

[STAFF REPORT FOR USE FOR WORK SESSIONS AND COUNCIL MEETINGS]

I-5 ROSE QUARTER IMPROVEMENT PROJECT: INDEPENDENT COVER SCENARIO RECOMMENDATION

Date: June 10, 2021
Department: Planning and Development
Meeting Date: June 15, 2021

Presenter(s): Margi Bradway, Deputy
Director of Planning, Development, and
Research; Eliot Rose, Senior
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Length: 45 minutes

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ISSUE STATEMENT

The I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project will add auxiliary lanes to Interstate 5 (I-5) as it runs through the Rose Quarter and make improvements to the surrounding streets and community. The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) directed Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to fund an Independent Cover Analysis (ICA) that will examine different development scenarios for the area on top of and surrounding the highway covers over I-5 that are planned as part of the project. Staff will share information with Metro Council on the scenarios that the ICA considers and seek feedback on which scenario Metro might endorse.

ACTION REQUESTED

No formal action requested.

Staff seek input from Metro Council at this meeting about which of the cover scenarios Metro should endorse when the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) meets to recommend a preferred cover scenario on June 28. Council President Peterson represents Metro on the ESC.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Staff seek to ask Metro Council which of the lid cover scenarios best align with the Metro Council's Values, Outcomes, and Actions for the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project

POLICY QUESTION(S)

- Which cover scenario best meets Metro Council's I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project Values, Outcomes, and Actions?

- Does Council have recommendations on how development on the covers should be further designed, governed, or financed?
- Are there other steps that staff should take to address Council's Values, Outcomes, and Actions as the Rose Quarter Improvement Project continues to move forward?

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

As the Metropolitan planning organization for the greater Portland region, Metro is responsible for allocating state and federal funding for the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (referred to as "Rose Quarter" or "RQ") for short and ensuring that the project is coordinated with other transportation plans and projects in the region. ODOT is the owner and operator of the Rose Quarter project. Metro has been engaged in the project from the outset.

The Rose Quarter project presents a significant opportunity to advance Metro's goals related to racial equity and climate action. I-5 was built through the center of Portland's historic Black community, displacing residents and businesses and physically dividing the neighborhood. This project, particularly the included highway covers and improvements to surface streets around I-5, presents an opportunity to restore justice for the Black community by transforming Albina into a vibrant and diverse community, consistent with the vision that has been developed by community members. The Rose Quarter Improvement Project also presents a key opportunity to implement congestion pricing to manage traffic more efficiently and safely on one of Portland's busiest and most dangerous corridors and demonstrate the potential of pricing to reduce emissions.

In 2019 Metro Council sent a recommendation that ODOT "Look at alternatives and align urban design elements of the project and the lid to create active, safe, and usable spaces supportive of community visions." In response, the OTC directed ODOT to conduct the ICA, and retain a consultant to study alternatives for how the space on and around the highway covers could be designed and developed. The ICA team has developed three different scenarios, as well as several variants upon these scenarios for the Rose Quarter ESC to consider at its next meeting. The purpose of this strategic discussion is for Council to weigh these scenarios and recommend a preferred scenario for Metro to endorse when the ESC meets on June 28.

BACKGROUND

The Rose Quarter project adds auxiliary lanes and shoulders on I-5 between Interstate 84 and Interstate 405 as well as highway covers, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and improved intersections on surface streets in the Rose Quarter to improve safety and mobility for all travelers and support the revitalization of Historic Albina, which was once the center of Black community life in Portland.

In April 2020, the Metro Council adopted a set of values, outcomes, and actions for the Rose Quarter Improvement Project (attached), stating that "Council's support for the project is

contingent on a clear commitment from the OTC to the outcomes listed below.” The RQ ESC, which includes representatives of Metro and other agency partners as well as community members, is responsible for overseeing the project and also adopted its own set of values and outcomes in October 2020. The two documents are organized around a shared set of values (restorative justice, multimodal mobility, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants, and transparent and inclusionary decision-making). However, Metro Council’s values and outcomes provide greater detail about the actions that need to be undertaken to achieve these values, especially with respect to advancing the community’s vision for the Rose Quarter, implementing congestion pricing, and creating a sound and transparent governance structure for the project.

