

# Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

*Working to Make Bicycling a Part of Daily Life in Portland*

1120 SW 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 800  
Portland OR 97204



January 15, 2013

Jilayne Jordan, Community Affairs Coordinator  
Oregon Department of Transportation – Region 1  
123 NW Flanders Street  
Portland, OR 97209

RE: ODOT Safety Improvements  
Barbur Blvd. – Newbury and Vermont Bridges

Dear Ms. Jordan,

During its January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) reviewed the limited pedestrian/bicycle safety improvements proposed for the Newbury and Vermont Bridges located on Barbur Boulevard between Capitol Highway and Terwilliger Boulevard. The BAC understands that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is prepared to perform significant construction work on these two bridges – with approximately \$5 million of funding dedicated to that purpose – and is also proposing to use supplemental funding of approximately \$200,000 to provide additional pedestrian/bicycle safety improvements. These proposed safety improvements include higher railings, sidewalk ramps, drainage improvements, and/or a wider sidewalk (from 3' to 5') on the west/southbound side. According to ODOT representatives, more significant bicycle improvements for this stretch of Barbur would come during the implementation of the SW Corridor Plan and other planning initiatives.

For bicyclists today, these bridges are extremely hazardous and represent a serious deterrent to using Barbur Boulevard as a bicycle route. Currently, the bridges experience significant motor vehicle traffic volumes moving at high speeds; they lack bicycle facilities entirely and feature only narrow, three-foot walkways. Given the scarcity of available, bicycle-friendly routes connecting Southwest Portland with the Central City and Northwest – and, by extension, Portland's Eastside – the need for bicycle-appropriate safety improvements on these bridges is paramount. The BAC does not oppose the installation of higher railings, sidewalk ramps, and drainage fixes as have been proposed because they will provide modest, near-term improvements for the limited number of pedestrians and cyclists who do utilize Barbur. Unfortunately, while these proposed safety improvements are well-intended, they will do little to resolve the underlying safety and comfort issues for bicyclists – especially for the large number of “interested but concerned” riders who today avoid Barbur Boulevard altogether.

With its gentle grade and direct alignment, this segment of Barbur holds *tremendous potential* to be the premier bicycle route connecting downtown and Southwest Portland. It is critically important for ODOT to find an acceptable and comprehensive solution to the current safety issues now and not use the SW Corridor or other planning initiatives as a rationale to defer serious action until well into the future.

To address these greater concerns for Barbur, BAC members and other community members from Southwest Portland have proposed a “road diet” in order to reappropriation some of the roadway’s cross-section to provide sufficient bicycling and walking space on the bridges and throughout this entire section of Barbur. In fact, the final *Barbur Concept Plan* (currently being drafted) is expected to identify the need to provide better accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians, including a road diet proposal for this segment of Barbur.

Therefore, the BAC strongly recommends that ODOT partner with the City of Portland to immediately conduct a full and modally balanced evaluation of a road diet between SW Hamilton and SW Miles. Then, should an analysis of a road diet indicate that dropping a travel lane would still allow the roadway to function properly, the two agencies should work together to design appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities that reflect the importance of this route for non-automotive transportation and that will accommodate the increase of bicycle and pedestrian travel expected for Portland’s future. Our committee would very much welcome the opportunity to be involved with such efforts.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Veaudry-Casaus', written over the printed name below.

Suzanne Veaudry-Casaus, Chair  
Portland Bicycle Advisory Committee

c: Jason Tell, Region 1 Manager  
Jessica Horning, Region 1 Active Transportation Liaison  
Jay Sugnet, Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability  
Jonathan Maus, Publisher, bikeportland