

Dear Burnside EQ Ready Workers:

I am following up on our discussion in the EQRB Section 106 consulting parties meeting on November 30, 2020. I appreciate being included in these meetings and for the invitation to respond with ideas. Please bear with the length of my response, like the 1926 Burnside, long and broad.

The meeting reminded me how many concerned citizens, agencies, and consultants are considering what's best for the now-94-year-old Burnside while also weighing what's best for the bridge users of today and for the generations of bridge users during the next 100 years and likely much longer. We don't know how long the steel bridges of today will last given they haven't been here long enough for us to get a handle on their longevity. We do know that, like people, bridges do better when tended to and cared for.

I've always had a special affinity for the rough-and-tumble Burnside, the 1926 bridge arriving the year before my mother was born and the same year my father was born. It's like a family member who has been around for decades, with the survivors wondering how to maintain memories and pay homage after the last goodbye. Like one's parents, there will never be another 1926 Burnside Bridge, true also of 1894 Burnside Bridge, the original Burnside part of the swing-span generation.

Being one of about 20 Community Task Force committee members for the Environmental Review and Type Selection phases of the project — attending no fewer than 20 in-person and Webex meetings over the past two years, at least one meeting running four hours — I remain confident in the CTF's recent decision to recommend the long span replacement alternative over the other three alternatives we considered, including an enhanced retrofit. I am grateful Multnomah County has taken on the responsibility for what will, no doubt, run in the neighborhood of a billion dollar project, one yet to be fully funded even as the County continues to manage and maintain five other Willamette River bridges (WRBs) and more than 20 smaller bridges elsewhere in the County.

As the historian who documented the Burnside Bridge and three other WRBs for the Historic American Engineering Record 1999 study of ten Portland-area bridges for the Library of Congress (my four reports not completed until 2005), I am devastated by the thought of losing the 1926 Burnside for many reasons. However, I see no alternative but to give it a proper send off to the Great Bridge Beyond, if you will, to include commemoration (mitigation) fitting of Burnside's place in Portland society and history.

Along with the marvelous ideas already on the table, I am interested in Nathan Holth's assertion that "mitigation must match the extent of the loss of Burnside," and his naming Burnside as "a loss of unusually high proportions" when considering mitigation measures. He's suggested retrofitting one or more of the other historic bridges in Portland to make them earthquake ready. What a splendid and fitting idea, but how to fund?

I'd appreciate at some point being reminded of what mitigation measures were taken for the replacement of the 1925 Sellwood Bridge, never listed on the National Register of Historic

Places, unlike the 1926 Burnside, which was added to the Register in 2012. Also, what the mitigation might have been for the County's Sauvie Island Bridge, opened in 2008 to replace the 1950 bridge.

My list, so far, of mitigation possibilities:

- Along with Burnside's City Beautiful and political connections and heart-of-Portland positioning, I have always been most admiring of the 1926 bridge's engineering bones. I think whatever other mitigation projects are to be considered, it would be of primary importance to graphically illustrate for history's sake what led to Burnside's demise. I am so sorry we can't get at least one of those 40-foot-tall Douglas fir timbers out of one of Burnside's two bascule piers and made into an exhibit so passersby can see at least one of the 1,100 tree trunks that supported Burnside for almost a century. Maybe a replica would be possible?
- This would be in addition to providing a survey of what the Burnside saw and experienced during its lifetime, both within and beyond its boundaries. I am imagining a timeline of local Big-Deal Portland personality changes and those of the bigger world between 1926 and 2028.
- Along these lines, please consider erecting one or more cenotaphs, metaphorically speaking, on the replacement bridge in a place of prominence and maybe position a permanent "obituary" in the vicinity of the replacement bridge.
- And how about running Burnside's obituary in *The Oregonian*? I'm thinking of the one-page four-color tributes to entrepreneur Gert Boyle and to those of other icons recently published in the main sections of *The Oregonian*. See my stab at Burnside's obituary below.
- Perhaps provide a Website address where people might leave their thoughts and appreciation for the 1926 bridge, giving anyone who wants access to a moderated site where the public of all ages, means, and inclinations can leave comments, stories, and their memories involving Burnside for an extended period of time, say during the length of the new bridge's construction?
- A Website could be a perfect place to publish the oral histories of the Multnomah County operators who opened, closed, and lubricated the 1926 Burnside in recent years. Their names are many, among them: Pam Patrie, Frank Engel, Dennis Dexter, and Tammy Vanderlinden. There are also maintenance staff and electricians who have their own stories to tell, including retired Bridge Maintenance Supervisor Tony Lester. It's my understanding that Jon Henrichsen, now serving as Interim Director of Transportation for Multnomah County, was the electrical expert during the conversion of Burnside from AC to DC power and from manual to digital control in recent years.
- One retired operator is a renowned tapestry artist; perhaps a work of art could be commissioned to be exhibited at some permanent location?

