Ramp Harbor Drive to Ash Street

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Dear Commissioner Bowes:

Returned herewith are copies of two communications; one from Mr. Ward V. Cook, President, Beatification Association; and one from Mr. Richard W. Norman addressed to Mr. Milo E. McIver, Chairman, Oregon State Highway Commission, relative to the proposed elevated ramp leading from northbound Harbor Drive to S. W. 1st Avenue and S. W. Ash Street.

This report is submitted in order to answer the various points raised in the attached communications, and to give certain historical data concerning this important project.

**Historical Data**

Following the completion of S. W. and N. W. Harbor Drive after the war, traffic congestion and accident records caused by left-turn movements of northbound traffic at S. W. Pine Street indicated the need for a study of a grade separation at that point, and such studies were made by the Traffic Engineer and also by the State Highway Engineers.

In 1953 a plan was prepared by the Traffic Engineer for an elevated ramp connecting to the Burnside Bridge, eastbound, with a branch ramp...
across S. W. Front Avenue along S. W. Pine Street, and south on S. W. 1st Avenue to connect to S. W. Ash Street. This ramp would have skirted the fire station at that location.

These connections would have been a part of the State Highway System because, at that time, S. W. Harbor Drive was to be the main route of U. S. 99W through the city. This was prior to the passage by Congress of the 1956 Highway Act which established the Interstate Highway System with its extremely high standards.

Studies were made at that time of a possible underpass for this connection, but excessive grades, interference with utilities such as the Front Avenue intercepting sewer, drainage problems, poor visibility for vehicle traffic because of sharp curvature, and the problem of pedestrian protection led to the abandonment of any further consideration.

Early in 1960 the Traffic Engineer prepared plans for an elevated ramp at S. W. Ash Street taking off northbound from the center of S. W. Harbor Drive, passing over the southbound lanes of Harbor Drive and S. W. Front Avenue, and coming to grade at S. W. First Avenue and S. W. Ash Street. These plans were submitted to the State Highway Engineer for study.

On May 2, 1960, the State submitted their plan for this structure based on the plan prepared by the City. At the request of the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, the State Highway Engineer studied a plan for a ramp at S. W. Oak Street instead of S. W. Ash Street.
On September 12th, the City Traffic Engineer made a report favoring the Ash Street location.

On November 3, 1960, a meeting was held in the office of Mr. Baird French, District Engineer for the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, attended by representatives of the City, State Highway Department, and the U. S. Bureau.

After much discussion as to the merits of the Ash Street and Oak Street locations, a compromise was reached using the Ash Street location but leaving Harbor Drive from the right side, instead of from the center.

On January 25, 1961, a public hearing was held in the City Council Chamber by the State Highway Department on this project, as is required by law. At that hearing, the only protest made against the proposed elevated ramp was made by Mr. Coggins, who asked what the architects generally thought about this construction, and objected to the structure being built in the park area along Harbor Drive. There was no objection raised by the architects or their organization at the hearing.

On May 3, 1961, Ordinance No. 113497, authorizing the signing of the agreement between the State Highway Commission and the City of Portland, was passed, and the agreements have been signed by the Mayor and Commissioner of Public Works, and are now in the hands of the State Highway Commission.

During these extended proceedings and discussions extending over a period of several years, during which time much publicity was given
and the various plans were published in the papers and both radio and television coverage was obtained, no protests were raised, and the general approval of such groups as the Portland Retail Trade Bureau and the Portland Chamber of Commerce and the Building Owners and Managers was voiced.

Alternate Plans--Depressed Roadway

The proposed plan for a depressed roadway at this location has been given careful study and has been abandoned for the following reasons:

1. In order to pass under S. W. Front Avenue with a clearance of 15 feet, which is mandatory on any State and Federal project, with the required vertical curves at each end, a grade of 11 per cent would be necessary. This would be prohibitive for an ascending grade.

2. This grade line under Front Avenue would cut through the Front Avenue intercepting sewer and would require the complete rebuilding of the sewer in this area. The City Engineer has indicated that this would create a very unsatisfactory condition on this very important drainage system for the entire west side area.

3. The low point on the grade of a depressed roadway would be Elevation 45.0 City Datum which would indicate that, at periods of high water or severe storms, the roadway would probably be flooded and standby pumping facilities would have to be provided to insure even inadequate drainage.

4. Visibility for vehicular traffic in a depressed roadway on a sharp curvature would be very poor and would lead to traffic accidents.
Continuous lighting would be necessary to insure any degree of safety for vehicle operators.

5. Since this facility is designed to provide access for pedestrians to the waterfront area and the esplanade along the harbor wall, the building of a depressed way would, to a large extent, eliminate the benefits of this pedestrian way, since any underground walkway demands extra policing in order to obtain any reasonable use.

Alternate Plans--Signals

It has been suggested that signals be installed to care for the left-turn movement which now enters S. W. Oak St. Such an installation has been avoided in the past because it would seriously interfere with the southbound movement on S. W. Harbor Drive. Since it is impossible to properly synchronize this movement with traffic on S. W. Front Ave., serious tie-up of traffic would certainly occur. The increase of traffic on S. W. Harbor Drive after the completion of connections from Baldock Freeway at S. W. Montgomery St. will make such a signalized intersection impossible.

