1. Construction Update

Kay Dannen said that the website has received nearly 5,000 hits, including one as far away as Australia. She has mailed 37 construction alerts to a total of 12,000 people. She mailed the newsletter to 3,000 people.

As of November 10, 50 percent of the track work was completed. By Thanksgiving, the contractor would stop work within the holiday moratorium boundaries in the Central Business District until January 2. Construction during November would proceed on SW 11th between Stark and Morrison to be completed prior to November 19. After the holiday moratorium, work will resume between Taylor and Jefferson on SW 10th.

The major project ahead will be where the streetcar line crosses the MAX line on SW 10th and 11th at Morrison and Yamhill. This will require MAX service to be interrupted during four weekends (March 3 and 24; April 14 and May 12) from 7:30PM Friday to 4AM Monday. Work around the MAX line will take place between February 15 and the end of May. During the shut down, Tri-Met will provide bus bridges around the construction area for their customers. They will need volunteers to help direct people during those weekends. Steve Fosler volunteered.

All poles and foundations are already in place in the Northwest where track work has been completed. The contractor will start installing hardware on the poles soon. During the moratorium, the contractor will focus on the maintenance area and platform stops in areas that aren’t dependent on seasonal shopping.

Art Lewellan asked about conflicts with existing railroad lines in Northwest. Vicky Dieder said that until recently, there were several active rail lines serving that area. With the Blitz operation closed down, that rail line is no longer necessary and may be torn out. A line on NW 15th which served the Meier and Frank warehouse, has recently has been sold, so there is no need for a special crossing at that line. That leaves only the line on 13th that requires a special crossing, and that line doesn’t extend all the way to Northrup, so the only extra work will be at Lovejoy and 13th.
Stan Lewis said that a man he knows who is blind recently explored the streetcar platform and is satisfied with the layout. Vicky said the next challenge will be how to communicate to people with handicaps about the features of the streetcar platforms.

2. Operations

Rick Gustafson referred the committee to material they received in their packets. It included:

A proposal to establish an operating budget of $200,000 for the following fiscal year.

The hiring of a maintenance manager to establish work requirements.

Information on an operation schedule.

Rick said that the transit union says that the streetcar is required to hire union members. The streetcar team is trying to figure out the implications of this assertion. A requirement to hire union members might severely impact the ability to run the system.

Rick said that the union has been very cooperative in working out solutions in other areas, such as special needs service and the Vintage Trolley, and he is hopeful that they can resolve the problem. Stan said that the union has made waivers in other circumstances.

Rick said that a streetcar team visited the Inekon Skoda plant in October. Because of delays in authorizing the order, the factory won’t be able to deliver the cars until March of 2001. Rick said that they will work on having them delivered earlier, but it significantly changes schedule for start of operations. At the same time, the delay gives the city more time to resolve some operational problems. It is still important to continue construction at the current rate to keep down costs.

The streetcar team is currently working to resolve problems with using the Vintage Trolley on the streetcar line. One issue is the trolley’s breaking capacity, which may not be adequate for use in a mixed-traffic lane. He thinks conflicting heights of anti-climbers is not a problem.

Vicky said this committee could be thinking about ways to introduce streetcar service to the neighborhoods. Should they start with the Vintage Trolley only until the streetcars are fully ready for service? Should they introduce a weekend-only service?

Rick said he originally recommended a six-month training period to make sure the drivers were fully prepared and that they found any possible problems with the cars before operations began. However, in light of the delay in getting the cars, he is ready to modify his recommendation.
The operation plan calls for the fare system to be fully consistent with Tri-Met’s, honoring all Tri-Met passes, tickets and transfers. But there is only one company that manufacturers the ticket machines Tri-Met uses. So Rick is suggesting that the streetcar have its own tickets, to be accepted by Tri-Met, but that can be produced by a less expensive machine that can be manufactured here. And rather than make 27 ticket machines for placement at each stop, the machines should be placed on the cars.

To prevent slow downs in operations, they will want to encourage as many people as possible who use the streetcar to acquire their tickets in advance – by using Tri-Met tickets or passes or even a monthly streetcar pass. The system will use fare inspectors, rather than relying on drivers to check tickets. They also hope the fare inspector role will be to support, not punish, riders.

Chris Smith said the NWDA Transportation Committee wants the city to be prepared to deal with a Park and Ride situation, if that occurs once the Streetcar is operational.

Vern Rifer asked how the city can help the Northwest parking situation. Chris suggested widening the permit system already in place.

Art suggested investing in one ticket machine on NW 23rd, the place likeliest to have the most people needing to pay to get on. Rick said another suggestion would be to have merchants sell tickets and short hoppers. He said that only about 10 percent of the riders will need tickets as about 40 percent will already have passes and many more use short-hoppers. Rick said the ticket strategy fits in with Al Solheim’s strategy of using the system to promote local businesses without selling advertising space on the outside of the cars.

