

**State and High Streets Two-Way Conversion Study**  
**Public Meeting Report**  
**Portland Public Library/Rines Auditorium**  
**March 4, 2015**

*Prior to and after this meeting, attendees made comments on a large map of a proposed two-way configuration as well as other technical maps regarding parking, speed and level of service. Those comments are at the end of this meeting report.*

*The meeting started at 6:08 pm*

Carol Morris of Morris Communications opened the meeting. She explained that the large part of the presentation would be about the pros and cons of a two-way conversion as identified by the consulting team. These pros and cons would be broken up by topic and rated by type of user (car, bike, pedestrian etc.) She noted that there would be time for questions, and also she encouraged participants to take the time to make comments at the displays. She then reviewed the Purpose and Need Statement and turned the meeting over to Tom Errico.

Tom Errico of T.Y. Lin took the floor and explained that after the presentation and discussion, staff would be available to discuss the plan.

Tom then spoke about examples of conversions from other areas. The consulting team had talked to a large number of other municipalities that had converted one-way streets to two-way streets. A quick review of the pros and cons experienced in some of the most similar municipalities was provided as a handout and will be included in the final report. He then moved on to a review of the identified pros and cons as sorted by topic.

### **Traffic speeds**

Tom explained that traffic speeds would be reduced at all times of day in a two-way scenario. The consultant did extensive studies of speeds in the corridor throughout the day and found that currently speeds average around 25-30 mph. A small percentage, between 1 and 3%, of the traffic traveled at speeds between 35 and 45 mph. The models predict that travel times to cross from one end of the corridor to another would increase by 1 or 2 minutes. Currently it takes from 2 to 5 minutes depending on the time of day.

### **Traffic Diversion**

The consulting team used various models to determine the likely effects of a change on traffic volumes throughout the area. It was found that State and High would both have sufficient capacity to carry the traffic and so there would be minimal diversion to other streets. The most heavily impacted area would be on State between York and Danforth where there would be an increase of traffic inbound due to westbound traffic taking State Street instead of going around to High Street.

### **Vehicle Mobility (Traffic Congestion)**

Levels of service would not be significantly decreased by a conversion to two way. However some intersections would see minor increases in delays.

### **Neighborhood Accessibility**

A switch to two-way traffic would make navigation of the area significantly easier. There would be some intersections in which some movements would be prohibited. Most notably the left turn from State northbound to Congress St. westbound would not be allowed due to a lack of space for a required turn lane. Without a turn lane, major congestion would take place.

### **Public Transit**

The consulting team had discussed the project with METRO and METRO believes that the two-way conversion would create opportunities by allowing for more flexibility in routing. This was seen to outweigh any potential for increased travel times.

### **Pedestrian Safety**

Pedestrian safety would be improved in a two-way scenario. This was due to slower speeds and better visibility. The gains in these were seen to outweigh any losses due to increased conflict points.

### **Cyclist Safety**

Current conditions have led to multiple wrong-way cyclist crashes, a risk that would be reduced in a two-way scenario. A two-way scenario would also make left turns significantly easier for cyclists as they would not need to cross two lanes of traffic at once. Lower vehicular speeds would also reduce the number and severity of crashes. One con of a change was that the one-way configuration does allow for motorized vehicles to more easily pass cyclists.

### **Vehicular Safety**

As with cyclists the reductions in speed would result in fewer and less severe crashes, but the increase in conflict points could result in more fender-bender-type crashes. The corridor has multiple, state-recognized high crash locations in the current configuration so there were gains to be made in safety.

### **Adherence to City's Complete Streets Policy**

A two-way configuration would be in adherence to this policy as it would serve the various modes of travel more equally.

### **Parking**

Some additional parking may be created in the Deering Oaks section of the corridor, but overall there would be a 9% decrease in the amount of parking throughout the corridor. A poster with

the number of spots gained or lost in each street segment was posted in the back of the room. The consulting team acknowledged that parking was a big issue and Tom said they were still working on it. They saw some potential for additional parking to be created on cross streets such as Spring St.