One of Council’s recommended actions for I5RQ was for ODOT to “appoint a landscape design team to inform a community-led decision-making process on highway cover design.” The ICA is the result of ODOT acting on this recommendation from Metro and other project partners. The ICA consultant team is charged with developing up to three design scenarios for the development, open space, and surface streets on and surrounding the highway covers, which will be located on top of I-5 between NE Hancock and NE Weidler streets. One of the ICA scenarios must be consistent with the assumptions and findings of the Environmental Assessment (EA) that ODOT has already completed for the I5RQ. The other two scenarios are not required to be consistent with the EA. The ICA team will also be making recommendations about how development on top of the cover should be governed and financed.

As summarized in the table below, the ICA plays a central role in addressing Metro Council’s adopted values and outcomes for the I5RQ project:

Metro Council values and outcomes	Role of the ICA
<p><i>Restorative justice:</i> A community-led visioning process elevates the voices of and benefits historically harmed and marginalized communities.</p> <p><i>Transparent decision-making:</i> People with diverse backgrounds and expertise are brought together in local community spaces through engagement that is creative, intentional, and fosters community building.</p> <p><i>Transparent decision-making:</i> Engagement efforts reach out to communities to foster a two-way dialogue that demonstrates how those conversations meaningfully inform decision making.</p>	<p>The ICA team has been engaging a broad variety of stakeholders, with a focus on Black Portlanders with connections to Historic Albina, to develop its scenarios.</p>
<p><i>Restorative justice:</i> Connectivity within neighborhoods and to job centers is increased, air quality and noise are improved, and active, safe, and usable spaces are created in the Albina community.</p> <p><i>Reduce greenhouse gas emissions:</i> A more efficient transportation system is achieved that improves traffic flow of the highway and improves and increases multi-modal mobility in the project area.</p>	<p>The ICA scenarios recommend changes to the street network in the project area that affect how people access and move through the area.</p>
<p><i>Reduce greenhouse gas emissions:</i> Air quality is improved and impacts to human health are minimized in the project area, particularly for communities of color disproportionately impacted by air toxins.</p>	<p>The scenarios change the location of development and open space relative to highway interchanges and major roads, which affects users’ exposure to noise and air pollution.</p>

Metro Council values and outcomes	Role of the ICA
<i>Restorative justice:</i> Community stability and value are restored and pathways are paved for wealth generation in the Albina community in both the short and long-term.	The ICA scenarios create developable space that can host Black-owned businesses and organizations that serve the Black community, as well as open space and other design elements that create a sense of place for the Black community.
<i>Transparent decision-making:</i> The process is community-led and supported by a clearly defined governance structure that is responsive to information, feedback, and insight gained through engagement. <i>Transparent decision-making:</i> All stages of the process reflect the shared power of the community and local, regional, and state government to influence project decisions and outcomes, ensuring there is consensus on the scope and that the project ultimately meets needs at every scale.	The ICA team is recommending the creation of an independent governance body led by the Black community and with participation from the full range of public agencies that have influence over development decisions.
<i>Greenhouse gas emissions:</i> A complete project that incorporates highway lid designs realizing the vision set forth by the Albina Vision Trust, improving development opportunities in the community, and enhancing connectivity of the local street network, particularly for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian users.	Albina Vision Trust is currently developing its vision in parallel with the ICA scenarios. The ICA team is coordinating with the Trust to get their input on the scenarios.

