

Portland Streetcar Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 3, 2009, 3:30-5:00 p.m., Shiels Obletz Johnsen

Members in Attendance: Chris Smith, chair; Bill Danneman; Sorin Garber; Peter Kilbourne; Stan Lewis; Janet McGarrigle; Brian Newman; Susan Pearce; Carol "Zoe" Presson; Bob Richardson; Vern Rifer; Scott Seibert; Joe Vaughn

Others: David Brandt, Arnold Panitch, Dustin Posner

Staff Attendance: Kay Dannen, Julie Gustafson, Rick Gustafson

1. Meeting to Order:

Meeting was called to Order by Chris Smith, chair. The minutes from the April 8, 2009 meeting were adopted.

2. Public Comments:

Sorin Garber invited the CAC to attend Portland Freight Committee meetings to represent Streetcar. Kay Dannen added that the Loop committee has met with the Freight committee on several occasions.

Lenny Anderson passed along his appreciation to this committee and all the staff that have worked hard to make Streetcar successful. Western Star Truck's Swan Island plant will close in a year, moving their production to Mexico. Northern Star will remain open. Oregon Ironworks has a joint venture on Swan Island and could extend their streetcar production to the Western Star plant.

Chris Smith extended an invitation to the CAC to participate in the first Green Line MAX ride on June 30, 2009.

3. Portland Loop Project Update:

The Loop project will be before City Council June 10, 2009 to present the first contracts to Council and to request a Notice to Proceed. Smith would like members of this committee to attend the meeting. Vern Rifer volunteered to testify at the meeting.

The prototype vehicle was delivered to the maintenance facility on May 15. We don't have a date yet for the beginning of revenue service, but there will be an unveiling event sometime around July 4, 2009 including a potential event with Secretary LaHood on July 6, 2009. Since the last CAC meeting Secretary LaHood announced that he plans on fully funding the Loop project.

Kay Dannen reported that the four Loop "chats" were successful. The chats were not highly attended, but that is not unexpected since construction has yet to begin. Sorin Garber asked about the sewer project and if there has been coordination with the Loop project. Smith answered that up to this point communication between the projects has not been strong, but that they are on each other's radars now.

Arnold Panitch suggested that as we plan and build the Loop we take into consideration how we name stops using the example of a blind man who testified at a TriMet meeting that several stops on MAX do not have reference to their location but rather just to their district (i.e. the Yamhill stop which does not clarify the cross street).

The Northrup option has been discussed at length the past two months with a potential Pearl LID to be formed to pay for the extra funding. A meeting was held to discuss the LID with property owners in the district to get their input on boundaries and the project.

4. Loop Fare Policy:

There is concern that when the Loop opens there will be a fare discrepancy with people riding free on the west side and paying on the east side. There are three options being discussed about the fare policy for Streetcar when the Loop opens. The first is to just maintain Fareless Square as is downtown and require a fare on the east side. The second option is to have a separate fare (\$1) for the entire Streetcar system. The third option is to try and work with TriMet to create a fare system that works better for Streetcar so that we can maintain our compatibility with them. Sorin Garber asked if there will be added fare surveying or actual inspectors if the fare system changes. Smith responded that the level of surveying and/or inspectors is part of the discussion.

Scott Seibert commented that it would be good for us to work with TriMet to investigate a new fare system (like a smart card system) that could make boarding and fare paying easier. Bob Richardson commented that the fare boxes we currently have do not have any unused buttons so we cannot add a new fare option without taking away one of the current options or getting new fare machines.

Scott Seibert commented that it would be confusing for people to have Streetcar charge a fare when MAX will be fareless in a parallel route just 5 blocks away. Joe Vaughn commented that we may get complaints from charging a fare downtown, but it will be about the same as the complaints we would get from the east side if the fare system isn't equal. Arnold Panitch asked if it would be possible to have a uniformed conductor on the trains to collect the fares rather than going to even more high tech means of fare collection. If that is not possible then he suggested doing away completely with the fare and making the entire system fareless. Dustin Posner commented that we are really talking about a difference of 25% of the riders since 50% already paid TriMet and 25% don't have a fare unless they are caught. Sorin Garber commented that he doesn't believe the confusion will be that great and that being consistent is far more important in maintaining a successful system. Susan Pearce agreed with Garber stating that from her experiences she noticed that having people to help explain the fares and how to use the machines will help solve the confusion. Peter Kilbourne commented that the system is currently user friendly and that when we start deviating it takes away from the ease of use for locals as well as the draw for out of town conventions. Seibert commented that he would like us to go out and talk with the neighborhood and business associations to get their feedback on this issue. David Brandt commented that there is a step here for public input so that there could be some more useful dialogue to the question. Susan Pearce added that the big concerns voiced by HAND all have to do with how we fund this project and having more fare revenue could help resolve some of those concerns. Joe Vaughn asked if the Lloyd TMA has been involved in the process and suggested that they be brought into this discussion as we progress. Richardson commented that we could even discuss with TriMet the possibility of extending the eastern boundary of Fareless Square to 7th Avenue. Smith commented that making the entire system Fareless leaves us short on operations funding. Garber asked if there is a policy set that the committee can get behind. Smith responded that there is a policy that is being floated of a Carbon Free Central City transit (including the Loop).

