

WASHINGTON PARK TRAIN TASK FORCE UPDATE AND COO RECOMMENDATION

Date: January 15, 2026
Department: COO/Council Office
Meeting Date: February 3, 2026

Presenter(s): Councilor Christine Lewis (she/her); Portland Councilor Olivia Clark (she/her); Marissa Madrigal, COO (she/her/ella)

Prepared by: Ina Zucker,
ina.zucker@oregonmetro.gov

Length: 45 minutes

ISSUE STATEMENT

Metro convened the Washington Park Train Task Force from March - July 2025 as the result of a budget amendment sponsored by Councilor Christine Lewis. The Task Force produced a report that was presented to COO Madrigal who now presents the report along with her recommendation to the Metro Council. The report was also delivered to the City of Portland administrator and will also be presented by Councilor Olivia Clark to the Portland City Council.

ACTION REQUESTED

Support for the COO recommendation which includes 1) endorsement of the Task Force report; and 2) commitment of \$50,000, in contingency, if at least \$200,000 is provided by others in the next two years, toward the cost of a comprehensive geotechnical assessment along the Washington Park Loop.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Support for the COO recommendation will form the basis for continuing conversations with the City of Portland and others about the future of the Washington Park Loop which operated outside the Zoo boundaries.

POLICY QUESTION(S)

What role will Metro play in the future with regard to the Washington Park Loop which closed in 2013?

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

1. Metro Council can support the COO's recommendation which signals understanding of the complexity of restoring this historical and cultural attraction, willingness to be involved in future conversations, and contribute to the cost of a geotechnical assessment along the corridor in Washington Park.
2. Metro Council can support the COO's recommendation to the extent of endorsing the Task Force report which continues Metro's involvement in future conversations about the Washington Park Loop but not commit any funding toward the cost of a geotechnical assessment.
3. Metro Council can receive the Task Force report but deny support to the COO's recommendation.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The Washington Park Loop was operated by the Oregon Zoo until the route's closure in 2013 due to construction of the new Elephant Lands and changes to the route of the train that runs on the Zoo's campus. The trains, track and Washington Park are all owned by the City of Portland. Metro and the City of Portland have an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) that allows for (but does not require) Zoo management of the trains and operation of the Washington Park Loop.

Based on a number of challenges, including safety, financial limitations, deferred maintenance, geological instability, aging trains, and lack of alignment with the Zoo's mission and vision, the Zoo did not re-open the Washington Park Loop and has focused attention on voter-approved bond projects, and improvements to the on-grounds train loop including future electrification.

In 2018 the City of Portland updated their master plan for Washington Park and focused on the Washington Park Loop rail corridor for a future trail/multi-use path. At the Portland City Council meeting where the master plan update was considered, the commissioners supported restoration of the train as a desired future use of that corridor.

The Friends of the Washington Park and Zoo Railway is a non-profit organization dedicated to restoring and restarting the Historic Washington Park Loop. They have worked tirelessly to promote this goal, including helping to secure historic preservation status for the railway in 2020. The Friends have also expressed willingness to be the lead organization, with support from the City of Portland and in place of the Oregon Zoo, in restoration and operation of the Washington Park Loop.

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the Metro Council approved a budget amendment in the FY 2024-2025 budget, sponsored by Councilor Christine Lewis, to convene a Washington Park Train Task Force to consider the opportunities and challenges of restoring the Washington Park Loop. The Task Force held meetings between March and July 2025. The Task Force included representation from the following organizations:

Explore Washington Park
Friends of the International Rose Test Garden
Friends of the Washington Park and Zoo Railway
Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (MERC)
Oregon Zoo
Oregon Zoo Foundation Board of Trustees
Portland Japanese Garden
Portland Parks and Recreation
Travel Portland

Task Force discussions focused on many topics, including: costs of restarting the Washington Park Loop and future revenue generation; longer route as a visitor amenity and reflection of community values; possible impacts on the Zoo's fiscal sustainability and parking capacity for all organizations in Washington Park; future feasibility of long-term operations and maintenance of train assets; preservation of the historical trains and railway; sustainable ownership/operation agreements; access to a broad range of potential users; and the future of the Rose Garden station.

The Task Force produced and unanimously endorsed a report in August 2025 which was presented to the Metro COO and City of Portland administrator. (See attached). The Task Force endorsed future discussions between the City of Portland and Metro to include:

- Identifying secure funding for planning-level work
- Clarifying long-term operating and maintenance responsibilities
- Aligning stakeholder risk tolerance with regard to environmental, logistical, and regulatory constraints
- Exploring train consortium and ownership structures.

The Task Force also recommended evaluating the need for peer or independent review of materials and additional studies if the Washington Park Loop project moved forward, as well as conducting additional outreach to assess community support for the project after more information is available.

In December 2025, Mayor Keith Wilson wrote a letter supporting restoration of the Washington Park Loop and future conversations between the city and Metro but committing no funding to this work. (See attached).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Recommendation from COO Marissa Madrigal

Attachment 2: Washington Park Train Task Force Report

Attachment 3: Appendices to the Washington Park Train Task Force Report

Attachment 4: Oregon Zoo to the COO Geotechnical Assessment Memo

Attachment 5: Support letter from City of Portland Mayor Keith Wilson