

Comments on SWC-LRP DEIS
for the July Homestead NA meeting
--Ed Fischer July 2, 2018

General Observations:

The DEIS is a huge document with 6 major sections and 9 appendices -- plus 5 "Attachments (available electronically)". The corridor is divided into 3 segments: A: Inner Portland (downtown to Barbur near Brier Place), B: Outer Portland (from Brier Place to just west of the Tigard-Portland boundary), and C: Tigard and Tualatin. While there are a lot of questions raised by many of the alternatives in segments B & C, my review focused on segment A, which is closest to our neighborhood.

The DEIS presents numerous summary-form conclusions but the document does not contain supporting documentation and calculations, which is understandable considering the size of the document. The reader is expected to just believe some of the conclusions -- which in some cases seem contrary to common sense. For example, Table 3.2-6 shows the "No-build" alternative with equal or higher congestion levels (Volume to Capacity Ratios) than any or all of the light rail alternatives. In other words they would like us to believe that having a light rail going through signalized intersections won't delay vehicles wanting to cross or turn at those intersections. I believe that conclusion is a result of either incorrect calculations, erroneous assumptions about vehicle demand, or a deliberately biased analysis. But without numerical details there's no way to know for certain.

The DEIS indicates that there are attachments available electronically. But I have not had time to examine "Transportation Impacts Results Report" noted to see whether there is any better evidence of the DEIS claims of minimal congestion impact from the light rail. I am skeptical about much of the claims related to traffic congestion in the report. Another example is the summary discussion of the Ross Island Bridgehead Reconfiguration Option (see p. E-20). There is a generalized claim that "Quality of life in South Portland would improve overall by enhancing safety..., increasing community cohesion..., and removing regional traffic from local roadways." Yet there are no detailed drawings of what will be changed nor any specifics on how the enormous volumes of traffic on local streets between the Ross Island Bridge and US 26 west of I-405 will be "removed". Replacing direct connecting ramps with traffic signals does not normally result in improved traffic flow. Once again, we are expected to just believe their statements without evidence. South Portland NA has apparently been convinced that the "Bridgehead" option will solve some of their traffic cut-through problems. But I am skeptical.

A. Initial Route Proposal in Segment A: Barbur

The DEIS identifies a draft "preferred alternative" as the "initial route proposal" (p. S-16). For Segment A the initial route proposal is A1 (Barbur). The overview table on p. S-17 identifies the following reasons for selecting Barbur over Naito: shorter pedestrian connection to Marquam Hill; faster travel time for LRT and busses in the "shared transitway"; and fewer displacements of homes, businesses, employees, and historic resources. *This is good news for Homestead and may be worthy of support from our NA.*

B. Marquam Hill Connection Options

There are 4 MH Connection Options noted (Appendix A, pgs A-26 thru A-30):

1A: Elevator/Bridge & Path Has 2 elevators (100' & 120' high), 2 bridges (140' & 190' long) and an at-grade crossing of Terwilliger with a pedestrian traffic signal. Connects to 3rd floor of Kohler Pavillion.

1B: Elevator/Bridge & Recessed Path Has 2 elevators (100' & 170' high), 2 bridges (140' & 150' long) and would have a below grade crossing of Terwilliger. Connects to 7th floor of Kohler.

1C: Elevator/Bridge & Tunnel Has 2 elevators (100' & 200' high), 2 bridges (140' & 120' long), a below grade crossing of Terwilliger and a 180' long tunnel. Connects to 7th floor of Kohler.

2: Full Tunnel Has a single elevator (290' high) one bridge (130' long) and a single tunnel (450' long). There would be no connect to Terwilliger (tunnel would be over 50' below Terwilliger). Connects to 7th floor of Kohler.

I believe the Neighborhood Association should write a letter (for the DEIS record) opposing Option 1A because it includes the pedestrian signal crossing of Terwilliger which we have opposed all along.

C. Design Refinement 1: Barbur Woods East-Side Running

The DEIS has identified a design refinement that would transition the LRT tracks from the middle of Barbur Blvd. to an area just east of Barbur (between Barbur and I-5) from approximately Rasmussen Village on the north to just north of Brier Place on the south. The tracks would be "primarily on an aerial structure(s)" (see page E-3 thru E-5) for approximately 1 mile. Changes in impacts and benefits (shown on pp E-3 & E-4) include lower construction costs; avoiding property acquisition and construction impacts (vegetation & "earthen cut walls") on the west side of Barbur; and avoiding reconstruction impacts to "historic" Newbury & Vermont structures. Both crossings of northbound Barbur lanes are assumed to be "at-grade and gated".

The DEIS does not mention any impacts to northbound Barbur traffic that will have to come to a complete stop every time a train (northbound or southbound) has to cross from one side to the other. Each train in both directions will have to cross northbound Barbur lanes twice on every trip. The delay to northbound vehicular traffic will be enormous (to the point that many northbound vehicles will likely divert to Terwilliger. Yet, there is no acknowledgement of potential vehicle delay, added queuing, or congestion on Barbur that would likely result. There is a clause on p. E-4 that notes the crossings "could potentially be grade separated". I believe Metro is using the term "historical bridges" in numerous places in the DEIS to persuade the reader that they would be doing everyone a favor by having this "East-side Running" design refinement. In reality, I suspect that it will be significantly cheaper to build narrower train & mixed use structures across Vermont & Newbury than it will be to completely re-build and widen the existing structures while maintaining traffic. I could not find the exact cost savings of this particular refinement. The total cost savings of all of the refinements (per Table S-5, p. S-23) is between 630 and 730 million dollars.

I think that the potential congestion and additional traffic on Terwilliger from at-grade cross-overs would be a significant negative impact on Homestead. I believe the NA should write a letter opposing at-grade crossings as part of a Barbur Woods East-side Running design refinement.