

MEETING TITLE: Vancouver Working Group Briefing
DATE: February 4, 2010, 6:00 – 8:00 pm
LOCATION: Vancouver Housing Authority, 2500 Main Street, Vancouver, Washington

ATTENDEES:

White, John (facilitator)	Berger/Abam JD White and Associates
Barrentine, Rob	American Institute of Architects (AIA), Vancouver CRC Urban Design Advisory Group
Becker, Ken	Lincoln Neighborhood Association
Carter, Sara	Commuter
Coulthard, Lee	Vancouver's Downtown Association
Ford, Karin	Vancouver Library
Ghormley, Lisa	Community representative
Harroun, Jack	Hough Neighborhood Association
Malin, Dick	Central Park Neighborhood Association
McCarthy, Terry	Esther Short Neighborhood Association
Montgomery, Ross	Resident, East Vancouver
Sellers, Bob	C-TRAN Citizen Advisory Committee
Welch, Charlene	Community Choices
Williamson, Bob	Clark College

Note:

- Meeting materials and handouts referred to in this summary can be accessed online at: <http://www.columbiarivercrossing.org/ProjectPartners/VWGMeetingMaterials.aspx>

Review agenda and desired outcomes

John White thanked members for attending. White explained that since the Vancouver Working Group (VWG) made their North/South alignment recommendation the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) transit engineers advanced the alignment design and developed new information. White said that the City of Vancouver, C-TRAN, and the CRC staff felt strongly that members deserved to hear the new information. He added that reconsideration of the VWG recommendations is not being requested. White mentioned that ongoing investigation is also occurring on the East/West alignment, but that McLoughlin Boulevard and 17th Street would not be the topic of discussion for this briefing. White added that there is a possibility that the VWG be updated on the East/West alignment in the near future.

White reviewed the VWG's recommended North/South alignment, which included a center-running Broadway/Washington Couplet with two-way automobile traffic along both corridors. White reminded the group about their Charter, Guiding Principles, and Key Considerations and emphasized that the new North/South alignment recommendation took into account all of the aspects that the VWG identified in those documents (refer to the "Guiding Principles and Key Considerations" document found at the Web address listed above).

Explanation of current North/South LRT alignment recommendation

Technical Review

Using a slide presentation Thayer Rorabaugh, City of Vancouver, explained the current North/South light rail alignment recommendation: a couplet on Broadway and Washington, with center-running track and two-way auto traffic.

Rorabaugh explained that the CRC project is an evolving process. Rorabaugh expressed that his goal for the briefing is to share the new information and explain how that knowledge changes the staff's preference on the North/South alignment to side-running track and one-way auto traffic.

Rorabaugh explained that both operation and function were taken into consideration in the on-going technical review by the City of Vancouver, C-TRAN, and CRC staff and that new analysis and data were realized when the following factors were considered:

- In-lane bus stops
- System-wide traffic flow
- Contra-flow with regular traffic and transit
- Prioritized left-turns
- Future conversion funds
- BRT in guide-way
- Pedestrian Zone
- VWG key considerations including on-street parking, access to off-street parking and loading zones

New Analysis and Information

Rorabaugh explained that the newly developed information included the following: 12' vehicular travel lanes are needed for safe operation, Broadway Street south of 11th Street has only 75' of Right-of-Way, and access can be maintained to some parking facilities. Rorabaugh continued by saying that new analysis was conducted including: traffic modeling analysis conducted for 2030 forecast, analysis of left-turn lanes and bus stop locations, design details with center platforms, and implementation of VWG desire for wider sidewalks.

Jeff Hamm, C-TRAN, explained that when the new information was developed the technical team investigated six various alignment configurations before concluding that side-running track with one-way auto traffic yielded the most benefits. Hamm clarified that variations of Washington and Broadway streets were the only options considered and that new alignment corridors were not investigated.

Traffic modeling analysis conducted for 2030 forecast

Rorabaugh said that the traffic modeling took into account the City of Vancouver's development plans, in addition to projected automobile travel patterns in the downtown core. Rorabaugh used the planned waterfront development as an example and explained that one of the benefits of the side-running, one-way auto traffic alignment is that it optimizes traffic and truck flow as well as signalization for the future.

Terry McCarthy highlighted the importance of an effective street grid for freight mobility.

