



The Oregonian

Adams sees web of streetcars

Getting around - Portland's Office of Transportation is working up plans for the next 30 years

Saturday, July 21, 2007

DYLAN RIVERA
The Oregonian

Could you imagine a streetcar line up Northeast Sandy Boulevard?

And how about Hawthorne, Killingsworth and Woodstock, just to name a few more?

The Portland Streetcar, long considered a downtown transit and redevelopment tool, could reach disparate parts of the city under a vision described on Friday by City Commissioner Sam Adams in a speech to the Portland City Club. The commissioner oversees the Portland Office of Transportation, which is developing a 30-year rail transit plan for the city, with implications for the metro area.

"What would Portland look like if we implemented solutions to global warming and peak oil?" Adams said. "It would look a lot like Portland circa 1920, a time when the main means of motion were your feet, streetcars and bikes."

The rail transit vision for the region was just one factor in a wide-ranging speech on transportation that Adams portrayed as an overwhelmed, underfunded system with a dire backlog of delayed maintenance.

"Portland's streets are killing and injuring people despite the fact that we know how to make them safer," Adams said. "We have lacked adequate funds to implement safety solutions, to enforce traffic laws and educate road users."

The speech, titled "From here to there in tomorrow's Portland," provided Adams' vision for the city's transportation needs decades into the future. The ballroom of civic activists at The Governor Hotel could have been forgiven for confusing it with a campaign address. Adams is known to be considering higher office, and big visions decades in the making are some of the ingredients that can inspire others to think of a city official as mayoral or congressional in stature.

The Portland area faces several major transportation challenges, Adams said, aside from the rush-hour gridlock most people are familiar with.

City streets aren't safe enough. Specifically, nearly 60 miles of the city's busiest streets don't have sidewalks.

"With such a gap in our transportation system, I don't blame parents for not wanting their kids to walk or bike to school, which contributes to the rise in childhood obesity," Adams said. The city's basic road and bridge system is "crumbling," he said, with at least \$422 million in repairs needed. Another \$325 million would be required to fix Multnomah County's Willamette River bridges, he said.

The potential unraveling of the region's land-use laws -- most pointedly, the urban growth boundary -- at the hands of voter-approved Measure 37 could further deepen the problems, he said.

"If the UGB goes, likely so, too, will the remaining capacity of our road and freeway systems," Adams said. "This is a disaster in the making."

Along with the challenges, Adams asserted that he's made progress in his two years supervising the transportation bureau in several ways:

The city, along with other regional governments, persuaded the state Legislature to approve \$250 million for a light-rail extension from Milwaukie to downtown Portland. Another \$20 million was approved for streetcar

projects.

The city's first transportation safety summit led to \$11 million in city money for improvements to Portland's most dangerous intersections. That has already resulted in new crosswalks on Northwest 23rd Avenue and Northeast Alberta Street, and 100 new school crossing beacons, among other recent projects.

Portland's first freight mobility master plan has identified important corridors for freight movement that could minimize impacts on residential neighborhoods.

The department also plans an expansion of the network of bicycle boulevards, streets where residents have ready automobile access but are dominated by bicycle use.

The more lofty future goals are intended to have a direct impact on land-use decisions in the city limits. Adams wants to see more dense residential and mixed-use development along existing transit lines, such as the yellow Interstate MAX line, and future lines.

"The slow pace of redevelopment along the yellow line in North Portland concerns me," Adams said.

"Every transit station in the city should be a vibrant micro-community with its own unique sense of place and identity," he said. "We need to maximize the return on our multi-billion dollar transit investments with station area development that makes walking, bicycling and transit the easiest and best set of travel choices."

Dylan Rivera: 503-221-8532, dylanrivera@news.oregonian.com

©2007 The Oregonian