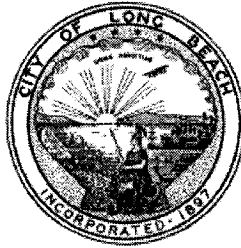



**City of Long Beach**  
Working Together to Serve



**Suja Lowenthal**  
Councilmember, 2<sup>nd</sup> District

## **Memorandum**

**Date:** May 15, 2007  
**To:** Mayor and City Council  
**From:** Suja Lowenthal, Second District   
**Subject:** Long Beach Streetcar Feasibility Study

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### **REQUESTED ACTION:**

Respectfully request the City Manager contract for an independent study of the feasibility in developing a streetcar service with east-west linkage to downtown and vital points of interest in Long Beach that may include California State University Long Beach, Long Beach City College, East Village Arts District, Long Beach Memorial, St. Mary's Hospital and our small business corridors.

Request this study include, but not be limited to, the following goals:

- Complements other transportation options offered by Long Beach Transit.
- Provides a green transportation alternative for moving people between City landmarks
- Determines the physical *and* financial viability of establishing a streetcar line.
- Fits the scale and traffic patterns of existing neighborhoods.
- Reduces short inner-city auto trips, parking demand and traffic congestion.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Throughout the nation, cities are rediscovering the benefits of streetcar systems linking emerging downtown business and residential districts with nearby points of interest such as universities, hospitals, retail corridors and tourist destinations. Streetcars are becoming the preferred mode of alternative transportation in dense urban centers, enabling people to park once then navigate a city's many sectors jumping on and off at will. The streetcar is serving as a catalyst for change and helping communities maximize their public/private investment. This is due in part to the fixed nature of the rail infrastructure, which implies permanence – generating confidence that it is going to be there for a long time. The rail system is also highly visible, with an easily understood route, and the quiet, pollution-free electric trolleys

blend in well with the community. Numerous cities, including Portland, Philadelphia, Little Rock, Tampa, Dallas and New Orleans have integrated streetcars into their existing transportation network using new low cost, low impact rail design and smaller cars that minimize changes to infrastructure and utilities.

As I mentioned during my travel report at our April 10<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, the City of Portland is emerging as a leader among U.S. cities by demonstrating its commitment to mobility through the implementation of alternative transportation options like the streetcar, which connects Portland State University with other parts of Portland, including its high-density residential and economic centers in downtown such as the Pearl District and South Waterfront. This innovative fusion of residential, arts, commercial and academic sectors attracts a creative class of individuals to the city's urban core and actively contributes to its long-term sustainability.

The Portland Streetcar is designed to fit the scale and traffic patterns of the neighborhoods through which it travels. Streetcar vehicles, manufactured by Skoda-Inekon in Plzen of the Czech Republic, are 2.46 meters (about 8 feet) wide and 20 meters long (about 66 feet). They run in mixed traffic and, except at platform stops, accommodate existing curbside parking and loading. The Portland Streetcar is owned and operated by the City of Portland. A unique shallow 12-inch deep track slab design reduces the construction time and utility relocations. Maneuverability of the shorter and narrower Skoda vehicles has allowed the 8-foot wide track slab to be fitted to existing grades, limiting the scope of street and sidewalk reconstruction.

Long time residents of Long Beach will remember our own streetcars, which were fondly called "red cars" or "Blimps" due to their large size. Charles Rivers Drake, a new resident to Long Beach and a former employee of the Southern Pacific Railroad, petitioned the city council to consider a plan for the creation of an electric interurban transit line connecting Long Beach and Los Angeles. Reaching a top speed of ten miles per hour, this "high speed" system was considered a sure-fire means of enticing potential residents and supporting a growing tourist industry. With the first run of the red car in 1902, Long Beach solidified its place among visitors as the "Coney Island of the West". More trolley lines followed so that by 1927, Long Beach had over 30 miles of streetcar tracks offering 30 all-steel, open air cars that seated up to 64 passengers. Combined with the development of the harbor and discovery of oil in Signal Hill, the streetcar helped make Long Beach one of the fastest growing cities in the country.

The streetcar's return on the national scene has been dramatic as an urban circulator and economic development catalyst. Projects across the country have delivered hundreds of millions of dollars in private development investment for the communities they serve. A streetcar system with east-west linkage will attract more people to our downtown and waterfront areas and serve ongoing residential and commercial development.

# A mass-transit trek through Portland's singular sites

Wired for weird: Locally grown food and folklore sprout along the beaten streetcar path.

By Christopher Reynolds, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

May 04, 2007



## *Portland, Oregon*

"Keep Portland weird," the bumper stickers say. I have no idea what they're talking about. I'm here on business — public transportation infrastructure tourism business.