- Speaking of Web resources, the *Wikipedia* entry to Burnside is sorely lacking with the current introduction running a mere three sentences. It would be important to expand this entry so it more accurately reflects Burnside's both grand and working class persona, while giving adequate attention to the 1926 bridge's shifty conception, i.e., the insider scandal that resulted in the recall of three County commissioners and a new engineering company being called in to take control of Burnside's creation.
- With the Hawthorne Bridge's major rehab in 1999, I curated and edited "Bridge Stories, a Memory Book," a collection of essays written by 30 local citizens about their "bridge" experience for an open-book display featured in the *Bridging the City* exhibit at the Oregon Historical Society. The memory book became part of OHS's then new "Portland Square" exhibit. Perhaps the museum might be willing to mount something similar for the 1926 Burnside and its iconic replacement. Impressive bridge artifacts are already on display at the Oregon Department of Transportation's Region 1 offices in Portland, among them one of the 1926 Burnside's original operation control panels and an antiquated electrical switch board.
- I strongly urge mitigation efforts include involving Oregon's poet laureate in any commemorative and planning ceremonies. Laureates are appointed for two-year terms. From the Oregon Cultural Trust's Website: "The Oregon Poet Laureate fosters the art of poetry, encourages literacy and learning, addresses central issues relating to humanities and heritage, and reflects on public life in Oregon." Given Burnside's humanity, heritage, and public life, the poet laureate could bring much to the table of recognition of Burnside's passing. For more about what poetry might do for the 106 process, visit *The New York Times* December 2, 2020 story, "In a Dark Season, We Went Looking for Poetry," by Felice Belman: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/02/insider/poet-laureate-thanksgiving.amp.html>.
- Finally, it is imperative that an educational component be created for the involvement of the elementary school students in the metro area who study the core WRBs every year as part of social studies curriculum. In Portland Public Schools alone, there are more than 4,000 third graders who annually learn more about our big river bridges. It would be a wise educational decision for mitigators to partner with interested school districts in the metro area to foster the updating of curriculum with new materials for younger readers, their parents, and teachers.

Meanwhile, below is a 1,450-word draft of my version of an obituary for Burnside's passing, written past tense. I'm wondering what others might write or add?

### The Burnside Bridge (1926-2028)

After a lifetime of community service, the one-of-a-kind Burnside Bridge of Portland, Oregon fell victim to changing times despite the constant and loyal attention it received from its long-time caretaker, Multnomah County. The 1926 Burnside Bridge's spirit and that of its

predecessor, the 1894 Burnside Bridge, are being carried on by a number of sibling bridges along with the 2028 Burnside — a total of 15 roadway, light rail, and train bridges between St. Johns and Oregon City in the Portland-area family of bridges in the 186-mile-long Willamette River. Like other such stalwarts that daily face exposure to the elements of a major river in a large city, Burnside hated salt, bird doo, overweight conveyances, having its members rammed into, and nature's dirtier tricks — all tough on a bridge's sub and superstructure. One of Burnside's scariest moments took place during the flood of 1996, when sandbags lined the Portland Harbor Wall. Fearing water would get into places it shouldn't, the decision was made to turn off the electrical grid along the waterfront, thus forcing all the movable bridges into the up (open) position. Not only did this allow unimpeded passage of river traffic, but kept debris (unmoored houseboats, wooden porches, whole trees, and other jetsam and flotsam) from piling up against bridge decks, including that of Burnside's. One bridge operator in Burnside's long history of providing gainful employment to dozens, maybe hundreds, of operators during its long span of years, said she would *never* forget the day she went to lower the Burnside's east leaf, being powered by a backup generator. "The control brakes for the bridge wouldn't hold," she said. Part of the problem was, unbeknownst to everyone, the flood waters had quietly leaked into Burnside's east leaf bascule pit and "floated" the 2,000-ton counterweight just enough to cause the east leaf to unexpectedly come crashing down. The operator later said her tower felt nothing — all bridge openings and closures conducted from the west tower — but she looked out to see "two or three maintenance crew members bouncing around." In Burnside's century of carrying on at a height of 64 feet above the river (with center span closed) during low water, it bore witness to many changes, most famously participating in the early stages of the Automobile Era. It was the first WRB bridge designed to meet the needs of increasing 20th century mobility. Before it was over, Burnside's center span could be opened remotely by a Programmable Logic Controller (digital) system rather than by an on-the-premises operator, a big jump for a by-then almost 70-year-old bridge, but Burnside responded magnificently to whomever or whatever was issuing commands, well, save for that time in 1996. Burnside also lived to witness Portland's population expand from about 250,000 in 1926 to almost 655,000 in 2020. During this time, nine new or rebuilt bridges were added to the Willamette River bridge family: Ross Island (1926), St. Johns (1931), Morrison (1958), Marquam (1966), Abernethy (1970), Fremont (1973), BNSF Bridge 5.1 lift span (1989), Sellwood (2015), Tilikum Crossing (2015), and across the Columbia