5. Project Updates:

- Burnside/Couch Couplet (Eastside) – The work on the road couplet is going out to bid. Gustafson reported that there has been analysis of the placement of rails in the street. With the current layout of the street it is not possible to have 8 feet of track bed and that it was a large cost to redo the whole street. Further studies are being conducted into a potential future alignment. Scott Seibert asked if other neighborhoods can help push streetcar projects in their neighborhood to a higher priority level. Gustafson responded that the “Friends of Burnside/Couch” have been working to get that alignment pushed forward. He also encouraged people to look at the Streetcar System Plan and that it has changed the dialogue about streetcar in the city and region.
- Burnside/Couch Couplet (Westside) – no update
- Portland/Lake Oswego Project –
We have been going through a refinement study to look at the choice between Willamette Shore and Macadam. There are still five options on the table. The first is a no build option. The second is to use the Willamette Shore Line Trolley Right of Way the entire length of the alignment. The third option is Bus Rapid Transit. The fourth and fifth options are hybrid options using both the Right-of-Way and Macadam, each with a different connection point. Vern Rifer commented that there is a refinement study in the month of June that could potentially eliminate the entire length of the shore line as well as the bus option. Metro is pushing hard to have the route use the entire length of shore line. Johns Landing has brought the businesses and residents together to support a hybrid option on the alignment. Rick Gustafson added that the refinement study and EIS are studying all five different options for the alignment. The general tenor was that ODOT and Metro were the major hold outs and were strong in their opinion of retaining the Willamette shore right-of-way as an option. For some people the alignment is a travel speed issue and for others it is an FTA issue. Rifer added that the longer these arguments continue the consortium of supporters will not be able to stay together in their support. Garber asked what they mean by travel speed. Gustafson responded that one of the issues is the user benefit ratios that are highly tied to travel times. A recent bill introduced by Congressman Blumenauer prohibits the use of travel time savings in evaluating streetcar projects. Gustafson added that the biggest issue along Macadam is the connection to Boundary and that the impact on vehicle movement will actually be from the growth that may be stimulated by streetcar.

Brian Newman commented that this project was first sold as a fast “cheap” project since the Willamette Shore could be used as match and that the concern is that this will turn in to a slow expensive project. Gustafson responded that the full Macadam option has been recommended to be dropped due to the loss in value of the right-of-way. The hybrid options have been developed to maximize the match of the right-of-way as well as maximizing the use of the Willamette shore tracks. The hybrids go through the commercial zones along the Willamette Shore Line right of way and move out to Macadam before the residential zones.

6. Service Reductions:

TriMet’s portion of the Streetcar operations budget was recently cut by the same 8% as the rest of their service cuts. We have left service intact during the busiest hours of the day but have removed a train earlier than we used to in the evening reducing service frequency slightly in the late evening. Between 500 to 700 service hours were cut without cutting operators, just cutting overtime hours. We have been able to do some trimming in other areas to make up the remainder of the 8% cut.

Bob Richardson asked if it's within the limits of the law to start saving money in a rainy day/recession fund to help prevent future cuts in down times. Smith responded that there has been a fund started for long term capital maintenance. Dustin Posner commented that on his monthly power bill there is a monthly fee for the green energy that goes to habitat restoration and that he wouldn't object to the having the ability to add a dollar or two to his bill each month to help pay for green energy for the streetcar. Lenny Anderson added that if a high level of service was tied to the fares in the public's eye there may be less opposition to charging a fare.

7. Ridership/Fare Survey Update:

Kay Dannen presented the fare survey results to the committee. The results are divided into two sections: NW and South Waterfront. Out of 83,448 people surveyed for the NW fare zone 50% had a TriMet fare, 11% had a Streetcar Annual Pass, 12% had a Streetcar ticket, 24% don't have any fare and 11% of those did not purchase a fare when asked to. The results were consistent in the South Waterfront.

8. Other Business

Dustin Posner asked if in designing the Loop there was ever a discussion about connecting the rails across the Broadway Bridge to the Light Rail to give them an emergency crossing if the Steel Bridge is closed again. Rick Gustafson responded that the idea had not been discussed but that there is the issue of vehicle width as well as vehicle compatibility. The MAX trains are 6 inches wider than the streetcar trains and would not fit on our tracks if a platform is along the section. There would be no problem for them on the bridge; it is the ends that cause the issue.

The next meeting for the Streetcar Citizens Advisory Committee will be Wednesday, August 5, 2009, 3:30pm-5:00pm at Shiels Obletz Johnsen, 1140 SW 11th Avenue, Suite #500, Portland, Oregon. Please call Kay Dannen at 503/478-6404 or email at dannen@portlandstreetcar.org if you have any questions regarding this committee or have items for the agenda. The CAC meetings are open to the public.