

Memo



Metro

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Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2020
To: Brendan Finn, Oregon Department of Transportation Urban Mobility Office Director
Megan Channell, Rose Quarter Project Director
From: Margi Bradway, Metro Planning and Development Deputy Director
Ally Holmqvist, Senior Transportation Planner
Subject: Rose Quarter Improvement Project (RQIP) Outstanding Partner Concerns

We appreciate ODOT's continued partnership on the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project, which has allowed for demonstrated alignment around the project values and outcomes. However, there is still much more work to be done in providing the comprehensive framework necessary to promote a successful path forward and re-establish trust with agency partners and the community. We still have not seen any tangible progress indicating that our collectively defined values and necessary outcomes will be realized as part of the project.

We have appreciated participating as part of an inclusive governance structure that has been making strides in the right direction for the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project. We recognize ODOT's work to begin addressing partner agency requests and community concerns by:

- preparing to conduct further intentional outreach to community members who have historically been excluded from the decision-making process;
- standing up a Project Management Group, Community Advisory Committee, Community Opportunity Advisory Committee, and Executive Steering Committee;
- using professional facilitators to lead committee processes;
- developing charters illustrating committee roles and responsibilities and beginning to establish meaningful two-way communication channels with those committees;
- working with the Executive Steering Committee to identify project values and outcomes;
- completing the environmental peer review of the air quality, GHG, and noise analyses;
- acknowledging historical harm and leadership's commitment to restorative justice, as well as incorporating this value in project discussions at multiple levels;
- beginning discussions around timing for the I-5/I-205 tolling study and Rose Quarter; and
- starting conversations around the agency letter of agreement and developing matrices to make commitments to and track progress toward agency and community requests.

This work in laying the policy and procedural groundwork to begin engaging in efforts addressing partner agency and community concerns is significant, but it is not enough. We recognize that taking a step back to develop a comprehensive framework to ensure the process meaningfully engages the Black community and delivers a project centered on racial and social justice takes time and effort. Yet while agency partners have made these same requests repeatedly since before January, engineering and design work for the freeway portion of the project have continued to move along on schedule. The underlying technical work needs to start undoubtably reflecting our collective project values, partner agency requests, and community feedback right now.

What we, other partners, and the community are still looking for are clearly defined actions that pave the path for achieving the restorative and environmental justice and community development benefits envisioned in our values and outcomes. Towards bringing agency and community partners back to the table, we are looking to ODOT to demonstrate that those actions are supported by institutional commitments to specified timelines and performance metrics for evaluating success.

We look forward to addressing the following agency and community concerns through that work:

Restorative Justice

- The highway covers are critical to re-engaging partners and rebuilding community trust and we must take the time to work together to get it right. The design process needs to be inclusive, support the active and safe spaces envisioned by the Albina community, and pave pathways for long-term wealth generation. The scope and timeline for this work needs to accommodate and reflect community-led participation and meaningful engagement of the CAC and ESC.
- Design of the highway covers and local street connections need to be complementary to other Albina area plans and investments including the N/NE Quadrant Plan, Central City 2035 Plan, and the Albina Vision and associated Metro 2040 grant funded implementation efforts, including the Community Investment Plan.
- To fully address OTC Action 8, the project needs to incorporate equity principles and strategies for anti-displacement, community building investments, and long-term wealth creation and land ownership opportunities that are documented in a community benefit agreement. Strategies should support the Reimagine Oregon Plan, be developed with community-led organizations, and continue to be open to evolution. These could include:
 - Partnering to conduct a project-level equity impacts analysis.
 - Working with and supporting Black-led organizations in anti-displacement efforts.
 - Providing technical assistance to Black-owned small businesses to help them navigate staying open and communicating with customers during construction.
 - Supporting implementation of the Albina Vision and Community Investment Plan.

