

Portland Streetcar Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 4, 2015, 3:30-5:00 p.m., City Hall, Pettygrove Room

Members in Attendance: Owen Ronchelli, Chair; Lenny Anderson; David Brandt; Bill Danneman; Reza Farhoodi; Arlene Kimura; Janet McGarrigle; Susan Pearce; Cora Potter; Bob Richardson; Vern Rifer;

Staff Attendance: Dan Bower, Kay Dannen, Julie Gustafson

Guest: John Betts, Evette Farra, John Sporseen

1. Meeting to Order:

Ronchelli called the meeting to Order. The minutes from the February 4, 2015 meeting were approved.

2. Public Comment

Evette Farra, Streetcar Operator, stated that a new article from the ATU International was published online about restroom breaks. At the last union meeting that Farra attended local leaders reported on 36 soiled seats in the TriMet system which resulted from operators being denied the opportunity for a restroom break. Farra reminded the CAC that, as they look at the big picture, the operators are human and they need restroom breaks and meal breaks. Farra added that, under the Freedom of Information Act, she is requesting all of the costs associated with the rebranding and new logo including hours worked on it, the firm that created it, etc. Bower responded that the simpler way would be to ask for the documents.

John Sporseen commented that some stops should be located at the far side of the intersection. One stop that doesn't work well is at Everett on 10th where people are often waiting to turn right. An example of a far side stop that works well is on SE MLK and Stark. Gustafson responded that some of that is lessons learned as the stops he specified that don't work are on the original segment and some is simply working around the pre-existing built environment, including driveways, curb cuts, curb extensions, etc., which lead to the stop on SE MLK and Stark being located at the far side of the intersection. Sporseen responded that it wasn't a critique but rather a suggestion for future planning.

3. Streetcar Operations & Service Planning

Ronchelli thanked everyone for coming to the meeting which will be almost entirely focused on operations planning which was requested by the committee. He asked the committee to state the impetus and importance behind creating more efficiencies in the system where possible to better frame the conversation. He asked if it is to speed up the system, lower headways, increase reliability, for the customer, for the operator. The committee responded yes to all of the above. Bower clarified that you can have a very reliable schedule that is slow for the customer or a very fast schedule that is unreliable or somewhere in between as there are tradeoffs to each of these decisions. Anderson stated that he has worked with transit for 20 years and that reliability is way more important than a couple of minutes on the schedule. Bower asked him to describe reliability. Anderson responded that when you live on a schedule, it is great when the bus or streetcar arrives at the station on time and can be counted upon to get you to your destination on time. Anderson added the operators are on that line every day and they know things that we can't know because we are not there every day. We need to understand how these decisions impact the operators too.

Richardson brought up the word consistency. There are two lines that overlap between PSU and the Pearl and if the schedules aren't well aligned you end up with two trains one right after another rather than even spacing as that brings the headways down to 7-8 minutes. He added that headways at even intervals, such as 10, 12 or 15 minutes, allow for more consistency at each stop as streetcars will arrive at the same time each hour. Ronchelli stated that if you look at renowned

transit systems around the world they are known for their reliability. Reliability is about the customer experience as one of the worst things in transit is seeing the vehicle leave early as you arrive at the platform. Rifer asked if being early can be better controlled. Bower responded it can be controlled to some extent and requires active management of the system. Rifer asks if there is a device in the car that lets the operator know that they are early. Bower responded that they do not currently have such a device but rather have a clock and a printed schedule of when they are due at certain time points around the system. Sporseen stated that he had a bus driver that was concerned about being early. Anderson responded that the bus drivers do have a screen that tells them how they are doing in relation to their schedule based on GPS.

Bower reminded the committee that the data has been laid out before them and that the conversation is theirs to have without influence from staff. He also pointed out that two meetings ago the conversation was all about speeding up the system and that today the conversation is centering around reliability which could involve slowing things down. He wanted to make sure that everyone was aware of this distinction prior to continuing the conversation. Brandt commented that the reputation is still out there that it is faster to walk than ride streetcar to your destination and he doesn't want us to completely sacrifice speed for reliability. Farhoodi seconded Brandt's comments and added that he would like to see Streetcar reestablished as a legitimate transportation option. Frequency is a big step in that direction as riders are typically less concerned about missing their streetcar if another one is less than 10 minutes out. We will achieve this between the Pearl and the Tilikum Crossing where the two lines overlap but not on the rest of the system.

Ronchelli summed this up by stating that the first priority is an efficient, reliable system with a secondary priority, which may run counter to the first, of speeding up the system. Often times these two goals can work in tandem by speeding up the system allowing the extra time needed in the schedule to stay on time and reliable. The committee confirmed these goals. Anderson added that the goals are also different for the short term and the long term as long term we would like to see the frequency improve to 12 or even 10 minutes but in the short term we want to open the completed Central Loop as successfully as possible. Pearce seconded Richardson's comments and added that we need to be realistic about the situations that exist, particularly traffic issues on the east side.

