
LRT Construction Mitigation Studies

PORTLAND, OREGON:
Portland Streetcar Project

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For University Avenue Business Association
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Synopsis

The Portland Streetcar Project, completed in 2001, was implemented with the idea that it would be a “development oriented” transit project. As such, the major redevelopment of Portland along the streetcar route has always been an integral part of the project’s charter. Moving forward with this tenet firmly in mind, Portland Streetcar Inc, a non-profit public benefit corporation, has worked alongside the city of

Portland and the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet) to ensure the initial and continued involvement of local businesses and citizens. Animated by a series of underlying values, which were seen as crucial to positive public transit, the Portland streetcar project has consequently guided throughout with these tenets firmly in mind. These stated underlying values include: improving the livability of Portland, fitting streetcar projects within the existing infrastructure of the urban environment, holding to principles of economical construction and operation, ensuring a fidelity to public/private partnerships throughout the process and minimizing the negative disruption to businesses and residents. “The project also placed a very high priority on responsiveness to inquiries

received from adjacent property owners during the construction process.”

Through these underlying values and fidelity to local residents and business owners, Portland Streetcar Inc. claims certain development lessons learned. First, a clear delineation between public and private responsibilities, both throughout construction and afterwards is necessary to successful partnerships. Second,

development agreements must be in place, monitored and adhered to as the very basis of legitimizing the on-going project. A restructuring of transportation throughout a neighborhood or business district can foster changes in the type, timing and frequency of consumer activities. Finally, that consistent stakeholder involvement is crucial to making equitable the expansion of public transit and continued development of area business.



The structure of public transportation in the Portland metropolitan area is rather complex and bears review here, in the interest of further clarity. Public transportation within the metropolitan area is overseen by the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet) which is governed by a board appointed by the Governor of Oregon. Within the region

TriMet operates, or helps to operate, a bus line, the MAX light rail, and the Portland Streetcar (with a commuter rail soon to come on-line). Portland Streetcar Inc is a non-profit public interest corporation responsible for the overall operation of the Portland streetcar – though each one is staffed by TriMet employees. Portland Streetcar’s Board of Directors operates under the auspices of the city of Portland Office of Transportation.

Though this report is meant to contribute to a series of light rail reports, it is instead focused more specifically on the Portland streetcar project for three reasons. First, the light rail system was initially completed in 1986 and much in the creation and execution of public policy has changed since that day. Second, the structure concerning how the streetcar project has been realized more closely mirrors the structure existing in the Twin Cities. Finally, this report focuses primarily on the streetcar project because it is the most recent and allows for a more complete and nuanced understanding, on the part of the city of Portland and subsequently for St. Paul, of how these projects can be completed successfully and what problems may arise. In essence the streetcar project has

allowed the city of Portland and TriMet to employ the best practices they have learned from the construction and operation of the MAX light rail.

The city of Portland, TriMet and Portland Streetcar Inc took a multi-faceted approach towards ensuring the mutual success of their project and the area’s residents and business owners. It started with thoughtful, careful planning and appears to be achieving its goals by vigorously monitoring the continued success of the project. By devolving power over individual area policy to resulting public conversations in each area along the route, Portland avoided a one-size-fits-all approach. Portland is lauded for its public transportation system, and rightly so.

Public Involvement Plan

Before any ground was broken on the Portland streetcar project, a public involvement plan (PIP) was implemented to ensure that the city went forward with a certain amount of foresight as to how businesses and residents would become and remain involved in the project. It is written into law in the state of Oregon that each governing body for a public project must adopt and publicize a program for citizen involvement that is appropriate to the scale of the project. The Portland streetcar PIP states that those managing the project are to furnish the public with “complete information, timely public notice [concerning potential alterations and planning changes], full access to key decisions, and (support) early and continuing involvement of the public in developing plans and (programs).” This PIP also maps-out ten objectives which fall upon the planners to involve local residents and business owners. (For Public Involvement Plan charter see, Appendix A.)

Objectives:

- 1 – Create a Public Involvement Plan with project timeline.
- 2 – Strive to involve the underserved in the project at all stages.
- 3 – Remove barriers to public participation
- 4 – Involve owners of current transportation systems at all stages of planning and execution.
- 5 – Provide adequate public notice for public involvement opportunities.
- 6 – Provide planning information in a timely manner.

7 – Provide opportunities for public input.

8 – Provide updated summaries of the public comments submitted.

9 – Provide additional opportunity for comments after the initial draft and before the final plans.

10 – Periodically review and update the public involvement process to reflect feedback.

