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Dear SEUL Board Members:

We appreciate the SEUL Board's interest in the Powell-Division Transit & Development Project. Your input is timely. We anticipate that the project's Steering Committee will make a decision on the project's Locally Preferred Alternative at their next meeting on Monday, October 24. It is important for the Steering Committee to hear from neighbors and organizations along the route as they make their decision.

As you requested at this week's Board meeting to project staff, we are providing a response to your letter on September 20, 2016. Below is a point-by-point response that lays out your concerns and the project team's responses.

1) ***Division is a poor choice, given its narrow streets and only one lane in each direction.***

A 60-foot articulated bus can increase transit capacity within the existing community character of inner Division. With all the new development anticipated in the corridor, ridership on the 4-Division is anticipated substantially in the next 20 years. This is one of the reasons the corridor is a top priority for transit improvements in the entire Metro region. A 40-foot bus cannot meet the demand of riders coming from and going to the neighborhood. A longer, more maneuverable vehicle can increase capacity on the street. In addition, buses today often hold up traffic on inner Division, a longer bus with fewer stops will result in smoother traffic flow.

2) ***Buses on Division would not be rapid. There is much skepticism of the data that suggests otherwise.***

The 4-Division bus today is often off-schedule and stuck in congestion. The new service would not be "rapid" in the sense that it be faster than the intended speed on the street; rather, it would be faster than 4-Division service is today. (The term BRT refers to many potential improvements to transit.) The proposed changes on Inner Division Street are designed to improve transit travel times, reliability (staying on schedule), and capacity (avoiding overfull buses passing riders waiting at stops). Much of this improvement would come from

- Multiple-door boarding, which means faster boarding at stations
- Fewer stops and transit signal priority, so the bus keeps moving

- Longer buses with more space and seats for riders
- Intersection improvements at key bottlenecks

While traffic can move slowly along Inner Division, it is more consistent than Inner Powell where congestion during rush hour is much worse. For example, during morning peak commute hours, the trip from SE Cesar Chavez to SE 12th Avenue takes five minutes longer on Powell than on Division.

Line 4-Division buses currently operate on average every 4-5 minutes during the peak hours and in the peak direction (westbound in the morning; eastbound in the evening). With these high frequencies already employed, simply adding more service on the 40-foot buses will not improve service in this constrained and growing neighborhood. Buses on Inner Division face challenges with reliability and capacity that will only continue to grow.

- The current frequency is not enough to meet the existing demand, and will not be enough to meet future demand—transit demand in the corridor is expected to grow substantially by 2035. Traveling between downtown Portland and Gresham Transit Center on Line 4 takes at least 10-20 minutes longer during peak commuting hours than it does at other times.
- Riders also experience a substantial variation in their travel time. Nearly all evening commute trips between downtown Portland and Gresham (4-6 p.m.) are late at least once a week.
- Currently, more than half of the trips on Line 4 are overcrowded in the evening commute from downtown Portland to Gresham
- However, the other 50% of trips are often not full—and this is because of the phenomenon known as "bus bunching." Bus bunching occurs when a bus experiences delays and the following bus catches up to it; often the leading bus gets crowded picking up passengers while the other bus is nearly empty.

The Line 4 is currently one of the most frequent busses in the TriMet system but receives some of the most complaints by riders being passed by full buses, as well as reports of overcrowding. TriMet continually makes adjustments to the Line 4 schedule in the hopes of improving its reliability, but because the traffic conditions in this corridor are highly variable, it is not possible to create a schedule that completely compensates for when and where the congestion will occur.

Without capital investments to improve capacity and reliability, along with traffic signal improvements to prioritize the new transit service, adding more trips to this bus line would only create more bus bunching. Capital investments with the project can improve transit travel times on Division Street by an estimated 15-20 percent as well as improve the its reliability and capacity. We believe these investments will build transit ridership along Division Street in inner Southeast Portland, as its residential population grows, businesses continue to attract visitors and employees, and driving and parking become more challenging. Further, the project could bring much-needed investments to Division Street in East Portland, where safe, accessible pedestrian infrastructure and bus stop amenities are sorely lacking. For transit-dependent riders, faster, more reliable bus service can play a fundamental role in quality of life, as well as access to jobs and educational opportunities.

