

Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland

1120 SW 5th Avenue, Room 800
Portland OR 97204



October 2, 2013

Commissioner Steve Novick
Portland City Council
1221 SW 4th Ave, Suite 210
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Novick,

North Vancouver Ave. is part of a very successful corridor street from a number of perspectives. Businesses are booming in the corridor, developers are creating many units of new housing and many people use the street to reach their destinations every day.

According to the Portland Bureau of Transportation, North Vancouver carried more than 5,000 daily bicycle trips in 2012. While the citywide proportion of women riding bicycles is approximately 31%, more than 40% of the people riding on North Vancouver were women. This is a positive indicator of the appeal of North Vancouver for bicycling, as higher proportions of women riding bicycles generally means that people feel safe and comfortable on the street.

Those more than 5000 bicycle trips on North Vancouver in 2012 represent a 97% growth in bicycle trips on that street in the past five years and a 172% growth since 2006.

But the subject of this letter is not North Vancouver Ave. It's SW Barbur Boulevard.

There are many similarities between these two streets. Like North Vancouver, SW Barbur Boulevard is a principal bicycle corridor connecting residential neighborhoods to the Central City. Like North Vancouver, SW Barbur offers the flattest topography for bicycling in its area, making it an especially desirable route. Based on Metro's newly-minted bicycle demand model, SW Barbur should be carrying a volume of bicycle trips similar to that on North Vancouver. But that's where the similarity ends. In reality, bicycle volumes on SW Barbur are one-eighth those on North Vancouver and they've been dropping since they peaked in 2008 at slightly less than 1000 daily trips. Only 20% of people riding bicycles on SW Barbur are women; well below the city average.

That SW Barbur does not achieve its potential to serve SW Portland as a bicycle route is principally a failure of design. The road is too fast. The bicycle lanes are unprotected. Most importantly, the bicycle lanes disappear at critical areas on the roadway, notably at the Vermont and Newbury bridge structures.

Creating comfortable riding conditions on SW Barbur is technically simple, yet is proving politically vexing. The portions of SW Barbur Boulevard for which the City of Portland is the road authority have already been improved through road diets, resulting in the provision of buffered bicycle lanes. Only the portion of SW Barbur Boulevard under the control of ODOT remains dangerous, uninviting and

serves as a currently insurmountable barrier to bicycling and walking for average SW Portland residents.

Given the importance of this roadway to active transportation in SW Portland, its potential to carry more than eight times its current volume of bicycle traffic and its current level of underperformance, it seems that what's needed is a serious analysis of how to address this problem. Unfortunately, ODOT has decided to prevent improvement of bicycle lanes on its segments of SW Barbur. More significantly, ODOT is basing its decision on a questionable analysis of conditions.

ODOT's analysis of a road diet on SW Barbur is flawed, and it is playing fast and loose with the data and information about this important corridor. This is confirmed by the SW Corridor Active Transportation Evaluation Report. Two analytic tools were used to analyze road diet conditions on SW Barbur. However, ODOT, in their 9/5/13 memo, bases their recommendations principally on the one tool (DTA) that uses non-standard practices and faulty data. By selecting these results ODOT has purposely presented the most unfavorable outcomes to improving bicycle conditions on SW Barbur.

The SW Corridor Active Transportation Evaluation Report states that "no firm conclusions can be drawn about the amount of diversion resulting from possible additional delay due to the road diet. Additional analysis would be needed..."

At this point we ask you to bring to bear all possible pressure on ODOT to work with its regional partners (PBOT and Metro) to conduct an impartial, transparent analysis of a road diet on SW Barbur. Should the analysis then support a road diet, we ask you to then actively work with ODOT to make that happen.

While SW Barbur may be under the control of ODOT, it is traveled daily by your constituents. We cannot wait 20 years for the development of high capacity transit to provide basic transportation facilities on a roadway of such importance to Portlanders. Most importantly, why should we rely on faulty analysis and incorrect assumptions when safety is so clearly at stake?

Sincerely,



Suzanne Veaudry Casais, Chairperson
Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee



Ian Stude, Vice-Chairperson
Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

Cc: Mayor Charlie Hales
Comissioner Nick Fish
Comissioner Dan Saltzman
Comissioner Amanda Fritz
Leah Treat, Director Portland Bureau of Transportation