



Native American Discussion Group

Summary Report

Project Background

The I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project adds auxiliary lanes and shoulders to reduce congestion and improve safety on the main north-south freeway on the west coast and redesigns the multimodal local street network. The Project will smooth traffic flow on I-5 between I-84 and I-405 where three interstates intersect and feature the biggest traffic bottleneck in Oregon. The Project also will improve community connections by redesigning overpasses and reconnecting neighborhood streets, enhancing public spaces, and promoting economic development opportunities. The Project's transportation improvements allow the City to implement the development goals for the N/NE area and realize the City's Central City 2035 Plan.

Discussion Group Overview

The Project team is intentionally listening, informing, and engaging with communities of color, especially the historically impacted African American community, the primary community displaced by past public and private development decisions, along with communities of color such as people of Native American descent. Transparent, inclusive engagement is a central Project feature through design and construction.

The Project team is using discussion groups as one of many important tools to capture feedback on the Project. Through discussion groups, the Project team is able to meet people where they are and engage in meaningful two-way dialogue to understand how different people from different backgrounds react to the Project and potential design considerations. Discussion groups have been and will continue to be an important opportunity for the Project team to hear from the community to shape the Project, and share project information.

The goal of this discussion group was to begin engaging individuals within the Native American population and begin building trust between the ODOT and the Project team and the Native American community.

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On February 27, 2020, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) hosted a discussion group as part of its I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (Project). The group included Native American individuals from the Portland area. Acknowledging Portland is home to the ninth-largest population of Native Americans in the U.S., and that Native Americans comprise the original population in and around what is now called the Albina and Rose Quarter areas, Native American insights and heritage will inform the Project as design progresses.

The Project team asked the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) to help convene and host the discussion group. William Miller, Community Advocacy Manager at NAYA, assisted

the Project team with planning and recruitment of the discussion group. NAYA recruited participants through direct and targeted outreach and word-of-mouth across NAYA's different departments to reach the desired group composition, which included:

- 12 to 20 Native American community members from the Portland metro area
- Gender balances
- At least two elders (65 years old and older)
- Two or more youth (25 years old and younger)
- At least two business owners
- Connection to I-5 and/or a historic connection to the Willamette River

A total of 13 participants attended the discussion group. All participants had at least some type of connection to the Albina and Rose Quarter area. The discussion group was held at NAYA and lasted 2.5 hours. Participants received a gift card stipend of \$125 in recognition of their time and willingness to share their experiences and knowledge of the community. Refreshments were available during the discussion group.

William Miller, from NAYA, facilitated the discussion. ODOT was present during the sessions to help answer questions regarding the Project and explain how feedback would be used. The facilitator used a discussion guide (see Appendix) to lead the conversation. Each participant was provided with the following Project handouts: frequently asked questions (FAQs), gatefold Project factsheet, evaluation and comment form, and a photo release form. The team showed participants a Project video and six Project display boards.

Key Themes

The discussion group revealed the following Project-specific themes. These themes reflect sentiments shared among the 13 participants in the discussion group and are not intended to represent the opinions of all Native American throughout the region:

- **Recognition that the Albina and Rose Quarter area is congested, and it is a safety concern** – Most participants agree that the Albina/Rose Quarter area has a congestion problem that should be addressed. Most participants agree that travel through the Project area is necessary for most people and experiences congestion for all modes of transportation. Most recognize that congestion on I-5 causes aggressive driving behaviors, which is a concern for safety. A few participants asked how tolling would impact congestion.
- **Some support for Project components** – Some participants believe the auxiliary lanes on I-5 will not relieve congestion. One participant stated that if the auxiliary lanes were to relieve the bottleneck just a bit, that would be a success in their eyes. Other participants believe that the highway covers will help improve some congestion and hope that bus-only lanes with protected bus stop shelters are prioritized in Project design. Some participants like the Clackamas pedestrian/bicycle-only bridge.
- **Skepticism about the driving forces of the Project** – Two participants are skeptical about the Project and want to know about the real driving forces behind the Project. Specifically, they want to know what funders are pushing the Project to completion. Most of the participants agree that they would not mind paying more taxes for the Project if the real community would benefit from it and not big developers.

- **Lack of transparency on how BIPOC communities would benefit** – Most participants felt like there is a lack of clarity and transparency surrounding how black indigenous people of color (BIPOC) would benefit from the Project. A few participants asked who would be displaced during the construction and what mechanisms are in place so that after construction BIPOC are not displaced and forced to sell their properties. Most are concerned that the Project would continue to gentrify the area and further displace BIPOC. One participant asked if this Project would be a repeat of Vanport.
- **Frustration regarding project information** – Most participants voiced frustration and felt that there was a lack of information regarding Project decisions, funding, history, and previous engagement. Two participants shared that this was the first time they had heard of the Project. Some participants asked why the legislature would approve this type of funding package when there are so many people in the Portland metro area experiencing homelessness who are in dire needs of services. Another participant asked how decisions were made and if the Project engaged with everyone from rich to poor. Another participant shared that departments of transportation always get their way. A few participants asked specifically how the African American community has been engaged throughout the Project.

