

Vancouver on verge of approving light rail

Mass transit | The thornier question may be where to place the northernmost terminal

By **ALLAN BRETTMAN**
THE OREGONIAN

VANCOUVER — If opinion polls are to be believed, if a recent public hearing is any guide, the popular consensus has opened Vancouver's door to light rail.

Seems like only yesterday that every news story about light rail in Vancouver mentioned a public vote held more than a decade ago: Clark County rejected light rail by a 2-to-1 ratio on Feb. 7, 1995.

But perhaps a clogged interstate, a changing population and \$4-a-gallon gas have converged so that it won't be much of a surprise Monday night when most members of the Vancouver City Council vote to support a light-rail line and new interstate bridge over the Columbia River.

That could be the easy part of the council's business.

A more contentious issue may be selecting the point where light rail should start and end. The council's choice could set a multiyear course for other local mass-transit choices, and it would undoubtedly alter some of the city's older neighborhoods.

The council is one of six policy-making groups whose preference will help guide the nitty-gritty planning for the staff of the Columbia River Crossing, the agency of Oregon and Washington transportation workers that has been guiding the study of a new bridge.

The six groups are picking a "locally preferred alternative" for what type of bridge, if any, and the type of mass transit, if any.

The board of C-Tran, the Clark County transit agency, votes Tuesday; the Portland City Council and Tri-Met's board vote Wednesday; Metro votes July 17; and the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council votes July 22.

Those boards, like the Vancouver council, are expected to recommend a replacement bridge with light rail.

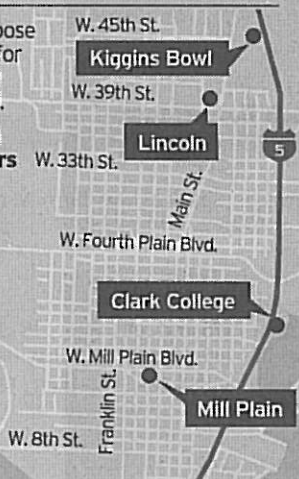
But only the Vancouver council and C-Tran will weigh in on the thorny matter of a light-rail terminus

Proposed Vancouver light rail

Vancouver officials are expected to choose from four stopping and starting points for a possible MAX line. The path of the rail line to the station has yet to be decided.

Terminus	Cost	Expected daily riders
Kiggins Bowl	\$1.04 billion to \$1.1 billion	21,100
Lincoln	\$850 million to \$881 million	20,800
Clark College	\$654 million to \$689 million	18,200
Mill Plain	\$596 million to \$628 million	19,100

Source: Columbia River Crossing



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Light rail: Council faces choice to hug I-5 or not

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location on the Washington side.

If light rail is built, it appears certain that Tri-Met's Yellow Line would extend from the Expo Center, over the river and through about 15 blocks of Vancouver's downtown.

That's where the council members' choice comes into play.

Should they set a course for light rail to roll alongside Interstate 5 or allow the line to cut through venerable Vancouver neighborhoods?

The Interstate choice

This line would veer east from downtown toward Clark College, on the east side of I-5 for about 30 blocks, again crossing over I-5 to a park-and-ride lot at Kiggins Bowl, a sports stadium a few blocks north of 39th Street.

Another choice before the council would allow the line to go through downtown and cross over to Clark College, where the line would end. This likely would allow future transit expansion, possibly to Kiggins Bowl.

Some light-rail supporters who spoke to the council at a public hearing last week said they backed the Kiggins Bowl alignment. They said it would have less impact on neighborhoods than another proposed route heading north from downtown, mostly along Main Street.

Main Street

This line would pass quaint retail areas and travel through

three of the city's oldest neighborhoods.

Several transit officials like the idea, noting that it would cost less to construct it. This route would end in the Lincoln neighborhood, roughly at Main and East 39th streets. The rail bed would use streets and would not require as much new construction.

The officials also have said retailers could expect a boost from a line running outside their doors. But no retailer spoke at the council's meeting last week supporting the alignment.

Another choice would allow the terminus at a spot between downtown and Uptown Village retail shops, the Mill Plain terminus, perhaps leaving open the option of someday extending north along Main Street.

Transportation officials feel confident about obtaining at least \$750 million in federal money for light rail, based on the track record of previous projects throughout the country, said Thayer Rorabaugh, transportation director for the city of Vancouver.

It's possible the council and other agencies are getting ahead of themselves in discussing details about the alignment. Vancouver voters probably will need to approve a sales tax increase to pay for light-rail maintenance and operations.

But city officials note much has changed since the light-rail referendum was defeated 13 years ago.

Since 1995, the city's population has grown nearly 140 percent, from about 68,600 to this year's estimated 162,400. Officials believe new arrivals from the Portland area or other cities are amenable to light rail.

Also, the price of a gallon of gas in 1995, unadjusted for inflation, peaked near \$1.25.

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