The ICA team has developed its scenarios over the past 10 months based on feedback from the public and stakeholders, direction from relevant plans and policies, and its own technical analysis of how different design alternatives. The ICA process was structured around three iterative work sessions, each of which was delivered in several different formats:

- A workshop focused on Black people and organizations that serve the Black community. Roughly 45 attendees, the majority of them Black, have attended all three workshops.
- An online open house that is open to the general public.
- Discussions with both the Rose Quarter ESC and the Historic Albina Advisory Board, a committee of Black people with ties to Historic Albina convened by ODOT to advise on the I5RQ project.

The ICA team began its work in earnest in Fall 2020 with a review of background documents, including prior I5RQ technical work, relevant plans and policies from stakeholder agencies, feedback received by ODOT to date. During February and March 2021, the ICA team held its first work session to understand community priorities for the highway covers. This was followed by another work session in April to gather feedback on preliminary design concepts and a third one in May and June to evaluate and refine the final scenarios.

The ICA team collected feedback on six different preliminary design concepts in order to arrive at the three scenarios that the ESC is now considering. These design concepts included the design currently assumed in the I5RQ EA and five alternative concepts referred to by number (Concept 1, Concept 2, etc.) with higher numbers generally indicating concepts with greater deviation from the EA. Under these concepts, the ICA team

explored several changes from the EA design, including creating more developable space on and around the highway covers, reconfiguring and/or completing the surface street network, and, in Concepts 4 and 5, relocating freeway interchanges to the southern end of the project area.

Community feedback from the second workshop showed the greatest support for Concepts 4 and 5. The ICA team's technical analysis found that these two concepts did the most to advance the project values, and Metro staff also determined that Concepts 4 and 5 best meet Council's adopted values because they create more high-quality developable space, complete major street connections across I-5, and reduce exposure to pollution and noise by relocating interchanges.

The ESC is now considering three scenarios as it makes its final recommendation. These three scenarios, which share numbers with the design concepts from which they were developed, are:

- Scenario 1: Flint and Broadway, fulfills the requirement that the ICA study a scenario that is consistent with the EA, but makes several changes from the current project design, including prioritizing development rather than open space on and around the highway covers and connecting N Flint and NE Hancock over I-5 in lieu of constructing a new bicycle/pedestrian bridge.
- Scenario 4: Center on the Cover, relocates freeway interchanges to the southern end of the project and merges N Vancouver with N Flint as it crosses over I-5 in order to create a large civic center with a mix of development and open space on and around the cover. This scenario is not consistent with the EA and could require further environmental analysis.
- Scenario 5: Restore the Grid, relocates freeway interchanges to the southern end of the project and completes a number of street crossings over I-5 to create a street grid and development pattern on top of the covers that is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. This scenario is not consistent with the EA and could require further environmental analysis.

Staff will share slides at the work session on June 15 that summarize key characteristics of each of these scenarios, including key design features, the amount of developable land created, updated project cost estimates that account for the cost of building the covers, and the ICA's assessment of how each scenario would impact the project values and schedule. It is important to note that this assessment summarizes a much more detailed technical analysis that the ICA team is still in the process of updating as it helps ESC prepare to make a final recommendation.

The timeline for the ICA process is as follows:

October 2020	Review of background documents (prior I5RQ technical work, relevant plans and policies from stakeholder agencies, feedback received by ODOT to date)
February-March 2021	Work Session #1 to understand community priorities for the highway covers

April 2021	Work Session #2 to gather feedback on preliminary design concepts
May-June 2021	Work Session #3 to evaluate and refine final scenarios
June 22, 2021	Historic Albina Advisory Board meets to recommend preferred ICA scenario to ESC
June 28, 2021	ESC recommends a preferred ICA scenario to the OTC
July 15, 2021	OTC meets to consider ESC's recommendation

ATTACHMENTS

Metro Council I-5 Rose Quarter Project Values, Outcomes, and Actions
ICA Scenario Background and Assessment Slides

[For work session:]

- Is legislation required for Council action? ☐ Yes ☒ No
- If yes, is draft legislation attached? ☐ Yes ☒ No
- What other materials are you presenting today? Powerpoint presentation