Bower stated that the outcome from this conversation will be a letter from the CAC to the City requesting a list of improvements that were decided upon with the stated goals in mind. Another part of this is that a big part of Streetcar's reliability is operators and their health and happiness. Bower thanked the CAC for their discussion around that as well. On Wednesday, February 25, Portland Streetcar gave an annual report to City Council at the end of which, the Mayor specifically asked for a list of improvements to be forwarded to him which could speed up the Streetcar. Bower went through all of the data and the suggested list of improvements which were developed by the sub-committee of the CAC in 2011 as well as additional issues that have arisen since the Central Loop opened in 2012. The list included possible stop consolidation in the Pearl, Central Business District and on SW Harrison, converting 4-way stops into signalized intersections, reconfiguration of signals at SW 4th & Harrison to allow two-way streetcar movements through the intersection, and improvements to the Broadway/Weidler corridor to increase reliability through that corridor. Bower recommended staying away from a scheduling conversation but rather focus on a conversation about desired improvements.

Richardson suggested converting the streetcar lane on 10th, 11th, Broadway and Weidler into streetcar and turn only lanes to help keep the traffic moving in front of the streetcar. Rifer asked

about a previous request to signalize 11th & Couch which was not on the list. Bower responded that the signalization of 10th & 11th at Couch is in the works now. Rifer followed up with a question about pedestrians backing up traffic at Burnside as there are often cars waiting to turn and the potential for the same issue at Couch. Bower responded that there will be a pedestrian “scramble” phase where no cars go and the pedestrians can go wherever they want including diagonally across the intersection. This is not being done at Burnside and could be an added suggestion from the committee.

Anderson suggested making a strong pitch to make the left lane on Weidler a Streetcar only lane from the Broadway Bridge to NE 7th as there is no parking and Weidler/Broadway is 2 lanes on the Broadway Bridge and 2 lanes again at 15th. Ronchelli added that the exclusive lane could be limited to peak hours similar to a carpool lane on the freeway. Brandt voiced his support for all of the suggestions.

Rifer stated that he doesn’t foresee a large ridership boarding in SE and riding around to downtown on the Loop. He asked if there is a plan B for the Loop operations to save money, for example, not operating the full Loop but rather operating from the Pearl, across the Broadway Bridge, down to OMSI and across the Tilikum Crossing to either RiverPlace or SW Lowell & Bond or even just to the west end of the bridge and then back across the Tilikum Crossing. Rifer asked staff to investigate what it would cost and if the savings in operations would cover the capital costs. Richardson commented that he and Anderson were looking at their own plan B options and would commit to email them to staff for review. Ronchelli responded that it is good to have the conversation about contingency plans but that he doesn’t believe we need to get too far down that road at this time.

Farhoodi thanked staff for the work that went into collecting and sharing the data provided in the meeting packet. He asked if there was possible consideration of stop consolidation in the PSU area as there is a high density of stops such as Market & 5th and 5th & Montgomery which are fairly close together. Bower responded that while those two stops are semi-redundant but that the streetcar needs to stop there anyway to get the signal so there wouldn’t be much, if any, time savings. Farhoodi seconded Richardson’s comment about investigating transit and turn only lanes but would like to add MLK and Grand to the list.

Pearce responded to Rifer’s comments about the lack of ridership potential from the SE to downtown stating that there are a lot of people, particularly in the Central Eastside Industrial District, who are looking forward to boarding the streetcar and heading south, across the Tilikum Crossing, and up to OHSU, PSU and even further into downtown. Pearce added that having a dedicated transit lane on MLK and Grand wouldn’t be bad as they are each 4 lanes, however, there is talk about a potential bike lane on the left side of those streets which may cut down on the lanes. She suggested not having conversations about MLK and Grand in a silo, but rather collaborating with other bureaus and departments as they look at making changes as well. Bower responded that the only area along MLK and Grand that causes delays on a regular basis is on Grand where the I-84 on ramp is located. Cars are often cued up in the PM peak to turn right onto the freeway which would still occur in the transit and turning lanes and thus would not resolve the issue.

Richardson asked if ideas that are capital intensive being entertained. Bower responded that capital in terms of islands, signals, striping, etc. is one thing but building track is a different expense entirely. Ronchelli asked for direction from the committee for next steps. McGarrigle added that the Harrison Roadway stop needs to go away as it is so rarely used.

Richardson moved that the CAC recommend the items on the draft list as well as the possible implementation of transit and turn only lanes on Broadway, Weidler, 10th, 11th, MLK and Grand, and the Market & 5th stop consolidation. Anderson seconded the motion. Rifer commented that the Pearl District is continuing to expand and that needs to be kept in mind throughout any conversation about stop consolidation. Bower responded that those conversations are ongoing. Pearce asked if it would be better to split the suggestions with solutions from those general areas that need attention. Bower responded that he wouldn't differentiate from the ideas put together prior to the meeting and those thought of during the meeting. The CAC approved the motion and directed staff to prepare a letter.

4. Staff Updates

Gustafson reported that there were 14,865 weekday riders in January per the Automatic Passenger Counters. Staff has consulted with the National Transit Database and is on the right path to getting the APCs certified. Rifer recommended that staff prepare themselves for kick back as there will be critics of the numbers based on the previous issues this fiscal year. Bower responded that the press release has been written, reviewed by the City's Public Information Officers, and is planned to be released later this week.

5. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

The next meeting for the Streetcar Citizens Advisory Committee will be Thursday, April 16, 2015, 3:30pm-5:00pm at City Hall, Pettygrove Room. Please call Julie Gustafson at (503) 222-4200 or email at julie.gustafson@portlandstreetcar.org if you have any questions regarding this committee. The CAC meetings are open to the public.