

Eastside Transit Alternatives Analysis

Locally Preferred Alternative Recommendation

Adopted by the Steering Committee
June 5, 2006



♻️ Printed on 30% recycled post-consumer paper.

I. Overview

This document presents the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) recommendation for transit improvements for the Eastside transit project in Portland's Central City. These recommendations are based on information documented in the *Eastside Transit Alternatives Analysis Evaluation Report* (Metro, May 2006) and from public input received during the public comment period and in the hearing held May 10, 2006 before the Eastside Project Advisory Committee (EPAC).

The LPA decision consists of three distinct decisions on project implementation and phasing. The **mode decision** chooses between streetcar, and the no-build bus network. The **terminus decision** addresses whether the project can be completed in one phase or in construction segments defined by three minimum operable segments (MOS). The streetcar alternative includes two potential alignments through the Central Eastside, the MLK/Grand Couplet and the two-way Grand design option and the **alignment decision** will choose between them.

II. Eastside Transit Project Locally Preferred Alternative

A. Transit Mode - Streetcar

Streetcar is the preferred transit mode for the Eastside project as defined by the **Full Loop Streetcar Alternative**. This alternative best meets the project's purpose and need and goals and objectives as outlined in the *Eastside Transit Alternatives Analysis Evaluation Report (Evaluation Report)*. The project also garners significant public support as shown by the public comment received.

The **streetcar mode** is preferred because:

- The streetcar mode results in approximately 30% higher ridership than an equivalent level of bus service operating in the same Central City mixed-traffic environment, indicating an inherent preference, or modal bias for streetcar
- A streetcar line would leverage higher levels of economic development and would provide better opportunities for land use that fosters compact urban form, reduced vehicle miles traveled and higher transit mode split than bus transit alone could provide, as shown by the experience of the existing Portland Streetcar
- A streetcar line has garnered strong community support, and the support of adjacent property owners, as evidenced by support for the current streetcar line through participation in local improvement districts, and through the stated intent of property owners along the Eastside line to participate in such a district.

The **Full Loop Streetcar Alternative** performs better than the no-build or MOS options in several key areas:

- Highest streetcar ridership and highest ridership per mile of operation
- Most cost-effective project by all three measures evaluated – annualized capital and operating cost and capital cost per new streetcar rider, federal capital cost per new streetcar rider and operating cost per new streetcar rider

- Best implements land use and economic plans and policies for the Central City
- Provides best potential for economic development given the geographic extent of the line
- Provides the greatest travel time improvements due to a new Willamette River crossing
- Provides potential for the highest level of local funding through a local improvement district and possible amendment of urban renewal areas
- Best meets the transit circulator function outlined in the Purpose and Need for the project.

B. Terminus

1. Interim Project Terminus – OMSI MOS

The **Full Loop Streetcar Alternative** is the project's ultimate objective. However construction of the project will need to occur in shorter segments to respond to the anticipated availability of federal and local funds and the timing of the Milwaukie Light Rail Project and construction of the new Caruthers Bridge across the Willamette River.. The **OMSI MOS** is the logical interim terminus for the full project until such time that the proposed Caruthers Bridge or other Willamette River streetcar crossing is viable. Current estimates for completion of the Milwaukie Light Rail Project put completion at 2014. The OMSI MOS would have a capital funding gap between project costs and anticipated revenues of \$37 million. It is recommended that major component costs and funding be reviewed seeking to reduce the overall cost and to identify additional revenue sources for the construction to OMSI as soon as possible.

2. First Construction Segment – Oregon Street MOS

The **Oregon Street MOS** is recommended as the first construction segment for the project for the following reasons:

- The Oregon Street MOS would require \$60 million in FTA Small Starts funding, less than the statutory maximum of \$75 million for a single project. All other MOS options and the Full Loop Alternative would require the maximum level of FTA participation.
- The City of Portland needs to complete key analyses regarding the alignment south of Oregon Street. The Oregon Street MOS is the only MOS that could be advanced expeditiously independent of additional analyses for the MLK/Grand couplet in the Central Eastside.

C. Alignment – MLK/Grand Couplet

The preferred alignment through the Central Eastside is the **MLK/Grand couplet**, contingent on the conditions set forth in section D below, for the following reasons:

- The MLK/Grand couplet alignment enjoys a higher level of community and business support than the two-way Grand Alignment.
- The MLK/Grand couplet alignment better supports existing city policy in the Portland Comprehensive Plan, Transportation System Plan and Central City Transportation Management Plan
- The two-way Grand alignment would result in greater local and neighborhood traffic impacts, would require major improvements on SE 7th Avenue including transitions to and from Grand Avenue, and would add \$17 million to the cost of the Morrison or OMSI MOS options or the Full Loop Alternative.
- The added cost of the two-way Grand alignment would strain finite local and federal funding sources and could delay the ultimate completion of the project.
- The MLK/Grand couplet would allow for a wider Local Improvement District and could enhance the ability to acquire local funding for the project.

Although MLK/Grand is the preferred alignment, the Steering Committee has raised some concerns regarding the MLK/Grand Couplet alignment and construction of the project through the Central Eastside including:

- Quality of the pedestrian environment, particularly on MLK Blvd, and its effect on the ultimate success of the project
- Connectivity with east-west bus routes at the bridgeheads, particularly from MLK Blvd
- Commitment of urban renewal funding, parking meter revenue and other sources to solidify local funding to construct the alignment south of Oregon Street.

D. Conditions for Extending the Project to OMSI

Extension of the project south of Oregon Street is therefore, contingent on the City of Portland addressing the following Steering Committee concerns regarding the Central Eastside alignment:

- Progress towards a signed development agreement between the Portland Development Commission and the developer of the Burnside Bridgehead project
- Development of an MLK/Grand Transportation Management Plan that will:
 - Improve pedestrian access to the streetcar
 - Improve pedestrian safety and increase pedestrian crossing opportunities at streetcar stops, with special attention paid to the needs of the elderly and handicapped and connections to the bridgeheads
 - Provide for efficient streetcar operations through evaluation of transit priority measures that could include capital improvements such as curb extensions and operational improvements such as signal timing and spacing, or other measures

- Provide for efficient vehicle and freight movements through coordinated signalization, or any other operational improvements that will address the issues
- Identification of additional private and public redevelopment opportunities and projects along the corridor in addition to the proposed Burnside Bridgehead project
- Amending the Central Eastside Urban Renewal District to facilitate development objectives within the District
- Development of a parking management plan that includes a plan for raising revenues to help fund streetcar operations

When the project Steering Committee determines that the conditions have been met, project sponsors will seek to immediately extend the project to the OMSI MOS. If that is not possible for financial reasons, the shorter Morrison Street MOS should be considered as an interim terminus. The overall short-term goal is to proceed with the project to the OMSI MOS until such time that the Caruthers Bridge or other Willamette River streetcar crossing is available.

If the preceding conditions are not met or are not met satisfactorily, the Steering Committee will evaluate other alignments and measures, which will meet these conditions.