The discussion group participants emphasized the following themes related to values and meaningful investments for Native Americans in Portland:

- **Lead with BIPOC by involving them in all aspects of the Project** – Almost all participants stated that the Project needs to have BIPOC at the forefront of the Project. Having Native Americans and BIPOC “honored” in the design of covers will not suffice. BIPOC should not be just engaged but instead have a seat in the decision-making table of Project planning, engineering, design, construction, and engagement.
- **Provide real economic development opportunities for BIPOC** – Almost all participants agree that the Project needs to provide real economic development opportunities for Native Americans and BIPOC communities. Some participants said that BIPOC need to be prioritized if housing or businesses are constructed on the highway covers; this will be crucial to give BIPOC real opportunities to build generational wealth. Some participants recommended that the Project team works with Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) firms and companies and prioritize BIPOC staff.
- **The Project can be an opportunity to help heal from past harm and injustices** – Some participants stated that the Project has the opportunity to help BIPOC heal from past harms and injustices in the Albina/Rose Quarter area. One participant said that they would like to be part of the healing process - if ODOT asked for forgiveness. Another participant stated that it does not matter who was on the land first; indigenous people are all about working together. The BIPOC community needs to come together to help heal and uplift each other, and the Project can help facilitate that.
- **Continue to engage with our elders and us** – Most participants stated that the Project team needs to continue to engage with BIPOC and Native Americans communities to continue to have conversations like the one had at the discussion group. Some participants shared that the Project team needs to use mediums trusted by the Native American community to share information, as they would more likely trust information from a trusted source than an ODOT newsletter. Other participants suggested continuing

engaging with trusted organizations like NAYA to provide information. One participant suggested working with the Tribal Employment Right Ordinance (TERO) to provide information about careers and job opportunities. One participant asked if the Project team had ever interviewed their elders.

Additional Sentiments Shared by the Group

The group shared the following additional sentiments:

- One participant shared their concern about the Project's impact to air quality and carbon dioxide emissions and how that might impact Harriet Tubman Middle School
- Another participant is concerned how traffic would be managed during construction during Moda Center and Veteran's Memorial Coliseum events
- One participant asked if construction would be able to sustain the next big earthquake that is supposed to hit the region
- Some participants shared that the existing signage on I-5 is poor and makes it difficult to travel through if you don't know the area

Group Ideas or Recommendation

Below is a list of ideas and recommendations from the discussion group regarding highway cover design components:

- Create open spaces for the community to come together, build relationships, and heal. These could include:
 - Parks or multiple mini-parks throughout
 - A garden with indigenous plants to the area and region
 - Places to sit, visit, and gather
 - Stages for musicians and cultural demonstration
- Provide services to people experiencing homelessness
 - Provide bathrooms and showers
 - Bring social workers to the area
 - Create overhangs for people to have shelters
 - Create jobs for people experiencing homelessness to keep the area clean
- Have a gallery or artwork displays of Native American and African American art or artists
- Have buttons throughout the area that tell the stories of the people who lived here
- Create a Rose Quarter Community Center that provides services and support for communities that were displaced
- Ensure that Native Americans and BIPOC oversee all cultural spaces to keep the integrity of the space
- Ask the Native American or African American communities who their leaders are and name streets after these leaders

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- Name streets after the tribes that inhabited the Rose Quarter area
- Center and honor the African American community that was displaced from Albina to show that there are still African Americans in the Rose Quarter area
- Have a food park with Portland food trucks and prioritize Native American and BIPOC businesses
- Have Native American-owned businesses
- Create a tiny home village with resources and support for those impacted with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Conclusion

It was clear throughout the discussion that participants have a range of views about the Project, which are captured throughout this summary. To recap key points of feedback as noted in the sections above participants acknowledged the congestion problem in the Albina/Rose Quarter area that needs to be addressed. Participants also expressed frustration for the lack of overall Project information shared with the Native American community. Participants were mostly concerned about who would benefit from the Project's completion, and whether those benefits would occur at the risk or cost of communities of color.

Participants offered recommendations and feedback on how the Project could help prioritize and center the concerns of Native Americans and communities of color. The key takeaways include the following:

- Honor Native Americans and BIPOC by having us at forefront of the Project and not think of us as an afterthought. It is not enough to honor us with artwork in the cover. Honor us by having us at the decision-making table and providing us with economic development opportunities in the planning and execution of the Project.
- Be transparent with Project information and continue to engage with the Native American community by using channels they trust.
- In the design of the highway cover, allow space for healing and for Native American, African Americans, and other communities of color to come together.

Moving forward, the Project team will use the key takeaways and comments from this and future discussion groups to continue to shape informed Project decisions. The Project team will share comment themes and summary reports and make them available to the public to continue to build shared values, shape informed Project decisions, and elevate the voices of communities of color.

APPENDIX: Discussion Guide

1. What is your history in the Project area? How do you use the Rose Quarter today?
2. Do you live in the area? *Show of hands*
3. How do you typically travel in the Rose Quarter area?
4. What is your opinion of the Project?
5. Are there Project components that will improve how you travel in and around the Rose Quarter?
6. What would you personally like to see prioritized in the design for what will go on top of the highway covers?
7. What are the important considerations for design to equitably address needs and perspectives of Native Americans and communities of color? (*tribal design, land acknowledgement, etc.*)
8. How can ODOT honor the unique history and heritage of Tribal activities and communities in the area?
9. Envision the area 10 years from now. Imagine this Project would have completed design and construction. How would you measure or envision success on this Project (design, construction, community engagement)? Can you think of other measures of success that would be important to you?
10. We will have an ongoing Project community advisory committee. How can we ensure your views are represented?