

## Midtown Crossing Concepts Ignore Community Priorities

In December 2019, the city commissioned a consultant to conduct a survey to determine what the community priorities were for funding transportation projects with a general obligation bond. The consultant reported the community would support a bond if it would improve traffic flow on east-west connections and if there were improvements to neighborhood safety. These community priorities are listed prominently in the bond resolution and the city website.

In July 2022, the public was invited to an open house to give feedback on the GO Bond concepts for Greenwood, Hawthorne, and Franklin crossings. The concepts that relied on widening the Parkway and Railroad bridges to accommodate wider crossings for pedestrians and bicyclists, were dead on arrival. The cost and impact to the community were far beyond reasonable.

For the Greenwood crossing, the consultants recommend a “road diet.” The existing four through lanes would be reduced to two through lanes, plus a turn lane. They stated “[congestion] *performance would be acceptable.*” What they don’t mention is the average daily traffic volume for Greenwood ranges from 20,120 to 23,008 AADT. The industry standard HCM 6<sup>th</sup> edition threshold for a street with two through lanes and a turn lane is only 18,300 AADT. A “road diet” significantly increases congestion on this major east-west connection. Vehicle queuing will stretch from 3<sup>rd</sup> street to west of the river.

The average citizen understands safety decreases as congestion increases. Drivers become more aggressive and may seek cut-throughs on local streets. Meanwhile, Greenwood can be made safer by adding a few appropriate left turn lanes without a “road diet.”

Instead of focusing on “community priorities,” the open house concepts prioritized improving biking connectivity only between the downtown and the Bend Central District. The presentation failed to demonstrate how these new bike crossings would “complete” bike routes extending further to the east and west which was the worthy goal of the 2020 Transportation Plan.

The Core Area Advisory Board for “Bend Central District” is recommending the “priority project” should be the Hawthorne crossing. Their hope is this “bridge” will incentivize redevelopment. It has been six years since this special zoning district was created with lower standard barriers and not one project has

been built that meets their vision. The one tall mixed-use project proposed came in at \$20M over budget. This advisory board should provide some basis for why this crossing would be a successful incentive.

After the open house, I spent time walking each crossing and read Bend's Low-stress Bicycle Facility Design Elements handbook. Then I applied my many years of planning, design and constructing major community infrastructure. Franklin Avenue is by far the best option for the initial midtown crossing. Franklin's traffic volume is nearly half the volume of Greenwood. The existing right-of-way is sufficient for two through lanes, one turn lane and physically separated bike paths, the gold standard of low-stress bike paths. Lastly, Franklin is the closest street to the most probable re-development parcels in both the central district and in downtown.

In June, a consultant completed another GO Bond project, the 128-page "Franklin Corridor" alternative concepts report. The good news is this report demonstrates the viability of creating a "separated bike path." The bad news is the study only looked at a very short segment of Franklin from NW Harriman Street to NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street (Bend Central District only) instead of the longer segment of Franklin necessary to achieve an improved east-west connection.

Will the community's priorities be supplanted by the priorities of the advocates of the Bend Central District. A new hybrid concept incorporating the best of the Greenwood, Hawthorne and the Franklin concept elements for a complete street for Franklin Avenue would be a win-win for the entire community and Central District. Remind the City Council of their commitment to "community priorities" when seeking community support of the bond.