3) ***This could lead to a reduction in ridership (example of Austin, Texas: https://austinrailnow.com/2013/09/22/why-metrorapid-bus-service-is-not-bus-rapid-transit/).***

The Austin Rail Now discussion of Austin Capital Metro's MetroRapid bus project highlights some of the challenges in terminology around corridor-based bus projects. While much of the proposed Division route would be in mixed traffic, the features previously noted above would improve travel times, reliability and capacity, plus add new amenities at stations.

These improvements typically result in increased ridership. Examples for other transit systems include:

- King County Metro Rapid Ride (http://metro.kingcounty.gov/am/reports/2014/rapidride-performance-evaluation-report-2014.pdf) A Line started in 2010. Runs from Federal Way to Tukwila. Ridership has increased 81% since line was begun
- Boston Silver Line: increased by 100% from 2005-2007: https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/FINALBOSTONBRTREPORT062507.pdf. More than 12% of new riders previously drove cars; nearly 40% are completely new riders to the area (South Boston Waterfront)

4) ***Fragile passengers (seniors, school children, and the disabled) may need to travel farther, at times uphill and in inclement weather, to the bus if stops are spaced further apart.***

Proposed station locations were identified based on data from existing Line 4 ridership. Other considerations included frequency of ramp deployment (for riders with mobility challenges, shopping carts, etc.) and proximity to transfer locations and other important destinations like grocery stores, medical facilities, and others. The proposed stations are located at the same intersections where 74% of existing riders board or disembark. Twenty-six percent of riders would have a longer walk of up to five blocks.

This summer's survey about proposed changes to Division Street included the question, "Which would you prefer, more bus stops but slower service or walking farther for a quicker trip?" Three-quarters of more than 3,200 respondents preferred walking farther for a quicker trip.

Another survey question asked about the proposed 11 pairs of stations between SE 8th and 82nd avenues, "On this stretch of Division Street, how well do the proposed station locations meet your travel needs?" Thirteen percent indicated they did not work well, while 64 percent indicated they worked well and 23% were in the middle or didn't know.

In open-ended comments, over 100 survey respondents suggested an additional station at SE 30th Avenue. Based on this feedback, planners expect to include this additional station in the proposal for the Steering Committee's consideration. The new station, plus four new stations on outer Division will result in 84.5% of riders having a bus rapid transit stop where they access a 4-Division stop now.

5) ***The longer, articulated buses do not have a strong performance record. Past failures are referenced in this article: http://southeastexaminer.com/2016/08/division-preferred-for-rapid-transit/***

TriMet is the largest transit district in the United States that does not operate articulated buses. Indeed, the articulated buses purchased in 1980s had significant maintenance issues, but technology has evolved significantly over the last 30 years. Other transit districts report no more issues, on average, with articulated buses than with the standard buses in their fleets.

6) ***The current plan does not address transit on the Powell corridor.***

A major transit improvement on Powell would cost more than a near-term project in the Federal Transit Administration's Small Starts funding program could achieve. The Powell-Division project is already into the first step in this funding program, and the project outcomes defined by the project Steering Committee in 2014 include "identify[ing] a preferred near-term high capacity transit solution for the corridor that safely and efficiently serves high ridership demand, improves access to transit, is coordinated with related transportation investments, and recognizes limited capital and operational funding." Bypassing the congestion on Powell, particularly during peak hours, would require extensive capital investments and impacts to properties and businesses that are beyond this scope.

That said, project partners recognize the many needs on Powell Boulevard and have developed a Powell-Division Corridor-Wide Strategy that represents commitments to pursue a coordinated set of actions that improve transit, safety, bicycle and pedestrian access, housing and equitable development in the greater Powell-Division Corridor. This includes transit, bike and pedestrian improvements on Powell Boulevard and connecting north/south streets, as well as programs to support affordable housing and economic development. Specific elements include:

- Potential Line 9-Powell Blvd transit service improvements. Possible options include additional service in peak-hours and limited stop service.
- Advancing Powell Blvd for regional consideration and prioritization within the High Capacity Transit planning process and amending the Regional Transportation Plan to assert continued need for Powell Blvd transit improvements. (This would be a much more extensive and long-term transit project.)
- Planned bus stop improvements on Powell at 39th, 82nd, 122nd, 136th avenues.
- Pedestrian crossing and intersection safety improvements including ADA ramps at 21st, 24th, 26th, 31st, 33rd, and 34th avenues.
- Improved bicycle and pedestrian crossings on Powell at 28th, 47th/48th, 57th/58th, 61st, 79th/80th, 107th/108th, 129th/130th, and 154th/156th avenues.
- New street lighting and right turn/bus lane at Cesar Chavez Boulevard.
- Enhanced pedestrian crossings at 36th, 125th, and 132nd/133rd avenues.

