

Memo



To: Metro Council

From: COO Marissa Madrigal

Date: January 15, 2026

Re: COO's Recommendation to the Metro Council on the findings in the Washington Park Train Task Force Report

Thank you for this opportunity to review the substantial and complicated work done by Councilor Christine Lewis, Councilor Olivia Clark of Portland and the Task Force, and to provide my recommendation on a path forward for Metro regarding this beloved amenity. My goal in this recommendation is to carve out a logical path for Metro in the future when dedicated partners, with secure funding, have been identified and are prepared to begin the long process of restoring train service on the Washington Park Loop.

The Task Force clearly worked hard and engaged with the direction provided in Councilor Lewis's budget note for the 2024-25 budget to think deeply and creatively about the benefits and burdens of restarting this train that has been closed for over ten years. In particular they grappled with the fact that the trains, tracks and Washington Park itself are owned by the City of Portland, not Metro, and that maintaining and operating the Washington Park Loop is no longer aligned with the mission, vision and financial goals of the Oregon Zoo. Task force members recognized that if and when the Washington Park Loop were to reopen, there would have to be a different owner/operator or consortium of owner/operators running this line.

My recommendation has two parts: first, I recommend that the Metro Council endorse the findings of the Task Force as laid out in their report and unanimously endorsed by the full Task Force, and second I recommend that Metro reserve in contingency \$50,000 in the COO's budget for two fiscal years that would become available if the City of Portland, the Friends of the Washington Park and Zoo Railway or other entities raise at least \$200,000 and dedicate the funds to a geotechnical assessment as laid out in attachment 4.

For the first part of my recommendation, I propose that the Metro Council endorse the Task Force's findings as a logical first step. The group's shared expertise on this subject

was impressive, and they endorsed a grounded approach to next actions on this project. They are:

- “Begin conversations between the City of Portland and Metro around the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) that currently exists for train operations. Discussions should include:
 1. Identifying secure funding for planning-level work.
 2. Clarifying long-term operating and maintenance responsibilities.
 3. Aligning stakeholder risk tolerance regarding environmental, logistical and regulatory constraints.
 4. Understanding the regional examples for train consortiums and ownership structures, including the interest expressed by the Friends of the Washington Park and Zoo Railway, to assume ownership of the trains. The Willamette Shore Trolley and the Portland Streetcar are potential local models.
- Additionally, the Task Force recommends evaluating the need for a peer or independent review of materials and additional studies, based on the needs of the organizations/governmental agencies moving forward with the train route. Another recommendation is to conduct additional outreach to understand the community’s support/interest after the review of studies is completed.” *Historic Washington Park Loop Report* p.3 (See attachment 2).

For the second part of my recommendation, I propose that Metro continue to be involved in pre-work that would need to be funded and completed before any entity could restart the Washington Park Loop. The Task Force mentions the need for additional studies above. They also noted in their report that documents and studies that were submitted during their deliberations reflected varying methodologies and levels of detail, had not been independently verified or reviewed, and may not reflect the most current information.

The first study should be a comprehensive geotechnical assessment to ensure that safe rail operations can be restored along the corridor. As the attached memo explains, the assessment should include subsurface investigation, quantitative slope stability analysis, and updated hazard mapping along the full Historic Washington Park Loop. The geotechnical assessment is currently expected to cost approximately \$250,000 which is why I propose that Metro reserve \$50,000 in contingency for two fiscal years (2026-27,

2027-28) that would match \$200,000 raised by other parties to complete this first study. (See attachment 4).

I am grateful to the members of the Task Force for the time and energy they spent considering the opportunities and challenges of restoring the Washington Park Loop, and to Councilor Lewis and Portland Councilor Clark for chairing. I look forward to discussing my recommendation with the Council on February 3, 2026.