



PROTECTING YOUR
RIGHT TO ROAM

30 September 2013

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To:

Commissioner Steve Novick
1221 SW 4th Ave, Suite
Portland, OR 97204

Subject: Support for Amendment for SW Barbur Safety Improvements

As the statewide walking advocacy organization, Oregon Walks is writing to express our firm support for a lane reconfiguration designed to provide space, separation, and safety for all modes of travel along Southwest Barbur Boulevard. Our organization is committed to advocating for safe streets throughout the state of Oregon, and few roads in the City of Portland need safety improvements more than Barbur. The City of Portland acknowledged this urgent need by designating Barbur Blvd as one of its first High Crash Corridors.

As the preeminent road connecting Southwest Portland neighborhoods to each other and to the City Center, it is deplorable that many stretches of Barbur, including the Newbury and Vermont Bridges, are severely lacking in even the most basic infrastructure for people traveling along or across that corridor on foot. Barbur has been the target of Oregon Walks advocacy for safer facilities for decades; to name a few:

- In 1999, the Barbur Streetscape Plan was funded through a Transportation and Growth Management grant; this project was staffed by a City of Portland employee who founded Oregon Walks (then known as the Willamette Pedestrian Coalition).
- Our 2010 Action Plan “Getting Around on Foot” report expressed frustration that projects for basic walking on busy arterials in southwest Portland “are eligible for regional funds, [but] have languished on the City’s, Metro’s, and ODOT’s transportation project lists for years.” “Getting Around On Foot” mentions that the West Portland Crossroads Residential Survey, undertaken in 2009 by Southwest Neighborhoods Inc., found that of the 327 respondents, 86 percent favored adding more sidewalks, 82 percent wanted better crosswalks, and 76 percent wanted improved access to bus stops.

- In December 2010, 27-year old Angela Burke was hit and killed by a drunk driver while walking her bicycle along a section of SW Barbur a half-mile south of SW Hamilton that lacks sidewalks. Oregon Walks' Executive Director immediately responded to the tragedy, noting in a press release published in full in the Oregonian that *"Ms. Burke's death was as senseless as it was preventable. In our community and in our region, everyone should feel safe while walking or biking on our roads. There is no higher priority than preserving life. This tragedy is a mournful reminder of how far we have to go in terms of traffic safety. We – as advocates, as transportation authorities, as parents, as people who walk and bike and care about the safety of our neighbors – must take swift action to make significant safety improvements along the entire length of SW Barbur Boulevard, and on every street where people are walking and biking near motor vehicle traffic above 20 miles per hour."*
- Oregon Walks volunteers have advocated for traffic calming and rightsizing initiatives on SW Barbur by participating in the City of Portland's Barbur Concept Plan study, passed by the city in April of 2013, and in the SW Corridor Plan, a joint project of Metro, TriMet, ODOT, the City of Portland and other jurisdictions in the corridor.
- This past August, Henry Schmidt, a twenty-year old student at Lewis and Clark College, was the victim of a hit-and-run on SW Barbur while walking his bicycle along a stretch of SW Barbur without sidewalks. Oregon Walks cosigned a letter from local organization Friends of Barbur calling for immediate and cost effective safety improvements to help prevent these tragedies.
- Just last week, another pedestrian was hospitalized after being hit while crossing this dangerous road at an unmarked crossing. Oregon Walks strongly supported a project to improve sidewalks and crossing opportunities in the vicinity of where this latest crash occurred, and we are grateful that the City is proposing to fund this project with its share of Regional Flex Funds.

Clearly, action is necessary now to prevent further injuries and fatalities.

Oregon Walks strongly supports an amendment to the Southwest Corridor Resolution Language that directs staff of the City of Portland, Metro and ODOT to immediately work toward opportunities to reconfigure SW Barbur Blvd to make it safer for people walking, biking, driving, and taking transit. Similar projects elsewhere (known also as *rechannelizations* or *road-diets*) have been shown to cut speeding, reduce conflicts, and improve safety for all users, all with little impact on overall travel times. For Barbur Blvd, a reconfiguration could increase separation between motor vehicles and people walking and bicycling throughout the corridor (and especially so on the

Vermont and Newberry bridges) as well as providing space for people walking where currently they must walk in the bike lane immediately adjacent to high speed traffic.

Your support of said amendment to support a study of the traffic and safety implications of rightsizing SW Barbur could help prevent the next horrific traffic fatality. We encourage you to consider an amendment to the resolution based upon the following suggested language:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Council directs staff to initiate a transparent and collaborative process with Metro and ODOT to study the SW Barbur lane diet option on SW Barbur Blvd. from SW Terwilliger to SW Hamilton (SW Corridor Plan Projects #5096 & #1019).

Thank you very much for your attention on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aaron Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aaron Brown
Board President, Oregon Walks