Let me say that another way. I am here, carless, to see what's new in downtown Portland, to eat Oregon produce and drink Oregon concoctions, to briefly live that Southern California dream of chucking it all and moving to someplace cheap and rainy. And to ride the streetcars.

I step out of the [airport terminal](#), a bag on my shoulder, feed \$2 into a machine and step onto a regional commuter train called [MAX](#). Forty minutes later, MAX delivers me to downtown Portland, land of half a million left-leaning people, 37 inches of average annual rainfall and too many bicycle commuters and solar-powered parking meters to count.

Around Southwest Yamhill Street and Southwest 10th Avenue, I step off MAX, walk a block and board a long, narrow, clean light-rail cabin. This is a [Portland Streetcar](#), which costs \$1.70 to ride all day, or nothing if you stick to downtown's "fareless square." They come along about every 15 minutes.

In the early 20th century, the streetcars of Portland ran all over, like the [Red Cars](#) in Los Angeles. Then, like the Red Cars, they died, the grisly details obscured by vast clouds of automobile exhaust.

So in 2001, Portland started over, and a new line, running as a city-operated sibling to the local light-rail and bus systems, has grown to cover 7.2 miles. Which may not sound like much. But in Portland, that's enough to cross town, to win over about 8,800 riders each weekday, to link several inviting neighborhoods and tempt some tourists out of their rental cars.

At the northwestern end of the line, upscale shops and restaurants have been multiplying like bunnies in spring. At the southern end, near the Willamette River, a \$57-million aerial tram began carrying customers in January to and from a hilltop aerie on the Oregon Health & Science University campus.

Meanwhile, in the middle, the city's foremost art museum has expanded into a recycled building. So has the city's leading theater company. And the postindustrial [Pearl District](#), now artsy and lofty, looks more polished than ever.

Where to begin?

### **A Northwest passage**

I start at the northwestern end of the line, sometimes known just as Northwest, occasionally known as Nob Hill. The first good news is that my hotel, the [Inn @ Northrup Station](#), a 6-year-old venture on 21st Avenue whose interiors were apparently designed by the Jetsons, gives guests free streetcar passes. Already I'm saving money.

But Northwest has never been a neighborhood for penny-pinching. Its history as a haven for eating and shopping goes back decades, and sellers and buyers alike reserve their greatest passions for locally grown ingredients and locally originated designs.

On 23rd, which is the backbone of the neighborhood and carries the moniker Trendy-Third, I stroll past the fancy soaps of Lush and kitschy trinkets of 2-year-old Hello Portland.

On 21st, I browse the lavish produce at City Market. On Northwest Lovejoy Street near Northwest 19th, I pause at the [3-D Center of Art and Photography](#), where a temporary exhibit (through May 27) details the history of the View-Master since its 1938 invention in, you guessed it, Portland. (Yes, they're still making View-Masters, but not in Portland.)

For dinner one night, I join Oregonian friends at 23 Hoyt, an elegantly restrained dinner place that opened on 23rd in late 2006. The menu is full of dishes such as pork from Carlton Farms (in the nearby Yamhill Valley) and lamb from Cattail Creek (in the Willamette Valley), accented by all manner of asparagus, morels, pea shoots, leeks and fennel. From our window seat, we watch an impeccably

put-together middle-aged man arrive for his dinner date on an impeccable red bicycle, then sit so that he can see the beloved bike over his friend's shoulder.

Another night, about seven blocks away, we scorn elegant and restrained in favor of the red lights and twirling mirror ball of Le Happy, a restaurant and bar that makes tremendous crepes and steak. That is followed by dessert in the distinguished quarters of Papa Haydn, where we sip apple and pear brandy from the Clear Creek Distillery, the fruit grown about an hour away, the distillery about 10 blocks off.

It is in this neighborhood that I spot the first bumper sticker about keeping Portland weird. And just a few hours later, I encounter Jessica Hulse, 23, outside a coffee shop on 21st.

She wears black, a cigarette at her lips and a Remington portable typewriter at her fingertips. She looks like Edgar Allan Poe's receptionist.

"It's a 1922," she says, fingering the keyboard. She has just bought it for \$15 at a thrift shop, and she estimates it's worth several hundred dollars. But this, she quickly adds, is not about money. It is about pleasure.

"I do like typing," she says. "It's nice after working a computer all day."

At the next table, a bearded man pauses at his laptop to look over and solemnly nod.

### **A cultured Pearl**

The next neighborhood over from Northwest is the Pearl District. After more than a decade of urban pioneering and adaptive reuse, it's thick with galleries, lofts, lofts that look like galleries, tea merchants, full-service bars and at least one tea merchant with a full-service bar. (That would be the Tea Zone and Camellia Lounge on Northwest 11th, where the "marTEAnis" and yerba maté ale flow each evening.)

And then there are the little horses.

