Portland Streetcar

Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
July 14, 1999

Members in attendance: John Carroll, chair; Kay Dannen; Vicky Diede; Rick Gustafson; Mary Kennedy; Stan Lewis; Ken McFarling; Vern Rifer; Chris Smith; Ingrid Stevens; Sterling Williams.

Others in attendance: Doug McCollum; Steve Fosler; J. Hahn Lee; Art Lewellan; Carter MacNichol; Dick Piekenbrock.

1. Construction Update

Kay Dannen distributed a construction schedule update. She said that track installation was proceeding on schedule. Track installation is completed between NW 16th and 21st on Northrup, with work proceeding between 21st and 23rd. She said construction on NW 23rd Avenue would require a full street closure for up to five weeks.

She said the project managers are very concerned about supporting the retailers, so the project will install special signage discussing the scheduling and letting people know that business is going on as usual. This work is scheduled to take place between July 28 and September 8.

She said that since May 10, more than 1,000 people have hit the website. She is hearing from people across the country who want to be included on the mailing list for more information. Staff has sent out 21 different construction advisories reaching more than 5,000 people since construction began.

Sterling Williams said he has heard people speculate that the construction was South/North Light Rail. Kay said that new signs that will indicate what is being built at the site.

Vern Rifer asked if there were construction delays. Kay said that construction is on schedule. The delay in opening the system results from the car delivery schedule, not construction. She said the project team is still investigating the potential of having temporary holiday service in December of 2000 to preview the trains.

Rick Gustafson said he is the one who is being most reluctant about starting operations by the end of 2000, based on his experience with the Vintage Trolley. He said that the streetcar will be run by an entirely new team of people – operators, administrators, maintenance crews, etc. He wants to make sure that everything is working well when the trains start running.

Ingrid Stevens agreed that these are legitimate concerns and expressed interest in pursuing ways that some type of service can begin earlier than 2001. Sterling said that Tri-Met had a very big learning curve to
overcome with its new MAX cars. Rick said it takes at least six months to learn all the subtleties involved in starting up new service.

Art Lewellan asked about the electrical system. Carter MacNichol said that the next step in construction is to drill foundations for the poles. This construction work will require only limited interference with traffic – just drilling and filling in the concrete and rebar. The other remaining construction effort is building the sidewalk extensions. This activity also will have limited impact on traffic.

The poles will be about 18 inches in diameter at the bottom and tapered, so they will be narrower near the top. A cantilevered arm over the street reduces the number of poles needed. Generally, they will just be located on one side of the street. When possible, the wires will be suspended from buildings. The construction team is subcontracting with a North Carolina company that specializes in this type of installation.

Ken McFarling asked about the difference in elevation of the rails in certain locations. He said the street surface should be evened out. Carter said that in some places, the grade of the street created a differential in the height of the rails. The construction team has tried to minimize this difference whenever possible, but in some places it couldn’t be fully corrected.

Chris Smith said that Northrup has been signed for local access only. He thought there would always be accommodations for through traffic. Kay said that in practice the flaggers are letting anyone through, despite the signage, because Northrup has so little traffic. She said that on Lovejoy, construction crews probably would allow through traffic for the whole length with the exception of temporary closures. She agreed there shouldn’t be a "local access only" sign.

Chris said he appreciates that the construction crew has capped over the rail on 21st Avenue to preserve two-way access. Carter said that it’s easy to plate over the rail during construction to keep traffic moving. They are working on ways to keep two-way traffic flowing at peak hours to accommodate the detoured traffic from the ramp closure.

Steve Fosler asked if the City had a schedule for installing new signals at N.W. 23rd and Northrup. Kay said she would find out.

Carter said that the construction team has met with Legacy/Good Samaritan staff to talk about access to the emergency room. He said the clear rule for flaggers and construction workers is that anyone who needs to get into the hospital must be allowed access. He said that the construction team has offered to provide the foreman with a radio if the emergency room staff feels it’s necessary.

Carter said that the paving machine, which allows 700 feet of paving a day, is a very unusual and efficient machine. It is being used on rail for the first time in this project.

2. Traffic Management
Rick Gustafson introduced J. Hahn Lee, a traffic consultant, who presented the CAC with a base map for determining traffic issues around the streetcar alignment. Rick said that the goal of this project is to assess potential impediments to the streetcar’s ability to run on time and to develop strategies to resolve problems. He expects the CAC to play a key role in advising the technical team, and he hopes CAC members will help communicate with specific groups along the alignment.

One major problem that could affect the schedule is having the streetcar caught in a cue of cars waiting at a stoplight, slowing its ability to get to a stop, and then getting caught at another red light when it reaches the stop. Another major other issue is traffic volumes on Lovejoy.