### **Heavy Vehicles and Deliveries**

A two-way configuration would provide more accessibility and routing flexibility for deliveries. Overall there is not a significant amount of large truck traffic on the corridor. However there are a lot of commercial establishments in the area that need trucks to make deliveries. Some of the intersections would be very tight in a two-way scenario and would require careful planning and possibly some minor property encroachments. The consulting team was still working on these issues and had an upcoming meeting with property and business owners to make sure that their needs could be met.

### **Property Values**

In the municipalities that the team had contacted about similar projects, most saw increases in property values following a conversion to two-way traffic.

### **Economic Development**

Commercial properties in the corridor would benefit from increased visibility and accessibility. In the municipalities that the team had contacted about similar projects, many noted that increased street and retail activity developed as an apparent result.

### **Historic Environment**

There would be a impact on Longfellow Square and the team was working with city staff on this. They were also working with the historic preservation staff and committee to make sure that potential issues were addressed. The fact that that a two-way system would restore the historic traffic flow pattern and help to preserve historic neighborhoods in this historic district would be a plus from their point of view.

### **Winter Operations**

This was a con, as a conversion would complicate snow clearing through the corridor. In conversations with the city's Public Services Department, it is apparent that it would require more effort to clear a two-way corridor, but DPS believes that it would be within the Department's capabilities.

### **Emergency Services**

The consulting team had gone through the potential configuration with the Fire Department and found that it would work with their trucks and that the increased accessibility would be a good thing.

## **Comparative Costs**

The corridor needed upgrades regardless of a change in configuration. A formal estimate of the costs was not completed at the time but is in the works and will be in the final report. There would be areas of significant cost. Signal changes would cost more than an upgrade of the existing equipment and some major work would need to be done to the Casco Bay Bridge approach as well as other intersections needing work.

*At this point the floor was opened up for questions.*

A resident of High Street noted that they were concerned about the potential cost of the project. They also felt that the connection between a conversion and an increase in property values was tenuous.

Tom replied that the costs would be known and presented to the Public Advisory committee in April. He acknowledged that it was hard to draw a straight cause and effect connection between the conversions and property value increases as some were done as part of larger revitalization projects.

A member of the public said that they were happy to see the potential gains in bike and pedestrian safety. They asked if the models took into account mode shifts based on these improvements.

Tom replied that the models did not incorporate that but that is something the team could consider. It was the aim of some of the improvements, particularly to transit access. He also noted that if traffic volumes were lower than expected it might be possible to regain some parking by shortening turn lanes.

A resident at State and York Street felt that conversion would create confusion. They felt strongly that it was a neighborhood and that any change should be focused on improving the livability of the neighborhood. They proposed that the gains in pedestrian friendliness could be achieved by better educating drivers and enforcing the rules of the road more strictly. A two-way configuration was seen to potentially create more noise, more pollution, and make it harder to cross the street.

A resident noted that crash data was available from the police and MaineDOT. He said that in the previous three years there was only one accident reported that cited speed as a factor. There had been 26 bike and pedestrian accidents and in 19 of those cases the bike or pedestrian had been found at fault. They felt that the dangerous behavior was not the drivers but the cyclists and pedestrians. They had talked to the traffic engineer that had originally designed the one-way configuration of streets and said that the engineer believed that a change back was a bad idea. They also felt that winter was a significant portion of the year and so an increase in efforts to clear the street would be worse than has been presented.

A question was asked if the consultants could speak to what the street would look like compared to other streets in the area.

Tom replied that the corridor had similar traffic volumes to Washington Ave. and parts of Congress Street and so might look similar to those streets.

A resident living on State Street near Mercy said that there was little visitor parking in that area. The plans called for a loss of 20 spaces in that area and they felt this was an alarming decrease. They asked which exactly the spots would be lost within the street segment.

Tom replied that he could point out the exact configuration on the map after the discussion period. The loss in spots would be spread out on both sides of the street.

The chair of Portland's Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee said that while the current speed limit was 25, the design speed was higher which encouraged greater speeds. A switch to two-way would change this and lower traffic speeds. They felt that this would be appropriate for the neighborhood feel that people wanted to encourage. They also wanted to stress that this was not a conversion but a restoration. The streets operated as two-way streets before and they could again. The improvements to bike and pedestrian use were a good thing. He added that while the earlier traffic engineer may have been right to change the configuration to one way in the 1970's, things had changed since then.