Metro Committee for Citizen Involvement (MCCI) and Community Advisory Committees (CAC)

The primary focus of these citizen-centered committees was to evaluate the quality of transparency and public involvement in the streetcar project. Each group furnished the opportunity for concerned community leaders to stay abreast of developments and served an evaluative function. Meetings usually occurred quarterly but often were scheduled more frequently during periods requiring high levels of involvement or during intense periods of construction. The MCCI was maintained by a Portland Metro employee responsible for maintaining lines of communication and addressing inquiries and concerns from the citizenry to TriMet while the CAC dealt more directly with the city of Portland government and Portland Streetcar Inc.

Community Liaisons

The city of Portland, TriMet and Portland Streetcar Inc each employed community liaisons to handle mitigation and be a channel

between local residents and business owners and decision makers. These liaisons had varying responsibilities which, though seemingly perhaps confusing, allowed for numerous avenues of communication and brought different approaches to problem solving. Because there were three distinct operations involved in decision making (the city of Portland, TriMet, and Portland Streetcar Inc) each group had its own community liaison. These liaisons were both in-house as well as privately contracted – depending on which organization one went through – and, because of their different allegiances, were responsible to different aspects of the project. Certainly this allowed for focus and specialization, but would seem to be rather tricky to navigate for the uninitiated citizen. (For contacts, see Appendix B.)

Public Presentations

These opportunities were focused on integrating small business owners and local residents into the streetcar construction timeline. Various these took the form of workshops, presentations to neighborhood group and public comment opportunities to Portland Streetcar Inc decision-makers, Portland Metro and Portland city officials. By keeping the information flowing in a dynamic manner – as a give and take – the hope was to minimize the disturbance to businesses and residents, prepare them for inconveniences to come and keep a dialogue active so that these disturbances could be reasonably limited.

Public Notifications –

For each development within the construction process public notification was required of all three entities – the city of Portland, TriMet and Portland Streetcar Inc (though the organizations could and certainly did work together on these). Minimal acceptable requirements for these public notifications were that they provide suitable notice given the nature and scope of the project. That each notification provide comprehensive information for how concerned residents and business owners could join the project mailing list and how to participate in Community Advisory Committees. Furthermore, notifications had to be explicit concerning how and when key decisions would be made and how to comment on such decisions. Such events would fall under the guise of those outlined above in Public Presentations. (For list of public notification mediums, see Appendix C; for public notification content, see Appendix D.)

Transit Use Encouragement

A program was established to encourage business owners to provide incentives for their employees to take the streetcar. Chief among these was an employer tax-break for employing people who took the streetcar a certain amount each month (it is unclear how this was achieved – perhaps in the form of a reduction in payroll tax).

It was identified that one reason people with cars

were not taking the streetcar was their concern that in the event of an emergency they would not be able to get where they needed to be quickly. Thus an Emergency Ride Home program was implemented, allowing riders a direct in-essence taxi ride home should a personal emergent situation arise.



Appendix A

(from Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon Public Involvement Policy, adopted June 10, 2004)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

A public involvement plan will be developed for each Metro program or project. The public involvement plan will specify the opportunities for public involvement, including the opportunities for participation by the general public (workshops, hearings) and by citizen advisory committees, as appropriate. The plan, program or project public involvement plan should identify the under-served (e.g., minority, low income) population and what strategies will be used to seek out and consider their participation. The structure also should identify and describe key decision points.

Each plan, program or project public involvement structure will be subject to the goals, objectives and guidelines described in this section. The public involvement opportunities described in each public involvement plan should be consistent with the guidelines that follow. The guidelines are more specific for certain types of long-term plans and programs.

It is recognized that these activities vary significantly and that there are any number of methods that could be employed to meet the overall intent of providing adequate, accessible public involvement during the planning process.

The public involvement structure may be fully defined at the start of the process, or it may be developed in concept (outline format) initially and then refined as a scoping element of the plan, program or project.

Appendix B

TriMet - Metro Committee for Citizen Involvement
Liaison

Cheryl Grant
503-797-1536
Email: n/a

City of Portland - Community Liaison

Christine Egan
503-235-5881
cegan@jlainvolve.com

Portland Streetcar Inc - Streetcar Citizens
Advisor

Kay Dannen
503-478-6406
dannan@portlandstreetcar.org

Appendix C

Notification methods:

- News bulletins
- Newsletters
- Public notices
- Distribution of flyers
- Public service announcements

- Electronic bulletin board
- Billboards
- Posters
- News stories
- Advertisements
- Mailings

- The purpose, schedule, location, and time of meetings.
- The location(s) where information is available.
- The comment period for written/oral comments.
- The process that may be available for supplementing or modifying the final plan or program (including identifying the anticipated time period for the next plan/program update).

