Open House #1 Summary

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Overview

The City of Portland held a public open house from 5-8 p.m. Wednesday, June 25, 2008 at the Cedarwood School for the Gibbs Street Pedestrian Bridge Project. The purpose of the open house was to present possible bridge concepts and ideas about how to connect the bridge on the east and west sides. This was the culminating event for the three-day design charrette held from June 23 to 25, 2008. The project team also shared information about the study schedule and budget, the community context of the pedestrian bridge and ideas that had been considered and set-aside.

The open house was advertised through a postcard mailing to 4,000 residents, and through announcements in the Southwest Neighborhoods Inc (SWNI) newsletter and web site, bikeportland.org blog, an OHSU employee newsletter, the South Waterfront's community newsletter, and at meetings of the North Macadam Urban Renewal Advisory Committee, the South Portland Neighborhood Association, and the South Waterfront 2020 Committee. Approximately seventy people attended.

The meeting was an open house format where members of the public had the opportunity to discuss the project with staff members, review displays and complete a comment form. The following displays were provided:

- General project boards including an overview and schedule for the project, the requirements for the bridge and the planning framework.
- Clear, two, and three span bridge design concepts
- East and West Landing concepts
- Ideas considered and set aside

Comment Form Summary

Demographics

Thirty-five comment forms were completed at the open house. The majority (around 64 percent) of respondents live or work in the Corbett, Terwilliger, or Lair Hill neighborhoods. About 18 percent of respondents live or work in the South Waterfront area, while another 18 percent either lived outside of the above mentioned neighborhoods or did not respond to that particular question.

When asked how they would use the bridge, the vast majority of respondents said they would use it for walking and biking for recreation. More than fifty percent of respondents said they would use the bridge to reach shopping, retail, or other destinations and walking to take transit. Few respondents indicated that they would use the bridge to walk or bike as part of their commute, or biking to transit. Two respondents mentioned that they would use the bridge for routine exercise to access the waterfront trail for jogging or biking.

Most respondents said that they would use the new bridge on the weekends. About half of respondents said they would use the bridge on weekday afternoons and evenings.

Bridge Concepts

The bridge concepts were presented in three groups: clear span options, which would require no piers in the ODOT right of way and only supported at both landings; two-span options, which would require one pier in the ODOT right of way; and a three-span option, supported by two piers in the ODOT right of way.

For the clear span option a cable stayed and arch concepts were presented. For the two-span option, a cable stayed, arch and box girder concept were presented. And for the three span, only one concept, a box girder was presented. In addition to conceptual drawings, bullet points about each concept relative to the project objectives and basic cost estimates compared with the budget for the project were provided. Respondents were asked which concepts they preferred for each span option, and invited to comment on what they liked or did not like about the design.

Clear span bridge concepts

Most respondents preferred the cable-stayed option, compared to the arch option. For those who liked the cable-stayed most mentioned that the design was the most aesthetically pleasing and likely to work well with the existing tram tower. Many people mentioned that although the cable-stayed option was more expensive, the pleasing visual aspect would justify the increased cost. Most respondents mentioned that they did not want an "ugly" bridge concept.

The respondents who chose the arch option also mentioned that they liked the concept because of aesthetics, and that it did not compete with the design of the tram tower. However, two respondents mentioned that both concepts would obstruct views of the river, and the open bridge designs would be very noisy for pedestrians.

Two-span bridge concepts

For the two-span option, there were three bridge types: cable-stayed, arch, and box girder. Again, the cable-stayed and box girder were the most popular. The arch was identified as fewer people's preferred concept. Written comments on all three are mainly related to aesthetics. Those that like the cable-stayed option again mentioned how it would fit in with the tram tower, and they liked the design. Those who liked the box girder noted that it was less expensive to construct and that the design would not complete with the tram tower.

Three-span bridge concept

The only three-span option presented was the box girder. About half of the comments about the box girder were positive and half were negative. The respondents who liked the concept were conscious of the affordability, low maintenance costs, and liked how the appearance seemed lighter and open. Those that did not like the concept focused on the aesthetic quality, and three respondents said that the option was "ugly". The number of piers and lack of visual flair were also mentioned by those that did not like the box girder option. However, even those who did not like the design mentioned that this concept was affordable and several people mentioned that they would accept this concept if it was all the budget allowed.

Landing Concepts

Design concepts the east and west landings were presented at this open house. There were two options shown for the east landing:

- option A included a tower with a two cab elevator and stairs wrapped around the structure
- option B showed the two cab elevator and tower, with an open stairway separate from the elevator tower.

The west landing concept showed the bridge ending at the intersection of Kelly Avenue and Gibbs Street.

East Landing

More respondents preferred concept B (separated stairway) than concept A. Some people noted the opportunity for a café or greenspace as part of the landing area.

Many of the negative comments focused on the elevator. Some questioned the need and perceived cost of putting in an elevator; others were concerned about visibility and safety issues as well as the inconvenience of waiting for the elevator. Another respondent suggested that people lingering after dark and skateboard activity could degrade the accessibility of the bridge itself.

West Landing

Those who liked the concept noted that the landing blended into the neighborhood, giving an integrated feel. They also noted that the like that the landing would be at ground-level and connect easily to Kelly Avenue.

Those who did not like the west landing were primarily concerned about pedestrian safety at the Kelly Avenue/Gibbs Street intersection given the amount of traffic in the area. Many of the comments mentioned how quickly traffic moves along Kelly Avenue, and how there would be conflicts with cars attempting to enter and exit the Ross Island Bridge. Respondents were concerned about the safety of the intersection, using words such as "death trap", "frantic", and "difficult" to describe the existing conditions. Other concerns raised were the need for a pedestrian activated signal, the possibility of already limited parking being eliminated and the negative effects of putting in a stoplight. In addition to the safety issues, three comments addressed the need for urban design to make the area more inviting for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Concepts Set Aside

During the charrette process, through technical analysis and feedback from the CAC , TAC and bicycle and pedestrian advocates, the team set aside a number of concepts. These include clear-span, two-span and three-span truss options. In addition bicycle ramp alternatives were set aside that would connect to Macadam Avenue, and a longer ramp that would connect to Moody north of the bridge. On the comment form, respondents were asked if the concepts set aside made sense to them, and to provide a reason why or why not. All respondents who answered this question agreed with the project team's decision.

Meeting Evaluation

All respondents said the open house was useful or somewhat useful. Almost two-thirds of respondents heard about the meeting through the project postcard mailing. Most others heard about it through a neighborhood association or related publication. A few people noted that they had heard about the meeting through the web site, a friend/neighbor, or the grocery store.

Most respondents liked and appreciated the availability and friendliness of the designers and staff people. Many attendees also mentioned that the posters and other visual aids were easy to understand, clearly presented and in a logical order which made the concepts easy to understand. When asked what the team could do differently next time, a few people mentioned including a brief presentation as part of the meeting.