A resident living at Cumberland and State spoke about the high speeds they saw on the roads. They also noted that bike and pedestrian counts were likely skewed, as people do not use the street to avoid the high speed and inhospitable conditions. They asked if there was anything in the study about rerouting the Route 77 designation to the Fore River Parkway.

Tom replied that they had talked to MaineDOT about that. MaineDOT has certain criteria that they follow for such a change and it was unlikely that the designation would change in the near future.

A resident living at Cumberland and High said they wanted it to return to a two-way configuration. They had lived in Portland before the change to one way. They felt that enforcement wouldn't solve the speeding problem but that physical changes to the street would. The mentality of the drivers on the street needed to be changed.

Tom agreed that changing visual cues was a good way to change driver behavior.

A resident of Libbytown said that lower traffic speeds were good for pedestrians and pedestrians were good for property values. They felt this justified saying there would be an increase in property values with a change in configuration.

A question was asked as to what size of a vehicle was used to calculate turn geometries.

Tom replied that in most cases they had designed to accommodate a vehicle up to the size of a city bus. The intersection of York and the Casco Bay Bridge and the intersection of State and Forest had both been designed to accommodate a tractor trailer.

A resident asked if the study had thought about removing State and High from Deering Oaks Park.

Tom replied that that had not been part of this study.

A representative of the Chamber of Commerce said that he had come into the study open to either way and that he remained open. He felt that the end choice would be data driven. He felt that Tom had given a good presentation but had not seemed like a neutral presenter but seemed to be advocating for a conversion.

Another audience member disagreed and said they felt the presentation had not been advocating strongly for either outcome.

There was some discussion about routing and how drivers from various directions navigate the corridor and how else they could cross the peninsula.

A resident of the West End said that parking was a big issue in the area. They wanted to make sure the consultants were only taking out parking where it absolutely had to be taken out. They felt that turn lanes should not be put in if they were only needed by peak hour traffic.

Tom replied that turn lanes were for congestion but also for safety and that not having them could be a safety hazard.

A resident of Sherman Street between State and High said that while they had a car and that the current situation was good for driving, the conversion would not be all that much worse. They felt that a conversion would make significant improvements to the neighborhood. They also noted that while there may not be a lot of speed-related accidents there were a lot of close calls, particularly between cars and pedestrians. They really wanted to see the safety improvements.

Carol made sure there were no more spoken comments and thanked everyone for their input. She said that it was interesting to hear advocates for improving the neighborhood feel that that outcome would occur in either one-way or two-way. She explained that at this point, further comments could be made directly on the posters in the room. Also she would accept comments by email and her email address was on the study website. She reminded the audience that those who put down their email address would receive a meeting report and updates.

A question was asked if the team would be surveying residents.

Carol said they had not done a formal survey of residents but that they would consider it.

Another person said that if there was a survey it should cover the whole city.

Carol agreed that any changes would affect the whole city.

Tom then gave a quick review of the schedule going forward. The report should be completed by the end of May or early June. The next PAC meeting is scheduled for early April.

*This portion of the meeting ended at 7:15 pm.*

## **Public Commentary**

### ***Flip Chart:***

- Zero accommodation for bicycles doesn't seem like an improvement
- This plan is a huge improvement for pedestrians. Bicycles seem to be at least no worse off
- Portland residents' interests matter a lot more than the people driving through from other towns.
- Losing too many parking spaces between Congress and York Street AND along State St. (Spring Steet area)
- Adding to confusion on both streets. More congested, more noise, more air pollution.
- What would the timeline be (for the change to be made)?
- Making this 2-way would make more pedestrians excited to walk=less air pollution.
- Improved safety for everyone is a lot more important than having more parking. There are a lot of public health benefits when people walk farther from car parking.
- What is the cause of the rising crashes on Forest Ave.? Two-way hill.