Hamm added that this alignment also provides the best opportunity for Bus Rapid Transit to operate in the light rail guide-way.

Rorabaugh explained that the model projected extreme congestion and poor Levels of Service with a center-running, two-way auto traffic alignment design. He continued by saying that once one-way traffic was modeled for Broadway and Washington streets, there was very high confidence that the system could work effectively. Rorabaugh clarified that his piece of information weighed the most heavily into the City of Vancouver's preference of a side-running two-way auto traffic alignment. Rorabaugh said that the rest of the downtown Vancouver street grid will remain two-way auto traffic.

Ken Becker asked about the timing difference in congestion that the modeled showed from the residential traffic at the Waterfront versus the industrial traffic from the Port.

Rorabaugh explained that there is substantial office and retail commercial space planned for the waterfront development so the timing of the automobile traffic would be relatively balanced.

Lisa Ghormley is concerned that the automobile traffic will divert to Columbia Street with one-way auto traffic light rail corridors, as well as through the neighborhoods North of Mill Plain Boulevard.

Rorabaugh said that converting both Washington and Broadway streets to one-way automobile traffic will cause some driver diversion to Columbia, Main, or C streets, but that the model shows the shifting will be minimal and that the other streets can handle the traffic shift.

McCarthy added that light rail trains run relatively slowly which impedes automobile traffic. McCarthy added that drivers will choose to use side streets regardless of corridors being constructed as one-way or two-way auto streets.

Bob Sellers asked if the Park & Ride numbers were included in the City of Vancouver's traffic model. Rorabaugh responded that they were.

Bob Williamson asked if the model considered the work of the G-Tech Blue Ribbon Commission.

Rorabaugh confirmed that that the model took the G-Tech Blue Ribbon Commission into account.

Ross Montgomery asked if a two-way track configuration on Washington Street was re-evaluated.

Rorabaugh confirmed that this alternative was investigated and that the model showed automobile traffic was made worse with a two-way track alignment on Washington Street.

Broadway right-of-way requirements

Rorabaugh explained the CRC team concluded that Broadway Street, south of 11th Street, has 75' of Right-of-Way (which is 5' less than the rest of the corridor has) and that either additional ROW acquisition or design refinement would be required in this area.

Parking facility access

Rorabaugh explained that City of Vancouver staff discovered that with a side-running alignment access can be maintained to key parking facilities with signalization and additional techniques.

Rob Barrentine asked about business access impacts from the side-running design.

Rorabaugh said that maintaining access is not the initial preference, but if a driveway cannot be re-designed to a side street, access can often be maintained as an exit-only driveway.

McCarthy said that he would have preferred a side-running track design originally, but was worried about business access being adversely affected which seems to be adequately mitigated in the design.

Analysis of left-turn lanes, bus stop locations, and 12' lanes

Rorabaugh showed the illustration of the newly recommended alignment: side-running track with one-way auto traffic and explained the benefits of the proposed configuration: wider travel lanes and sidewalks, an increase in on-street parking spaces, and out of lane bus stops (this illustration is available, via the power point presentation, online at the Web address above). Rorabaugh explained that all of these items enhance the safety of the corridors substantially.

McCarthy cited an example of how dangerous in-lane bus stops can be for automobiles.

Sara Carter asked for clarification that the new light rail recommendation would not change the previous bus routing concept. Hamm confirmed.

Lee Coulthard asked about which side, of both Washington and Broadway streets, the light rail would run.

Rorabaugh answered that the light rail trains would run on the east side of Washington Street and the west side of Broadway Street.

Hamm explained how this would affect the bus stops.

Jack Harroun asked if bike lanes will be included on either Washington or Broadway streets.

Rorabaugh said that the City of Vancouver would like to stay consistent with their previously identified bike corridors and keep the bike lanes on C Street.

Hamm showed an illustration (this illustration is available, via the power point presentation, online at the Web address above) of the VWG recommendation: center-running track with two-way auto traffic. Hamm said that center-running stations are considered wasted real estate in dense, urban areas, as opposed to combing the sidewalk and station and having a dual purpose of the station. Hamm acknowledged the security concerns with side stations and explained design and policy considerations that are being identified and worked-through for side-running stations.

Sellers asked how the proposed 19' side-running station and sidewalk compares to downtown Portland.

Steve Witter, CRC, said that it is very comparable.