in the Portland area the Interstate Northbound (1958) and Glenn L. Jackson (1982) and, just off the main stem of the Willamette, the Sauvie Island Bridge (2008) — in all, a dozen new arrivals on the skyline. If a bridge could be a grandparent, or even a great-grandparent, Burnside would have been a veteran at remembering dedication ceremonies and family birthdays. Named for Daniel Burnside, a flour mill owner and an early Portland volunteer fireman, the 1926 Burnside also bore the weight of more than one public political protest in its lifetime. It hosted the largest demonstration ever seen in Oregon when thousands of protesters stretched out nearly everywhere on Burnside's 1,382-foot long roadway surface, many protestors lying prone on their stomachs with hands behind them as if handcuffed. The nine-minute Lie-In/Die-In occurred June 1, 2020, in reaction to the suffocation of an African American man in Minnesota seven days before during a police arrest. Solidly tying the two sides of the city together was Burnside's most important claim to fame, along with providing cover since 1990 for the first do-it-yourself skatepark built in the world (east end) and since 1973 for all or part of Portland's Saturday Market (west end). Meanwhile, new stairs at the west end of the bridge led to a MAX stop at street level below, with access to the waterfront, Skidmore Fountain, and historic cast-iron buildings. In more community outreach, stairs were built adjacent to Burnside's southeast end to give access to the Eastbank Esplanade, the latter opened in 2001. Travelers heading east on the bridge's 26-mile-long namesake street soon arrive at Mount Hood while those driving west meet the Pacific Ocean, also in under two hours. The 1926 Burnside was always about freedom of movement of travel and the long view. One of its proudest moments was being lighted by the Willamette Light Brigade for the 2012 Rose Festival, thus drawing attention to its ornate balustrade railings and not one, but two turreted Italian Renaissance operator towers and the barrel-vaulted shelves (similar to those used in medieval castles) that support each tower. At the narrowest point in the Willamette River, the 1926 Burnside faced Big Pink, the nickname for the second tallest building in Portland, to Burnside's left, and on its right, the 2,500-foot-square neon and incandescent lighted sign featuring a leaping deer, an outline of Oregon, and the words "Old Town." In between sign and tall building loom the 1,100-foot-tall Tualatin Mountains, nicknamed the West Hills. To the east of the Willamette, where 80 percent of Portland's population lives scattered amongst extinct volcanoes, Burnside witnessed ever-increasing non-stop growth spurts and infill projects with jaunty high rises recently joining the party. Burnside's fate was sealed when it was determined that no amount of maintenance and rehabbing (for

example, replacement of the bascule span's concrete deck and other repairs at a cost of \$9 million in 2006) would ensure Burnside could survive a 21st century magnitude 8+ seismic event. Nobody worried about earthquakes when the 1926 Burnside arrived on the Portland scene. We know so much more today, what with our better understanding of hometown seismic instability. Notable for its connections to Joseph Strauss of Golden Gate Bridge fame (Burnside's bascule system patented by the Strauss company), and Gustav Lindenthal, one of the foremost late-19th and early-20th century American bridge engineers and former New York Commissioner of Bridges, Burnside enjoyed DNA like few others. It was, indeed, a paragon of firsts: In 1996, Burnside Street was appointed as the lone "Regional Emergency Transportation Route," making the Burnside Bridge the one non-freeway bridge in Portland for public agencies to route emergency vehicles, equipment and supplies across the Willamette. It was also the first large-scale bascule bridge of its type and the largest double-leaf bascule when it opened — the first such bascule in the U.S. designed with a concrete roadway deck on its lift span and the first big river bridge in Portland designed with the help of an architect. Its matter always remained unparalleled. Unfortunately, however, its internal organs proved to be a little too much previous century — the bridge's main river piers Two and Three each sat on a cluster of 550 timber piles, that's 1,100 forty-foot-tall Douglas fir tree trunks holding up 4,000 tons of concrete counterweights and a 252-foot-long concrete deck for nearly 40,000 days of eternal movement on an unreliable and fickle riverbed (no bedrock anywhere close under Burnside). In the end, the bridge's vulnerability to gravity proved to be its Achilles heel, so to speak, thus exposing motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians to undue risk should the Burnside develop tremors of any magnitude. The 1926 bridge will be greatly mourned and missed even as it's survived by today's replacement bridge, which like the first and second Burnside's, comes with a great deal of personality and at a scale for which the public can continue to place its trust. This third bridge, in the same locale where the 1926 bridge once reigned, will surely prove to be a charmer, but it is the 1926 Burnside that will be remembered as the "It" bridge of its generation. Burnside's persona was profiled for posterity in the National Register of Historic Places in 2012 and can be admired and studied (photos, drawings, and texts) for at least the next 500 years or so at the Library of Congress site <https://www.loc.gov/item/or0470/>. RIP, 1926 Burnside. Condolences, memories, and tributes can be left at [The1926BurnsideBridgeLives.org](http://The1926BurnsideBridgeLives.org). A dual celebration for

the life of the old bridge and the life of the new bridge is being planned for a date yet to be announced.

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December 5, 2020