Community Input and Transparent Decision-Making

- Engagement efforts need to clearly demonstrate how input will inform decision-making and then meaningfully incorporate that feedback into project development. Black community members and leaders living, working, or with historical connections to the Albina neighborhood and broader N/NE Portland must be engaged and participating in decision-making as part of this effort.
- The decision-making structure still does not clearly define how feedback mechanisms will function between the community committees. There needs to be more clarity around how the COAC and CAC will communicate advice and recommendations to the ESC and each other, whether through identified regular liaisons or a report by representatives. Similarly, there needs to be more clarity around what the CAC and ESC may shape in their work and how that feedback will be incorporated to meaningfully influence project milestones. Some areas of influence not currently outlined in the charters include:
 - Project funding and finance plan (ESC)
 - Actions toward achieving the values and outcomes established by the ESC
 - Measuring and evaluating project success based on the values and outcomes
- Better alignment is needed between information that ODOT leadership provides the CAC and ESC and the day-to-day work of the Rose Quarter technical teams. We appreciate ODOT's transparency in pursuing development of matrices to document CAC and partner agency feedback, assign responsibility, and report back on progress in implementation. We appreciate that these tools will be a public demonstration of accountability and look forward to regular progress reports to the CAC and ESC. We would like to see how this feedback influences the work of the technical teams in terms of decisions around design and performance measures.

- We appreciate ODOT's work to establish values and outcomes for the project. The next step is to identify the performance measures that will be used to indicate whether the project is on track to and ultimately successful in achieved our established outcomes. These measures should be shaped by the ESC with input from the CAC.
- Metro and other partners have consistently requested an agency/community benefit agreement (e.g., IGA, MOU) be completed for the project that outlines the process for continued collaboration and commitments to actions with specified timelines that will lead to achievement of the established outcomes and associated forthcoming performance measures. The community benefit agreement should be developed together with the PMG, the CAC, and the ESC and include a framework for accountability (e.g., funding, auditing).

Transportation Demand Management and Public Health

- The project needs to maximize opportunities for high quality and safe transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure and crossing to increase mobility and improve travel reliability. meet. Strategies like bus on shoulder and local streets designs consistent with the City of Portland's N/NE Quadrant Plan and 2035 Transportation System Plan will be key in this effort and should be documented in the community benefit agreement.
- As the project was first conceived in the N/NE Quadrant Plan, local streets designs should also support the investments proposed as part of the Get Moving 2020 funding measure, including improvements to street lighting, transit stops, and the bikeway on N Vancouver/Williams and characterizing NE Broadway/Weidler as Albina's main street through public art, street lighting, and enhanced transit stations.
- It is still not clear how the Rose Quarter Improvement Project is linked with larger I-5 corridor planning and transportation demand management strategies to take into account the full scale of transportation needs and impacts.
- In particular, the project timeline does not appear to be synchronized with the I-5 tolling program in a way that pricing strategies for managing transportation demand and addressing cost overrun will be considered when assessing traffic and greenhouse gas emissions benefits. Metro and other partners have been consistent in our request that congestion pricing on this segment of I-5 be studied in time to inform project design and delivery and implemented as soon as possible and prior to completing the project. However, the current scopes and schedules for this work do not seem to be in alignment.
- Metro and other partners have consistently stressed the importance of a commitment to environmental justice through strategies reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality in N/NE Portland, which is disproportionately impacted by air toxins. It is still not clear if and how the recommendations from the Environmental Peer Review Report will be considered and/or incorporated. The commitment to implementing these and other mitigation measures, particularly to address health impacts to Harriet Tubman middle school with PPS and potential future impacts to land uses on the highway covers, should be documented in the community benefit agreement.

Metro and agency partners have requested that any alternative process to an EIS include a clearly-defined framework for moving forward combining creative methods to engage our community with innovative action plans to invest in community building and development centered in restorative and environmental justice. These concerns remain around sufficiently establishing that alternative framework and we look forward to continuing to work together to address them.

Thank you,
Margi Bradway