Alternate Plans--Location N. of Burnside

The suggestion has been made that the location of this connection be made north of Burnside Bridge in order to eliminate the building of an elevated structure at S. W. Ash St. Plans made many years ago call for a northbound roadway connecting to N. W. Glisan St. across N. W. Front Avenue after the proposed underpass under the railroad tracks at
the Steel Bridge is completed. This will undoubtedly be constructed at a later date. Because of the multiplicity of ramps in this area connecting to the Steel Bridge, no other connection is possible in the area north of Burnside Bridge. It should be evident to any unprejudiced individual that any connection in this area would in no way serve the central business area. The only access to that area, without crossing the Burnside Bridge traffic at grade, would be by way of S. W. 1st Ave.

Alternate Plans—Elimination of Any Left Turn Movements

The only possible alternative to the construction of this elevated roadway would be the elimination of any left turn movement at that point. There are, at present, 4,500 vehicles making that turn under serious traffic conditions. With the opening of Baldock Freeway, we anticipate this volume will increase to at least 7,000 vehicles per day. If this movement is eliminated, entrance to the Central Business Area must be made by way of the S. W. Clay St. ramp. The addition of 7,000 vehicles to the anticipated volume of 10,000 vehicles would mean a volume of 17,000 vehicles to be carried by the existing ramp and a congested 56-foot roadway on a 60-foot street. This would create an impossible traffic congestion.

Interim Period

It should be borne in mind that there will be a period of about five years between the connections of Baldock Freeway to S. W. Harbor Drive and the completion of any additional facilities, such as the Foot-hill section of the Stadium Freeway, with its connections to S. W. 4th,
5th, 6th Avenues, and S. W. Broadway, during which S. W. Harbor Drive
will have no relief from the extreme traffic congestion which will occur.

It is to be hoped that no serious delays will be allowed to develop
which will interfere with the construction of this much needed facility
as soon as possible after the completion of the Baldwin Freeway. Al-
ready, we have experienced a year of delay, otherwise the completion
of the two units would have been at approximately the same time.

Visibility of the Waterfront

It should be readily apparent that the river, with its activities,
are not visible to any area lying west of S. W. Front Ave. In fact,
the only way that such a view can be had is from the esplanade which
has been constructed along the harbor wall. Any view of the river it-
self from west of Front Avenue would be at an elevation above the street
level which would raise the line of vision well above any elevated
structure such as proposed. Such an arrangement would lend itself well
to a plan for ground level parking area with other facilities raised
to the second and third levels.

Use of the Existing Waterfront

In 1929, the Front St. intercepting sewer and harbor wall were com-
pleted, thereby eliminating a serious drainage problem and allowing an
orderly development of the west side area without sewage backup.

Following this, several hundred thousand dollars was expended to
provide a concrete esplanade, landscaped areas, and a concrete railing.
This was all done to provide for the many thousands of people who would, possibly, use the area to stroll along the mile-long walkway.

How has this worked out? Except during the Rose Festival and other times when ships have been moored at the Harbor Wall in this area, there hasn't been a "corporal's guard" using the area during an average week day.

The completion of the Ballock Freeway with the resulting increase in traffic on S. W. Harbor Drive, will increase the hazard to pedestrians and thus decrease the use of the area along the wall.

The completion of the Ash St. ramp will allow a safe access by pedestrians to the Harbor Wall and will, as far as possible, make for a better use of the area, commensurate with the present investment.

**Future Motel Construction**

The statement has been made that the construction of this Ash St. ramp would preclude the construction of a proposed motel in the area north of S. W. Stark St. and west of S. W. Front Avenue.

Your Highway Coordinator has discussed this project with the promoters some time ago, and they agreed that the Ash St. ramp would in no way adversely affect their project. In fact, it was agreed that the funneling of traffic from the south directly into the area involved by way of S. W. 1st Ave. would be of great value to such a project.
Morrison Bridge Approach

Your Highway Coordinator, 15 years ago when he was Traffic Engineer, advocated the construction of a parking garage over the proposed Morrison Bridge approach.

When this bridge was finally approved, he insisted that the construction of the bridge approach be made in such a way that such a structure could be built in the future. Such construction was obtained and the area is available for future development. If a hotel can be incorporated into the parking design, a project of inestimable value to the central business area will, at long last, be an accomplished fact.

Importance of Vehicular Traffic

It has been stated by those opposing this project, that the maintenance and preservation of the old buildings in the area along S. W. Front Avenue north of S. W. Oak Street was of more value to the City of Portland than the construction of the Ash Street ramp.

Let these people show where the present facilities along the Harbor Wall or the area in the vicinity of the Skidmore Fountain have or will bring additional people and thereby additional dollars into the coffers of the downtown businessman.

What are needed in the downtown area are more people and more shoppers, and the Ash Street ramp will provide for their ready access to the area, with ample parking spaces already provided or potentially available.

If this desire to preserve the old, obsolescent buildings along
Front Avenue had been observed in the past, the present Front Avenue-Harbor Drive improvement would not have been possible.

We must decide between our desire to live in the past and our desire to improve conditions and go forward for a greater Portland. In this decision lies the answer to whether downtown Portland will survive.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

F. T. Fowler
Highway Engineering Coordinator