

The Multnomah County Bicycle and Pedestrian Citizen Advisory Committee applauds the progress made toward an Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge. However, we believe some of the cost-cutting measures being proposed, along with the lack of commitment to specific connectivity features, could leave us with a bridge that is not able to meet the demands of earthquake response nor serve the vital needs of our community. We have three areas of concern:

- 1) A narrowed bridge will not meet the emergency response, disaster relief, rebuilding and personal transportation demands in the days, weeks and months after a major earthquake.
- 2) The lack of specific, firm commitments to connectivity with pedestrian, bicycle and other wheeled mode (especially wheelchairs and mobility scooters) infrastructure in both the Central City and the Central Eastside risks squandering this unique opportunity to lead the way toward safer and convenient active transportation in our region.
- 3) Both these shortcomings imperil progress toward the adopted goals of the County's Climate Action Plan.

A major earthquake will shatter roads and bridges throughout the region. Even if residents could find drivable routes, there will not be gas or electricity to power personal motor vehicles. Bicycling and walking will be the only practical means of personal transportation. To truly be Earthquake Ready, the Burnside Bridge must accommodate this predictable surge in bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Project staff have said it is possible that motor vehicle lane space could be allocated to bicycling and walking. But faced with the vital needs for emergency response, transporting food, water and other essential supplies, debris removal and then rebuilding materials, it seems quite unlikely that there will be any "extra" deck space. The County must maintain the Preferred Alternative commitment to 20' bicycle and pedestrian paths on both sides of the Burnside Bridge.

Paths on a bridge are useful only if they have robust connections to the transportation network. Before the pandemic, the Hawthorne Bridge paths were filled with people walking and biking, while the path on the nearby Morrison Bridge was largely deserted. The key difference is how the bridge paths connect... or don't... on each side of the river. The existing Burnside Bridge is also underutilized because of poor connectivity, particularly with the Eastbank Esplanade. Its replacement will continue to be the central bridge of our growing and evolving city and region for even longer than the current bridge's century-long lifespan. If robust connections and the capacity for improvements are not included in the project criteria, the new Burnside Bridge could become a bottleneck and obstacle to regional active transportation development far into the 22nd century. If we fail to heed that long timeline, generations to come will pay for our short-sightedness. At a minimum, the County must commit to including ramps to the Eastbank Esplanade (not unreliable elevators), as well as safe and convenient connections to the street grid, including, but not limited to, Better Naito, SE Ankeny, and connections to the Green Loop. Because the project team has decided to delay key design work on the east approach, firm connectivity criteria and adequate budget allocations must be in place to guide that design phase.

County leaders have correctly identified the climate crisis as the greatest environmental challenge of the 21st century. But the 2020 Final Progress Report of the County's 2015 Climate Action Plan warns that "carbon reductions have started to plateau and that current emissions trends are not sufficient to meet the needed reduction targets that need to be achieved. To achieve the goal of a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 as identified by climate science, local emissions must be reduced by an additional 31% in the next 10 years. This is a daunting task." (p. 14) The Climate Action Plan specifically calls for identifying "opportunities for expanding pedestrian, bicycle and other multimodal transportation options on Willamette River bridges". (p. 82, Action 4CC) The new Burnside Bridge is the largest infrastructure investment the County has made in our lifetimes. It must be a bridge that will help us meet the challenge of the climate crisis. When weighing project budget options, we must not undercut progress toward reducing vehicle emissions. That necessity includes incorporating future expansion of bus and streetcar transit on the Burnside Bridge. The County must ensure that the design of the Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge fully aligns with County's Climate Action Plan.

The Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge project is the opportunity of a lifetime to build a bridge that will support a thriving community. We cannot allow it to become a missed opportunity that would hobble the evolution of regional transportation for a century or longer.