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Harbor Drive closure - Bonner's notes

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Recommended Citation

Bonner, Ernest, "Harbor Drive closure - Bonner's notes" (1961). *Ernie Bonner Collection*. 214.
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June 10, 1961: Panel to be selected for 'overpass' study (Journal, pg. 3)
June 14, 1961: Overpass rule to get review (Oregonian, pg. 1)
June 15, 1961: Full Study Assured (Oreg. Pg. 34, editorial)
June 25, 1961: East Side Freeway to offer view, mile-long park (Journal, pg. 3, sketch)
July 24, 1961: Planning Commission recommends by unanimous vote that the City Council terminate work on the Ash Street ramp.
August 9, 1961: City ordinance #113941 passed by City Council terminating agreement between City and State to build Ash Street ramp.
December 20, 1961: Coordinating Committee of the Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Transportation Study releases data for analysis of need for access ramps to downtown off Harbor Drive.
February 20, 1962: Planning Commission Staff Report to the Planning Commission notes that opening of the 'Baldock Freeway' has not resulted in any significant change in the volume of traffic making the turn-off to downtown on Ash Street.

Harbor Drive Closure

Once the Oregon Journal moved to its new quarters with the Oregonian, the City of Portland bought the building and reviewed options for using it for city functions. When these uses were found infeasible, the City and the State Highway Division decided to demolish the old Journal building; relocate Harbor Drive close alongside Front Avenue and widen it to 6 lanes (3 in each direction), leaving an 80-foot strip of land along the river for a waterfront esplanade. It would be several months before anyone outside the officials involved would know about this plan.

Commissioner Ivancie is assigned responsibility for looking at all options for use and development of the waterfront and reporting findings and recommendations back to the City Council. Ivancie immediately struck out on a course from which he would budge only slightly: buy the building, demolish it, then widen Harbor Drive to 6 lanes each way, leaving 80' wide esplanade along the waterfront.

So the City and the State Highway Division were well along on their planning when the Portland Beautification Association challenged the city and state to think boldly about the waterfront, and first brought up the possibility of doing away entirely with Harbor Drive.

Soon after the informal meeting of city officials, the pace quickened. The City developed three options and estimated costs on each. All of the options included a relocated and widened Harbor Drive and an enhanced Front Avenue. Mayor Schrunk, recognizing the issues and the possibilities, moved to form a committee to study the entire situation.

Almost 6 months after the city and state began planning on the purchase and demolition of the Journal building and the widening and relocation of Harbor Drive, the City Club appointed a research committee to study the potential re-uses of the Journal Building. In their inquiries into the status of the Journal Building, they were soon to find out that the city had already decided to buy and demolish the building, and that widening and relocation of Harbor Drive was not far behind.

Governor McCall, probably in response to Mayor Schrunk's proposal to form a study committee of city, state and county officials, came to town to talk to City and County

officials about an opportunity he saw on the waterfront to add to the Willamette Greenway efforts in other parts of the state. He not only challenged them to think about the river as a great resource, but he asked their agreement on a task force of city, county and state officials to plan and execute redevelopment, and he set forth some criteria for the task force to meet in their studies and plans. His criteria, when faithfully followed would make any proposal very expensive--unless Harbor Drive was removed entirely from the waterfront.

Proposals for development of the waterfront came fast and furious. Gov. McCall proposed a plan (undoubtedly with the Highway Commission's blessing) for a 6-lane depressed (not covered) roadway and a widened Front Avenue, both located west of the Front Avenue alignment, in order to provide a 250-foot wide esplanade between Front Avenue and the Harbor Wall. Pedestrian overpasses (over Harbor Drive) were planned at three different locations. The state estimated the cost of this alternative at about \$18 million.

The Portland City Planning Commission then proposed a 4-lane Harbor Drive relocated alongside Front Avenue in a tunnel stretching from Market to Ash Street--providing a 235-foot wide esplanade between Front Avenue and the Harbor Wall. The City estimated the costs of this alternative at about \$7 million.

So the quandary for city officials is clear. Gov. McCall was standing by his initial criteria for a plan. But any plan which met Gov. McCall's criteria (especially the accessibility criteria) would be 'too expensive.' On the other hand, doing anything less than the 10 lanes proposed by the traffic engineers would invite massive traffic congestion on north-south streets in the downtown and on the Stadium and I-5 freeways.

Glenn Jackson, who was charged with finding a solution to the dilemma probably didn't know which way to go. But he was soon to get some help from an unexpected quarter.

The fear that city and state officials had already made up their mind on 10 lanes of traffic on the waterfront would motivate the City Club and others to a furious outburst of anger and activity. In the following 6 months, this force, plus an adamant Governor McCall would produce a dramatic turnaround in the official position of the State Highway Commission.

A City Club resolution asking for public hearing on waterfront plans is approved by the Board of Governors. Governor Tom McCall privately directs the Harbor Drive Parkway Task Force to hold public hearings on alternative waterfront development plans, and specifies his objectives for the Task Force. Citizen groups organized and began organizing for presentations at the public hearings. The energy of the citizens and the images of the possibilities on the riverfront created favorable editorial comment. More and more people were demanding a careful study of waterfront plans before any state or city action.

