisory Committee and then to the general public. A meeting of local business will be held in March.

Meeting ends at 6:13pm.