7) In place of the current plan, we propose exploring other options including:

a) Address "problem areas" of extreme congestion, ex. intersection with train tracks around 11th/12th (cars wait a long time for freight trains to pass; bike/pedestrian elevated path lost when Max orange line built), or under the overpass on Powell around 17th

The project focuses in on the most congested intersections to improve transit priority primarily east of 82nd Avenue. In addition, TriMet has been working with the Union Pacific Railroad to identify potential remedies to freight trains stopping in the crossings at SE 8th, 11th, and 12th avenues just south of Division Street.

b) Create flex lanes

Capital improvements in the project would focus on problem areas of extreme congestion on Division Street. Modern transit signal priority would help minimize time stopped at signalized intersections, and multiple-door boarding at consolidated stations would further minimize time buses are stopped. During the detailed design phase, additional improvements for minimizing delay at key intersections would be explored, in consultation with adjacent businesses and other neighborhood stakeholders.

c) Use express and local buses (instead of one route with reduced stops); perhaps express buses for outer SE residents

Express buses mixed with buses that stop at all existing stops on Division Street would not provide faster, more reliable service. The express buses would be stuck behind local buses with no opportunity to pass when local buses stop to pick up or drop off riders. The investments discussed above are necessary to improve travel times, reliability and capacity. In addition, inner Division Street is a major destination in its own right. Express buses running through the area would not provide access for people that want to access the destinations and would otherwise drive and park in the neighborhood.

d) Build light rail

A light rail line is beyond the scope of the current project (see discussion of Powell Boulevard above.) However, the Powell-Division Corridor-Wide Strategy considers advancing Powell Boulevard for regional consideration and prioritization within the High Capacity Transit planning process and amending the Regional Transportation Plan to assert continued need for high capacity transit improvements on Powell.

e) Introduce park and rides

City of Portland policy discourages placing Park & Rides in neighborhoods where there is robust transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and good access to transit to minimize motor vehicle trips. The inner southeast neighborhoods along SE Division Street do not have the characteristics that would support Park & Rides adjacent to the new transit service.

f) Perhaps keep the 4 line on Division and put BRT on Hawthorne to replace where the 14 line used to go

g) Consider a plan that does not have a straight alignment

The primary project outcome defined by Powell-Division Steering Committee in 2014 is to create a plan for "improved mobility to address long-standing infrastructure and investment issues along Powell-Division." A route on Hawthorne Boulevard is outside this corridor, and outside the area where needs have been identified. While Hawthorne Boulevard's four lanes may appear attractive for creating bus priority, at 9 ½ feet wide, they are not wide enough to consider routing the new service.

h) If the current plan moves forward despite objections, we would like to at least see a test done of BRT as proposed on Division, before committing to fund and implement the full project.

The improvements proposed are significant capital investments. However, last month, TriMet invited C-TRAN to drive a 60-foot articulated bus on Division Street to help address questions about how these longer buses would fit. (C-TRAN's new service with articulated buses, The Vine, is scheduled to open at the end of this year.) The C-TRAN bus operated very similarly to the Line 4 buses that serve Division today. The same width as TriMet's existing fleet of 40-foot buses, the primary operational difference is that these 60-foot articulated buses have a shorter turning radius.

NEXT STEPS

At the October 3rd Powell-Division Steering Committee meeting, Kerry Rowand also asked for more information about other transit districts that operate service similar to what is proposed for Division Street. We expect to have a detailed report next week but wanted to get the above information to you in the meantime.

We look forward to our continued discussion in the coming weeks and at the October 17 Land Use & Transportation Committee meeting.

Sincerely,

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Powell –Division Transit and Development Project Manager
Metro