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April 12, 2007

Couplet Lives to Fight Another Day

I was fortunate to testify relatively early in the process yesterday, as part of one of about a half dozen invited panels.

That was before some 80 members of the public testified.

I had to leave immediately after my testimony to get to an MPAC meeting.

I just finished going through almost six hours of video of hearings (and I still missed the vote/final statements of Sten and Potter, which went past the 6-hour mark I had set my recorder for). Thank god for the 30-second-forward button on TiVO.

The net is that the couplet will move into preliminary engineering. But auto traffic will return to Burnside at 15th, so the Catholic Cathedral and School will not be impacted by additional cars.

Still in question is whether the Streetcar might use the stretch of Couch from 15th to 19th. That issue will be studied further.

Commissioner Saltzman who felt "trammitized" wants to keep the Enhanced Burnside alternative alive in case costs for the couplet turn out to be unfundable. The Mayor is concerned about how the project competes for funding with other transportation priorities.

Commissioner Sten wants to make sure that the couplet doesn't happen UNLESS the Streetcar alternative happens (this is different from Sam's previous position, which was that the decision was divisible; he has apparently now embraced the full bundling). Sten also added an amendment tying the decision into the Central City Plan update process (a potential delaying factor) but with a strong suggestion that the Central City Plan better include the couplet.

As part of the discussion, Sam had to defend the local match funding sources for the Streetcar Lo

project and took pains to point out that they don't compete with the potential Burnside sources.

Net result: A unanimous vote for \$2.6M to start preliminary engineering on the couplet, and \$500 to do project development on the Enhanced Existing option as a backup if the couplet proves too expensive.

Sam also has marching orders to figure out how the City-wide rail plan will get integrated into the early stages of the Central City Plan update.

Planning Director Gil Kelley, a confirmed couplet opponent, chose to go to MPAC rather than the Council hearing. I doubt he will be thrilled with the direction to reconcile the couplet with the Central City Plan.

We're a long way from done...

Oregonian [blog coverage here](#).

Posted by [Chris Smith](#) at [01:17 AM](#)

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Comments

April 12, 2007 07:07 AM

Grant H Says:

Woo hoo!

This project is of particular interest to me as I live on Burnside. I dread crossing it every time, an unfortunately it's a daily chore. I hate that street, and I don't take that term lightly.

Chris, thank you for all the effort you have put forth. I wish I could be more involved, but between work and college, there's little time.

April 12, 2007 07:16 AM

pdxcook Says:

Steve Duin's column had it right this morning -- it was theater in the round -- nothing fresh or new in the updated slide show, a chorus of paid political consultants AND the addition of some of the cut school kids we'll ever see at City Hall. I applaud the Council's decision to move the cars back to

15th away from Cathedral School (with further possibility of moving the streecar onto Burnside at 15th as well). But how could the Commissioners completely ignore the Pearl District's ONLY public school, the Emerson School at Park & Couch? Those children breathe even MORE bad air and will have five times the cars going by their windows, too? Folks, Emerson just LITERALLY got thrown under the train!! This project needs more work!!!

April 12, 2007 07:36 AM

[Chris Smith](#) Says:

But how could the Commissioners completely ignore the Pearl District's ONLY public school, the Emerson School at Park & Couch?

They didn't. Council asked that the Emerson area be looked in detail during the preliminary engineering phase to maximize safety.

April 12, 2007 11:35 AM

pdxcook Says:

The best way to "maximize safety" for Emerson School would be to HONESTLY CONSIDER the Enhanced Burnside Option -- which would keep the cars on a safer Burnside and NOT run them by the school. But the real question is -- if Emerson School had walked EVERY STUDENT in front of the council to testify, would their voices have been louder than the large property owners and the "independent consultants"?? Doubt it.

April 12, 2007 11:56 AM

Bob R. Says:

I think there is an important (though perhaps not overriding) distinction to consider when comparing the claims of the Archdiocese and the Emerson School.

The Emerson School was not chartered until early 2003 and did not open at its current location until September of 2003, long after much of the Burnside-Couch planning and public process had already taken place and had been announced.

The Archdiocese has a stronger claim because of their long-established presence in that location. I would be curious to know if back in 2003 the Emerson School site selection committee was aware of the couplet proposal and what their thoughts were at the time.

- Bob R.

April 12, 2007 12:04 PM

Frank Dufay Says:

if Emerson School had walked EVERY STUDENT in front of the council to testify, would their voice have been louder than the large property owners

I actually felt sorry for the PDC guy who came on after the kids...positively bursting with enthusiasm --albeit heartlessly-- and waxing eloquent over the millions of investments to be mad the increased values, and, oh, sure, the "gap" that may require still more --was that \$40 million? in additional public subsidies to make this all happen.

This sure ain't about the kids. And it sure ain't about the pedestrians either. Not that I don't think there isn't value to what's proposed...but is it value enough, and is it an important enough priority? And if it IS...then why not have the real beneficiaries pay MORE of it through a Local Improvement District?

April 12, 2007 01:12 PM

[Adron](#) Says:

So with the Streetcar coming down Burnside and Couch or whatever... does that mean at the crossover places like Powell's books will now have 2x the amount of LID to pay since they have as much service?

How would that work anyway?

Also, I support what Frank Dufay says, but only if the general funds used for roadways is brought equity by tolls (electronically collected) to provide a more balanced and intelligent choice among customers of each respective service.

Hell, it wouldn't be much, just charge a measly 15-20 cents per mile on the interstates... Oregon could be the first state to cover 100% of roadway costs out of roadway collected/directly associated funds collection!!!! :)

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