

December 27, 2022

To:

Shawnea Posey

Sharon Daleo

Caitlin Reff

RE: ODOT I-5 Rose Quarter Supplemental Environmental Assessment

PBOT Staff and Leadership,

The Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee (PAC) has reviewed the Supplemental Environmental Assessment for the Rose Quarter Improvement Project and the proposed “Hybrid 3” proposal. This project will create treacherous conditions for people walking on surface streets in the Rose Quarter. **We call on PBOT to withdraw support of the Hybrid 3 concept**, which would introduce a highway off-ramp into an area with heavy foot traffic, remove crosswalks, and generally worsen conditions for active modes. The current proposal goes in the wrong direction on climate, the wrong direction on safety, and the wrong direction on our modal goals, while providing little promise of accountability and follow-through for the few positive claims it can make. PAC members volunteer their time to guide City leadership in focusing on its commitments to prioritizing pedestrian modes, and we call on PBOT to honor those commitments.

Portland has committed to prioritizing pedestrian modes in the City’s transportation hierarchy, and PBOT policies clearly direct leaders to prioritize walking over other modes to improve pedestrian safety, accessibility, and convenience. PBOT’s Transportation System Plan (TSP) Policy 9.6 states that saving the lives of our most vulnerable road users – people walking and biking – is the bureau’s top priority. Further, the TSP includes commitments to:

- Encourage walking as the most attractive mode of transportation for most short trips, within and to centers, corridors, and major destinations, and as a means for accessing transit. (Policy 9.16)
- Create more complete networks of pedestrian facilities, and improve the quality of the pedestrian environment. (Policy 9.17)
- Improve pedestrian safety, accessibility, and convenience for people of all ages and abilities. (Policy 9.18)

In the face of these clear goals, Portland has continued to struggle with a legacy of substandard infrastructure and underfunded projects, with the heartbreaking and enraging result that dozens of our friends, family, and neighbors die on our streets each year. Two members of this committee have lost children in Portland crosswalks, and many of us have been personally impacted by vehicular violence in our lives. With one month to go in 2022, pedestrian fatalities

are at a 70-year high in Portland—an unacceptable and predictable result of the City not living up to its stated goals.

The I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project is, at its heart, a highway project focused on reducing congestion and moving automobiles quickly. While ODOT has expanded the project to include potential for connectivity of the surrounding area, its own analysis shows many areas where pedestrian safety and convenience will directly be made worse in the surrounding area. Specific examples from the SEA include:

- *“The relocation of the I-5 SB off-ramp at the intersection of NE Wheeler/N Ramsay/N Williams (formerly NE Wheeler) and N Vancouver under the Revised Build Alternative would increase the length and complexity of crossings and reduce safety for NB cyclists and pedestrians on N Williams south of N/NE Weidler... Closures of the crosswalk on the west side of N Williams, crossing N Broadway, and the crosswalk on the north side of NE Weidler, crossing N Williams...would introduce more complicated crossings (e.g., out-of-direction travel) on this section of N Williams...”* (pg. 94) Highway ramps are often very stressful crossing points with vehicles exiting at high speeds. The Moda Center area inherently includes large pedestrian events before and after games, concerts, and other gatherings. The area is also a heavy bike/ped thoroughfare and major transit hub. Creating an environment with more difficult crossings and detours for people walking is the opposite of what we need to be doing to move toward greater pedestrian safety and comfort.
- *“Increased potential for pedestrian auto conflict due to the placement of the I-5 SB off-ramp and updated turning movements”* (i.e. a double right turn lane) (pg. 97). ODOT claims that the added dangers may possibly be mitigated by signal phases and other design elements, but does not commit to any of these interventions. For a project to warrant the level of investment that ODOT is seeking, it should center pedestrian safety rather than first prioritizing high-volume high-speed traffic flow, and only then tinkering around the edges to add back some chance that people walking will be able to navigate safely. The current design violates multiple TSP policy commitments in its failure to center and commit to safe pedestrian travel.
- Closing crosswalks (West side of N Williams crossing NE Broadway, North side of NE Weidler St crossing N Williams) in a Pedestrian District moves against the goals of the TSP and standards of PedPDX.
- Removing Clackamas Crossing eliminates one of the few project elements that would otherwise improve active transportation access and safety consistent with local goals.
- Designs for the area suggest 4-lane arterials where high speeds from freeway traffic are predictable—the antithesis of a design that would center pedestrians or further climate and safety goals.

These negative impacts to pedestrian safety and comfort are notable even before considering how much ODOT is leaning on the City of Portland to contribute staff time and funding toward surface street changes and other support when those resources are urgently needed to mitigate deadly conditions in hundreds of other locations citywide. We call on PBOT not to invest time and resources in a project that clearly runs against the transportation and climate goals and policies that Portlanders have set for ourselves. The current crisis on our streets demands that PBOT, ODOT, and associated partners focus on projects that actively center safety for active modes. We urge PBOT to withdraw its support of the Hybrid 3 concept.

Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee