



Concordia Neighborhood Association
P.O. Box 11194
Portland, OR 97211
www.concordiapdx.org

Re: Lombard/Hwy 30 Safety

September, 2020

To:

Senator Lew Frederick (sen.LewFrederick@oregonlegislature.gov)

Representative Tawna D. Sanchez (rep.TawnaSanchez@oregonlegislature.gov)

CC:

Oregon Governor Kate Brown (kate.brown@oregon.gov)

House Speaker Kotek (rep.TinaKotek@oregonlegislature.gov)

Congressman Earl Blumenauer (congressman.EarlBlumenauer@mail.house.gov)

Commissioner Chloe Eudaly (chloe@portlandoregon.gov)

PBOT Director Chris Warner (PBOTDirector@portlandoregon.gov)

ODOT Director Kris Strickler (kristopher.w.strickler@odot.state.or.us)

ODOT Region 1 Director Rian Windsheimer (rian.M.WINDSHEIMER@odot.state.or.us),

Metro President Lynn Peterson (lynn.peterson@oregonmetro.gov),

Metro Councilor Sam Chase (sam.chase@oregonmetro.gov)

Dear decision makers,

In early August, a mother and her son, a student at Vernon Elementary School, were traveling on North Portland Highway (Hwy 30) when she lost control of her vehicle, it crossed the center line and impacted with an unoccupied truck and fifth-wheel on the opposite shoulder.

The car burst into flames, and both vehicle occupants died in the resulting fire. Police report the vehicle was traveling at a high rate of speed before impact.

A year ago, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) embarked on the Columbia/Lombard project to study conditions along those roadways, and recommend safety improvements.

Since that time, absolutely no safety improvements have been made to Lombard Street, meaning nothing prevents future tragedies such as this one from occurring again, and again and again.

It's an unsafe highway, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) does not appear to feel any motivation in the slightest to fix it to make it safer for travelers and nearby residents.

On the contrary, ODOT appears to feel its only required role is to justify why continuing the status quo is the only outcome the agency is interested in.

The time has thus come to remove North Portland Highway from ODOT's jurisdiction, and to transfer responsibility for the roadway to PBOT. This will free the roadway from needing to meet ODOT standards, and allow for alternative design solutions to be implemented.

This is not the first crash on this corridor. On Saturday, December 12, 2015, Martin Greenough was killed while riding his bicycle at the NE boundary of our neighborhood, on Lombard underneath the 42nd Ave overpass, at a pinch point where the bicycle lane vanishes and bicyclists are forced into high-speed traffic. Martin was a newcomer to our city, a recent transplant who wanted to live the Portland dream of riding his bicycle to and from work. Unfortunately, our region let him down, by not providing a safe and continuous bicycle route for him to use for his daily route. Now, he's dead, and his blood is on the hands of the agency responsible for designing and operating the facility that he was using. But, perhaps it is also on all of our hands, as a community, for not demanding better, safer facilities sooner.

So, as the neighborhood association that is responsible for that location, we feel a special responsibility to make the case that bicycle and pedestrian safety must come first, on all facilities that can be legally used by bicycles and pedestrians, and especially those that appear on city and regional bicycle maps or that might be recommended as routes by electronic way-finding apps.

When we asked ODOT staff to brief us on the agency's response to this tragic incident, as well as its future plans for making the entire Lombard / US 30 Bypass facility safe for all users, staff came out and met with us at our regular Land Use & Transportation Committee meeting, and gave us an overview of ODOT's plans for this facility through the year 2021. In reviewing these plans, we are struck by the fact that it will be many years before these safety improvements are complete, but even more critically, by the fact that once the planned improvements are complete, the facility as a whole will still not provide safe, continuous accommodation for bicycles and pedestrians along the stretch in question, from NE 181st ave on the east to the St Johns Bridge at the west.

Specifically, while ODOT has delivered a bike lane infill project on the south side of the highway at the NE 42nd Ave overpass, it has not yet developed a feasible proposal for the bicycle lane on the north side of the highway. Further, the bicycle lane disappears completely at the turn between NE Lombard Pl and NE 10th Ave, without any safe accommodation that would allow and direct bicycle users to a safe parallel facility. It would not be acceptable for a freeway to suddenly turn into a dirt road with no warning, and yet this sort of network incompleteness is apparently quite acceptable to ODOT when it comes to bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Sidewalks are completely discontinuous along this entire facility, despite the fact that it is lined by residential, commercial and industrial uses that see and produce pedestrian activity.

We would like to see a different approach taken to tackling this issue, one that prioritizes Vision Zero-type goals of eliminating traffic fatalities and minimizing serious crash injuries for vulnerable road users as soon as possible. Specifically, given the current shortage of available transportation funds for major projects, we would like to see the immediate re-stripping of this facility to create safe, protected bicycle lanes along its entire alignment.

We suggest the facility be put onto a “road diet.” The roadway cross-section would have a continuous sidewalk, street trees and a two-directional cycle track on the south side next to the neighborhood.

Then add another row of trees, on-street parking, a single eastbound traffic lane, a median with trees and turn pockets at intersections, and a single westbound traffic lane with a shoulder/ break-down lane.

The trees would limit the ability of traffic to cross the center line, reducing the severity of crashes. With only one lane in each direction, the temptation to speed to pass other vehicles would be eliminated and, with lower speeds, would also come fewer crashes and deaths.

A protected cycle track and new sidewalk would allow bicycles and pedestrians to travel east and west along the corridor safely and comfortably. The trees would provide shade to reduce the urban heat island effect, where large expanses of asphalt cause excessive heat on hot summer days. They would also help to capture pollution, trapping it on their exposed leaf and branch surfaces until it can be washed away in the next rain.

While the funding and engineering for this long-term approach is underway, we urge the immediate implementation of a “road diet” approach of removing through traffic lanes to allow for a cross-section that includes safe, protected bicycle facilities, as this is an improvement that can be accomplished in the very near term using only “paint” (thermoplastic). We feel strongly that, in this age of COVID-related quarantine, there will be no resulting traffic delays from this approach, and even if minor delays did result, they would be more than mitigated by the reduction in potential loss of life or serious injury to road users.

We also urge the construction of pedestrian facilities, including sidewalks, wheelchair ramps at intersections, and marked crosswalks at all legal pedestrian crossings, along the entire length of this urban facility.

We feel strongly that even one death is too many to be acceptable, and we urge the prioritization of human life over traffic throughput, average traffic speed, or driver inconvenience.

It's past time to stop making excuses for why bad designs have to remain. It's time to start building the safer future that we need to manifest to stop the senseless deaths on this blood-stained piece of local infrastructure.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Furstner", with a small flourish at the end.

Astrid Furstner
Chair, Board of Directors

Concordia Neighborhood Association
P.O. Box 11194
Portland, OR 97211
landuse@concordiapdx.org

cc: Jon Makler, Region 1 Planning Manager (jon.makler@odot.state.or.us)