### ***Pedestrian/Bicycle Crash History***

- I live here (between State and High one street up from Park). I walk, I bike, I drive and I know two-way will improve my quality of life and the lives and safety of my neighbors who you have not heard from. Many people who live here must walk or bike in this neighborhood and their health safety and welfare must be the driver.
- There shouldn't be pedestrian crashes.

### ***Public Transit Map***

- More buses on State and High.
- From 100 State Street: We'd like to go up State Street on #8 bus to go to N.E. Med. How come no left turn on Longfellow Square? Why not shave off some of that wide sidewalk at Petite Jacqueline and other restaurant and make a left there?
- Bus #6 marked on map is actually Bus #8.

### ***Speed Study***

- What is target travel speed?
- Any proposal to accommodate the Cape and SoPo commuters need to go faster through faster i.e., in SoPo, Broadway, off bridge to Commercial Street via York?
- Statistics needed: How many percent just use State and High as throughway?

### ***Vehicle LOS***

- LOS D should be acceptable or even desirable.

### ***On-Street Parking***

- With 2-way on State and High, why couldn't we add parking to Cumberland Ave. between those streets.

### ***Aerials – starting West and moving East***

- High speed right turns are safety hazard to bike/peds (off State WB to Forest EB).
- State and High should be removed from Deering Oaks.
- Add parking on North side of State Street in Park. No parking on pond side: obscures view of pond.
- Ped bridge across State in Park.
- No ped bridge!
- Lose High through the park
- This area was once all park ☹️
- It's okay to eliminate some parking if its more bike/ped friendly.
- Sharrows on down hill side! Uphill climbing lane for bikes on steep areas.
- When I walk home from work I look over my shoulder in crosswalks because I know drivers won't see me in time to stop. I drive too.
- Forest Ave between Park and Congress should be closed to vehicular traffic.
- The design speed and danger to ped/cyclists is reason enough for restoring. I am afraid when on my bike on State and High.
- Is left turn from High St. to Free St. allowed? Or is it a good idea.
- What about keeping one-way and accommodating more modes of transportation? (two way: two lanes of parking and one lane moving in each direction. One way: transit taking one lane, cars taking one lane, parked cars in one lane, bikes in one lane.
- The new view of PMA will be amazing!
- 2-way Free Street?
- From 100 State Street: the 6 parking spots between Spring and 100 State Street are crucial for visitors to us here.

- Need to improve intersection of State and York – add back left turn onto York
- No left turn off State onto York – is a problem for York St. residents

***Email Received after Public Workshop:***

Please consider this message a corroboration of several supportive comments made by Peninsula residents during the Q & A. My husband and I live on Winter Street near Mercy Hospital and 100 State Street and I regularly walk around the West End, the Old Port, and other downtown areas. One reason I suspect State and High don't have lots of walkers (as one man suggested) is because they are so uninviting. Part of this, in State Street's case, may be because of monolithic structures along the way that are generally attractive but not on a human scale. But a far bigger reason, I suspect, is due to the traffic whizzing by. There is a palpable difference between State Street and Danforth, for instance. So I routinely avoid State and High for this reason alone—it just doesn't feel conducive to walking except for utilitarian purposes.

Others seems to avoid these two streets as well, as a couple of comments last evening suggested. While one participant suggested that the "actual number" of accidents on the two streets is quite low, the participants who talked about "near misses" and changing their patterns of behavior around those streets had it more right in my view. So this non-quantifiable information should be considered as the study team and city officials continue to mull the prospects.

Something else that should be at least in the back of everyone's minds is the prospect that automobile use 10 to 15 years from now will not be what it is today. At least one participant last evening voiced this thought and I heartily agree that the trend towards younger people not driving and owning cars may continue. Moreover, our country seems generally to be waking up to the climate crisis and this promising development suggests that cities in the near future will make coordinated efforts to recover a variety of modes of more ecologically-responsible transportation our society used to have only several decades ago.

So, if a way can be found to fund the conversion project and it is done as part of a holistic vision that addresses things such as vastly improved public transportation around Portland, I think it could be a wonderful step towards a healthier and more beautiful future for the City.

Thanks so much for all your efforts on this project. If you have any questions about what I've written here, don't hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,  
Liz Parsons  
44 Winter Street  
West End