Appendix D

(from Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon Public Involvement Policy, adopted June 10, 2004)

Content of notifications:

Notifications should be easy to understand and provide adequate information and/or indicate how additional information can be obtained.

To the extent possible, notifications of public involvement activities should include the following information:

- What action is being undertaken and an explanation of the process.
- What issues are open for discussion (e.g., regional significance).
- Who is holding the event/meeting and to whom comments will be made.
- How the comments will be used.
- How much time is scheduled for public comment at meetings
- Who should be interested/concerned and what are the major issues.
- Who may be contacted by telephone, in writing or by other means to offer comments and/or suggestions
- Future opportunities for comment and involvement.

Appendix E

(from Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon Public Involvement Policy, adopted June 10, 2004)

Opportunities for public involvement (examples):

Following are examples and ideas for strategies to provide for public involvement in transportation planning. Many of these ideas and descriptions are taken from “Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning,” distributed jointly by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration (January 1994). A copy of this document can be obtained from Metro.

This list is meant to provide ideas for consideration. Metro does not intend to prescribe specific strategies for use for any particular project. Jurisdictions are free to choose one or more of the following or to use any other appropriate strategies for their public

involvement activities.

Brainstorming is a simple technique used in a meeting where participants come together in a freethinking forum to generate ideas. Used properly – either alone or in conjunction with other techniques – brainstorming can be a highly effective method of moving participants out of conflict and toward consensus.

A charrette is a meeting to resolve a problem or issue. Within a specified time limit, participants work together intensely to reach a resolution.

Citizen surveys assess widespread public opinion. A survey is administered to a sample group of citizens via a written questionnaire or through interviews in person, by phone, or by electronic media. The limited sample of citizens is considered representative of a larger group. Surveys can be formal (scientifically assembled and administered) or informal.

A citizens' advisory committee is a representative group of stakeholders that meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While citizens' advisory committees have been used for many years and the technique itself is not innovative, it can be used very creatively.

A collaborative task force is assigned a specific task with a time limit to come to a conclusion and resolve a difficult issue, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. It can be used on a project level or for resolving issues within a project. Its discussion can help agencies

understand participants' qualitative values and reactions to proposals. It can aid in development of policies, programs, and services and in allocation of resources.

Focus groups are a tool used to gauge public opinion. Borrowed from the marketing and advertising industry, they define transportation as a product with the public as customers. Focus groups are a way to identify customer concerns, needs, wants, and expectations. They can inform sponsors of the attitudes and values that customers hold and why. Each focus group involves a meeting of a carefully selected group of individuals convened to discuss and give opinions on a single topic.

Media strategies inform the public about projects and programs through newspapers, radio, television and videos, billboards, posters and displays, mass mailings of brochures or newsletters, and distribution of flyers. Better information enhances public understanding of a project or program and is the basis of meaningful public involvement efforts.

A period for written and oral comments provides an opportunity for in-depth and more lengthy consideration and response by the public to draft recommendations. A comment period allows interested parties an opportunity to present their opinion on a particular project without the need for attending meetings or hearings.

Public meetings and hearings provide opportunities for information exchange. Public

meetings present information to the public in any number of ways and obtain informal input from citizens. Held throughout the planning process, they can be tailored to specific issues or citizen groups and can be informal or formal. Public hearings are more formal events than public meetings and generally focus on a specific proposal or action. Held prior to a decision point, a public hearing gathers citizen comments and positions from all interested parties for public record and input into decisions. Facilitators can be used to effectively guide the discussions at meetings.

Telephone techniques make use of the telephone for two-way communication with the public. The telephone can be used to obtain information and to give opinions. Its use has entered a new era of potential applications to community participation, going beyond question-and-answer techniques toward the evolving new multi-media connections with television and computers.

A transportation fair is an event used to interest citizens in transportation and in specific projects or programs. It is typically a one-day event, heavily promoted to encourage people to attend. Attractions such as futuristic vehicles can be used to bring people to the fair, and noted personalities can also draw participants.

Video techniques use recorded visual and oral messages to present information to the public, primarily via videotapes or laser disks. Video information can be presented at meetings or

hearings. Many households own a videotape player, which provides an additional opportunity for information dissemination.

Visioning leads to a goals statement. Typically it consists of a series of meetings focused on long-range issues. Visioning results in a long-range plan. With a 20- or 30-year horizon, visioning also sets a strategy for achieving the goals.