Rick said that the contract with the streetcar vendors offers a financial incentive for delivery ahead of schedule, and the manufacturer is determined to get the cars to Portland in December of next year. He said it is not possible only to have one car delivered early – the way the process works, all the cars will be assembled at one time. He said the manufacturer also is trying to have the cars broken in before they are delivered.

David Bragdon recommended not having all the cars delivered on the same ship. He said a vehicle that large would probably be carried on deck, leaving it open to hazards.

3. Future Alignment Committee

Vicky said that the Future Alignment Committee has been working to develop the next phase of the alignment. She said that the preferred route would include a couplet east and west on Mill and Market streets to connect the line currently under construction with PSU’s Urban Center. However, there isn’t currently money in the budget to pay for that alignment. She said to complete that route would require establishment of a LID. It will also require more operating dollars. Finally, if South/North MAX is ever built as previously planned, part of the tracks would have to be rebuilt to accommodate the light rail trains.
Currently, they are deliberating between a single track operation using the existing construction budget or creating the couplet if more money can be found. The current thinking is to build a single track to the Urban Center as part of the current construction project, then add a second track when the line is extended to the river. Vicky said that building to the Urban Center is a wonderful way to connect the streetcar to the transit mall. By including it in the current project with the current contractor, they can build it less expensively and with more certainty.

Rick said that building to the Urban Center will require a fifth train to be able to meet the 10-minute headway. Vicky said that she hopes the urban renewal district for North Macadam will be able to pay for a sixth car, allowing the system to have one in reserve.

Vern Rifer said that there is a difference of opinion about the route to North Macadam from the first phase. John Carroll said that while there is some interest in serving the office buildings on Columbia, there is very strong support on the committee for serving the Urban Center and PSU.

Vicky asked the committee to support the alignment shown on the map in their packets. Art asked about a short spur on the map. Vicky explained it’s a "dead train" option, to prevent all service being stopped if a train is out of order.

The committee unanimously approved the recommendation. Vicky said the recommendation would go to the Future Alignment Committee and to the PSI Board.

2. Lovejoy/Northrup Traffic Analysis Study

Rick asked the committee to support a proposal to create a group to explore traffic management options on Lovejoy and Northrup between NW 10th and 23rd Avenues. He said that Lovejoy receives a lot of regional traffic passing through on the way to downtown, and that current two-way operations would create traffic congestion around the streetcar. There are a variety of options that may reduce the congestion, including right turn bays, left turn lanes, or changing to a one-way street. He referred to traffic analysis figures in the members’ packets that showed traffic problems in the area. He said these figures were from 1995-96, and that traffic problems would be worse by the time the streetcar starts operating.

John said he was concerned that the CAC had always assured the neighborhoods that traffic wouldn’t be made worse by the streetcar operation. He didn’t want this committee to sound like they were going back on their promises. Steve Fosler said that the traffic congestion didn’t necessarily mean gridlock, and that neighborhood people aren’t worried about traffic congestion necessarily – that’s more a concern of the people driving through the neighborhoods from elsewhere.

Chris said that NW 23rd Ave. is already congested for much of the day. Hahn Lee said that if traffic is slow, the streetcar will be slow, too,
and that the focus of this is to keep the streetcar on time. He said congestion is a problem for bikes and pedestrians, as well as cars.

John Carroll said he would like to see a preamble to the proposal explaining that the reasons for the task force: that traffic is bad now and will continue to be worse, and that there are mitigation options that should be analyzed.

Rick said the task force should include three representatives from each of three organizations: NWDA, Pearl District Neighborhood Association, and the city. Vern said he wants the three city representatives to be from the CAC, to make sure the streetcar’s interests are represented. Stan agreed. Vicky agreed, but said that technical people must be on the committee too. She suggested expanding the committee.

John suggested adding in the preamble language the importance of traffic management to allowing the streetcar to meet its promised headways.

Rick said the proposal should be finished before the NWDA meeting on November 18.

Stan cautioned the committee not to be defensive. He said any new transportation mode improves efficiency of the street system, and all changes require some problem solving.

Ingrid Stevens said that people make ridiculous complaints about light rail, but they will complain about anything, as all that would make them happy would be to have faster moving traffic on Highway 26.

3. Correction to Minutes

Kenneth McFarling presented changes to the minutes of September 15. His comments should read as follows:

To forestall conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian traffic on one hand with handling cars on the three tracks south of the projected carhouse below the I-405 viaduct, the one-block length of NW Marshall St. between 15th and 16th avenues should be discontinued as a thoroughfare open to public use. [Water, sewer, and probably other subsurface utility lines, would continue to have rights of way.]

Because a major thoroughfare would remain on each side, and only a block away, impediment to the neighborhood would be inconsequential.

The city has established a precedent for that closure by a more drastic action: To provide for Greyhound Corporation a depot site [five times as large as the one from which it was being evicted], the city [not only] closed the block of NW Hoyt St. between Sixth and Fifth Avenues [it also vacated the street, so that buried utilities had to be relocated. Be it also noted: No street north of Hoyt can function as an alternate route.