Rick said that pre-emptive signals are a possibility to reduce the time spent at red lights.

Vern asked about the potential for people to hail the streetcar from a corner without a formal stop. Rick said that to implement that system would require consideration of operational and safety issues. Also, such a system would require approval by the Regional Accessibility group, because people using wheelchairs couldn’t access the streetcar from regular curb height. The project team is pursuing this idea.

Rick encouraged the members to consider traffic issues and conflicts that they anticipate based on their knowledge of the area. For example, one problem area is 10th and 11th at Burnside.

Vern asked if the traffic signals are sophisticated enough to be manipulated electronically. Doug McCollum said that the signals are fine, but the City needs to acquire new communication technology to communicate with the signals in the necessary way. Some of that technology already is being installed in Northwest Portland. The vehicles will have the capacity to interact with the signals.

Rick asked the committee to think about traffic issues in these terms:

If we don’t do anything different in terms of traffic, what will the situation be like?

What are the solutions to the problems we’ve identified?

The CAC was shown a set of maps that indicated various levels of detail, including one that showed placement of parking meters and signals. It’s possible to separate different elements of the map to highlight different issues. Rick said that staff will distribute small versions of the maps to members so they can talk about the issues with people in their neighborhoods.

Chris suggested that they e-mail the maps using Acrobat PDF files, which can be read by most computers.
Vern suggested that the CAC as a whole just deal with the more general issues and that individual members take specific locational problems to staff separately.

3. Proposed PSU Terminus

Rick referred the members to a memo and graphics in their packets addressing the streetcar alignment through PSU. The recommendation is that the streetcar would turn south on market from SW 11th, then turn onto 10th, where a single station would be the terminus. Dick Piekenbrock said that PSU had determined that two streetcar lines would not work on Mill because of other large PSU facilities located there.

Rick said that the Urban Center also only has room for one track at SW Sixth. It was noted that the Urban Center had originally been designed to accommodate light rail.

Carter said this new alignment still has some outstanding problems but simplifies things over the previous alternative.

Vern expressed concern about the streetcar’s ability to operate on Market Street, which is very busy. Doug said it’s not a big problem, because the car will turn from 11th, which is one way, and Market has two left turn lanes, so making a right turn on 10th should be fairly easy. Rick said the problem here is the frequency of turns. Doug said this may create more disruption during construction because of the larger turning radius.

Steve Fosler said that the streetcar project seems to be constantly changing its plans in response to PSU.

Stan Lewis asked for copies of affected neighborhood association land use meetings. He asked what the conflict would be with the science building. Carter said it would require eliminating 12 to 14 feet from the building’s basement.

Carter said that it was too early to talk about the connection to the Urban Center.

Vern asked what the situation would be if the elementary school is never built. Carter said the track could be moved further west in that circumstance, but Market is an easier street to build on. He said that Clay Street has the heaviest traffic and could involve more traffic conflicts.

Dick Piekenbrock said that a decision to donate an athletic field interfered with the original alignment plans. The decision to build a public school also interfered with the alignment because of the need to preserve space to drop off children. He said it isn’t necessarily true that the school district has pulled out from its decision to build a school, and he noted that there has been a great deal of investment in this project to date. He said PSU always has objected to having two tracks on Mill Street because of the active loading docks there. They are
now waiting for an analysis of how the tracks would connect with the Urban Center.

Stan noted that Tri-Met found it would have difficulty operating South/North MAX on Columbia and Market Streets. He said he would like to look at Tri-Met’s data.

Vern asked that the issue be brought back to the CAC

4. Operations Plan

Rick said that the PSI board had met the previous day to look at the operations and maintenance budget. He said the board has decided to create a subcommittee to investigate some of the issues in more detail, particularly with the respect of contracting for employees.

He said that by fall, they need to have in place:

A five-year operations agreement between PSI and the City.

An agreement between Tri-Met and the City for operating money (there exists a letter of understanding, but no formal agreement).

An agreement between Tri-Met and the City on the use of Vintage Trolleys as back-ups for the Streetcar system. Vintage Trolleys can’t continue to operate on the MAX line, so it makes sense to use two of them as back-ups in case a streetcar is out of commission

5. Other Issues

Chris said that the Northwest District passed a resolution to institute a parking permit system in parts of Northwest.

He also said that bicyclists are not feeling as if the City is listening to them on the issue of the Lovejoy Ramp reconstruction and the streetcar, and there is some talk about a lawsuit. The issue is whether or not the streets have room for bicycles after the streetcar is operating.

Ingrid Stevens said that the Planning Commission considered testimony on the North Macadam plan the previous day and that there are serious issues related to the proposed streetcar alignment.