After a 2 1/2 hour meeting in Salem, attended by Portland Mayor Terry D. Schruck and City Commissioner Francis J. Ivancie, Task Force Chairman Glenn Jackson and city, Multnomah county and state planners and engineers, Governor McCall publicly instructed the Harbor Drive Parkway Task Force to hold public hearings on alternative plans for the waterfront. Public and editorial interest growing rapidly and widely.

Before the hearing is held, Portland Development Commission Chairman, Ira Keller, reports that the City was planning to submit a multi-million bond issue to the public to fund the more expensive alternative on the riverfront: a 2,000 foot long tunnel for Harbor Drive. He also made several other pronouncements of Task Force recommendations. This announcement only confirmed what many already suspected. The Task Force had already made up its mind. The upcoming public hearing was a waste of time and a sham.

First public hearing on city and state proposals for redevelopment of the waterfront held on Oct. 13 and 14. Hundreds of people jam the City Hall chambers for a chance to present their ideas and comments. According to Glenn Jackson, widespread agreement was expressed by those in attendance on several points:

1. plans for redevelopment of the SW Harbor Drive area must be integrated into comprehensive core area planning.
2. Planners should consider the possibility of eliminating Harbor Drive completely from the waterfront.
3. Independent professional consultants should be hired to work out a plan.
4. Whatever riverfront space is available should be designed so that it can be used by people on foot.
5. Financing means other than the property tax base should be considered.
6. Procedures should be established that permit closer and better communication between the task force and the public."

Glenn Jackson went on to hint that some kind of 'interim plan would be considered by the Task Force. "The ideal solution would be some means by which Harbor Drive and Front Avenue could be removed from the riverfront, either by putting them underground or by relocation. However, the estimated minimum cost of such a development would be \$12 million, and 'funds are not available.' The task force has turned to consideration of alternate proposals, including a 'progressive' plan that would lead in steps to a cut-and-cover development for burying traffic and giving the waterfront to people rather than vehicles."

To offset the high costs of the Task Force's preferred alternative, the so-called cut and cover tunnel for Harbor Drive), Governor McCall pledges \$7 million in state highway funds for the development of Portland's West Side waterfront. The governor urged the Task Force to name a citizens' advisory committee to help plan the project. He also asked the State Highway Commission to pay 40% of the costs of preparation of a comprehensive waterfront plan. And he asked the Task force to re-examine the feasibility of eliminating Harbor Drive completely, something the Task Force had agreed could not be done.

Harbor Drive Parkway Task Force commissions comprehensive traffic study of the Harbor Drive area, including an assessment of the effects of closing Harbor Drive; hires project management professionals to assist in working with citizens and public agencies.

Planning Director letter to State Highway Commission (presumably agreed to by all the Commission) requesting that the closure of Harbor Drive be delayed until the downtown planning effort is underway. One week later, the Planning Commission Chairman sent a clarifying letter to the State Highway Commission noting that the Commission ' . . . does not desire to delay the decision to close Harbor Drive. We do request that you instruct your staff to delay their planning of the use to which Front Avenue and First Avenue will be put until the completion of the Comprehensive Planning Effort now under way.'

Glenn Jackson argues with local planners about the timing of the Harbor Drive closure: Jackson wants to close soon (probably his boss, Gov. McCall wants to close it soon); local planners want to wait until downtown plan completed. Much ado about nothing, really. As it turns out, Harbor Drive could not be closed anyway until 1973 and by that time, downtown goals and guidelines had already been approved by City Council. Final public hearing by state on the closure of Harbor Drive.

City Traffic Engineer D. E. Bergstrom (like most traffic engineers in Oregon) opposes the closure of Harbor Drive in letter to Commissioner Anderson. Bergstrom notes that, in his opinion, the Transportation Consultant hired to assess the feasibility of closure, plus the State Highway Department, plus the City Traffic Engineer all agree: 'closure of Harbor Drive will significantly adversely affect traffic access and service to the Central Business District, and on all street and freeway facilities in the corridor bounded by the Stadium Freeway on the west and as far as Union and Grand Avenue on the east.' Bergstrom further states 'I don't feel that either the consultant or Highway Department have made a strong enough statement. In my opinion, delays and congestion will be serious and the motorists will find these conditions unacceptable, and that as a result both the City and the State will be subjected severe criticism. Neither the Consultant nor the State Highway Department were asked directly 'Should Harbor Drive be closed?' Had this question been asked I am convinced that their answer would have been 'Harbor Drive should not be closed.'

After review of the feasibility of closing Harbor Drive and developing a waterfront park, Commissioner Lloyd Anderson sends memo to Portland City Council recommending that, after several city, state and Tri-Met requirements are met, that Harbor Drive should be closed.

After lengthy process to review the recommendation of Commissioner Anderson for closing Harbor Drive, City Council approves closure. The State then quickly OK's City decision and moves to initiate waterfront park study planning.

Development of Tom McCall Waterfront Park.