Barrentine said that the bus stop fence located at Broadway and Evergreen streets, are very unfriendly and aesthetically unpleasing.

Harroun added that he also hates the fence and that there would be a lot of resistance to that type of light rail station design.

Hamm explained the business pressures at the Broadway and Evergreen streets bus stop and that the re-design solved the problem.

McCarthy said that when the 7th Street Transit Center moved, it simply displaced the problem. McCarthy added that he can appreciate romantic architecture notions associated with designing light rail stations, but that they are opposed to business interests.

Discussion regarding refinements to the North/South alignment recommendation

White summarized that a side-running track configuration, with one-way auto traffic is the resulting North/South LRT alignment recommendation from the CRC, City of Vancouver, and C-TRAN staff.

White summarized the presentation indicating that numerous benefits can be realized with the side-running, one-way track alignment including the maintained parking capacity, flexibility in bus loading and unloading zones, and better utilization of space within the corridor because center platforms consume valuable real estate. Additional benefits presented include the implementation of the VWG's desire for wider sidewalks with the greatest amount of safety for pedestrian movements at intersections and enhanced sidewalk capacity for businesses and pedestrians.

Hamm added that an additional benefit is the optimized traffic and truck flow, as well as signalization for the future, and providing the best opportunity for Bus Rapid Transit in the light rail guide-way.

McCarthy said that the side-running track, one-way auto traffic recommendation makes a lot more sense for operations, but questions what the implications for the City of Vancouver will be from converting Broadway Street back to one-way auto traffic.

Rorabaugh explained the history of Vancouver's business community in regard to parking, the bus system, and auto traffic. Rorabaugh confirmed that the business community and surrounding neighborhoods requested two-way auto traffic on particular downtown streets, but emphasized that the recommended alignment would propose to change only Broadway Street to one-way auto traffic and would keep Washington Street as one-way auto traffic. Rorabaugh did advise that City of Vancouver Council has not heard this information yet.

Coulthard said that the trade-off to the business community, with losing two-way auto traffic, would be much wider sidewalks.

Barrentine said that station location and development potential should be considered with the side-running track recommendation. Barrentine continued by saying that station locations may need to be reconsidered now that they are side stations and that each station site should be examined individually.

Barrentine said that the new recommendation will be very effective from a traffic and transit perspective, but that the business push back is going to be immense for the following reasons: the business community believes that two-way auto traffic provides more exposure to their store fronts and will view one-way automobile traffic as unacceptable; and defining a station area in front of a business is going to be perceived as an impediment to the public getting to that business. Barrentine continued by saying that the benefits provided to the business community, rather than the transportation benefits, need to be the message communicated to them.

Members expressed interest about the upcoming outreach approach and concern about impacted businesses being informed about this recommendation.

White explained that there is going to be extensive outreach by CRC staff as part of this North/South alignment recommendation refinement including door-to-door outreach and light rail alignment open houses.

McCarthy said that he does not want to be affiliated with the old VWG alignment recommendation because he very well would have come to the same recommendation if he had been presented with the correct analysis and information.

Harroun said the he really appreciates the public process and believes the CRC, C-TRAN, and City of Vancouver staff has been genuine in trying to use the VWG input and incorporate it into finding the best alignment alternative.

Vancouver Advisory Committee Introduction/Closing Comments

Hamm said that CRC, C-TRAN, and City of Vancouver staff are conducting the same type of in-depth analysis on 17th Street and McLoughlin Boulevard and would be happy to bring that information back to the VWG when they are concluded.

White explained that a new Vancouver Advisory Committee (VAC) will begin meeting in the near future to focus on design aspects of the Vancouver light rail line. White said that all VWG members are invited to participate on this advisory committee and asked that they express their interest in continued CRC project involvement, as it relates to light rail in Vancouver, to Katy Belokonny either via phone or e-mail. White added that members should not underestimate the value of their work to the project, C-TRAN and the City of Vancouver.

Ken Becker asked if the VAC would be open to the public.

White said yes and explained that it would not begin until the light rail alignment has been presented to the City of Vancouver Council and the C-TRAN Board of Directors.

McCarthy asked when the alignment recommendations would be brought forth to the City of Vancouver Council and C-TRAN Board of Directors.

Rorabaugh said that these meetings would most likely occur in March or April.

White closed the meeting by thanking members for their time.