These are the result of [a public-art project](#) begun in 2005 by artist Scott Wayne Indiana, who decided to make use of dozens of otherwise idle old equine hitching rings along the curbs. Indiana and his followers have taken to attaching tiny plastic horses to the old rings — various brands, breeds and sizes, mostly purchased for a dollar or two from discount stores.

Despite the inevitable horse thieves, there are now scores of these roadside ponies in the Pearl and beyond. If you lean down and listen closely, you can almost hear them whinnying scornfully at those fancy civic campaigns elsewhere that scattered big, arty angels around Los Angeles; big, arty cows around Chicago; and so on.

"Let's keep Portland weird!" writes one fan on [the campaign's website](#).

Portland? Weird? Really?

Of all the Pearl District's old features turned to new purposes, the most prominent is probably the EcoTrust Building, an 1895 brick landmark that's been rehabbed since 1998 according to exacting green standards, from the garden on the roof to the weathered old floorboards. Of course there's a Patagonia store inside it, and while inspecting the \$14 socks, I spot a thicket of bicycles under a hand-lettered tote board. Last month, it explains, 68% of the staff's commuting trips were made by bicycle, and 22% more were by bus, train or carpool, leaving just 10% by car.

I have a choice here. Feel good about the streetcar pass in my pocket, feel bad about the jet fuel that was burned to get me here, or move on.

I retreat to Jamison Park, with its burbling fountain, its shaded benches, its romping children, its middle-aged men lobbing silvery balls. So, I say to one of the men, a little afternoon bocce?

"It's called *pétanque*," says Johnny Prince.

I have shamed myself. But Prince, president of a *pétanque* club called [La Boule Rose](#), is the forgiving sort. No — the zealous missionary sort.

He tells me how the members gather most Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings. He shows me how he's had his name stamped on his equipment. He points out the neighboring French restaurant, Fenouil. And he begins to recall how he approached the city four years ago when the park was in planning stages, hoping to enlist municipal support for a patch of dirt that those in the know call a *pétanque* terrain.

Oh no, I think, having lived in Los Angeles for 15 years. Here comes a tortured tale of bureaucratic woe....

"There was no red tape," Prince says. He got what he wanted. End of story.

Oh.

### **Hollywood, go home**

The next streetcar carries me out of the Pearl and past the mammoth [Powell's Books](#) on Burnside to the core of downtown.

I meander through the [Portland Art Museum](#), which expanded in 2005, taking over the former Masonic Temple next door and refitting it to house modern and contemporary art. I peek in at the lobby of Portland Center Stage, which took over the 1891 Portland Armory Building and reopened last fall with a new performance space inside.

Over on Southwest 15th Avenue, the Hotel deLuxe opened a year ago with a glitzy Old Hollywood theme. On Southwest Washington Street, the Fifth Avenue Suites Hotel in February reinvented itself as the Hotel Monaco Portland. And the achingly trendy Ace Hotel arrived early this year on Southwest Stark Street, supplanting the old Clyde Hotel.

Just how trendy is the Ace? The headboards are made from recycled German military ponchos. The bedspreads are blankets custom-made by Oregon-based Pendleton. Fourteen rooms will soon be outfitted with working turntables and vintage vinyl. And when the in-house public relations guy hands me his business card after showing me around, I see that his job title is "cultural engineer."

Yet, for my money, there's a far bolder cultural-engineering effort afoot across the street. There, in a former nightclub space, a group of investors eager to advance "the dream of a few crazy filmmakers" in December opened the Living Room.

The Living Room is partly a restaurant and bar with big windows and lots of cedar on the wall, but it's principally a movie house, with six screening spaces designed to hold 40 to 60 viewers each in recliners and love seats and such. If they like, these viewers can order food and drink before the film begins. Or a group could rent a whole screening room and bring in home movies. But don't expect to see any new Hollywood fare.

"It's all independent films," says box office associate Lisa Flaherty. "No Hollywood. And no film. It's all digital."

Basically, these entrepreneurs wanted to make a venue for independents and didn't want to play ball with the companies that control traditional film distribution in the U.S. And so, while the rest of America has been lining up to see "Blades of Glory" and "Meet the Robinsons," the Living Room's customers have been choosing among such offerings as "Darius Goes West" (a 2006 American documentary about a young wheelchair user's efforts to get on MTV's "Pimp My Ride") and "The Hole Story" (a 2006 comedy about an outsider's efforts to understand a mysterious hole in the ice of a Minnesota lake).

Back home in the land of movie moguls, I'll be quietly rooting for the Living Room. But right now, I have one more streetcar to catch, one more strand of Portland subculture to sort out.

#### **Quick zip through the air**

I board a crowded southbound car and ride it past Portland State University to the end of the line: the South Waterfront, a formerly idle industrial zone teeming with construction equipment. This is Portland's next new neighborhood.

The first condo tower opened last year. In July, the streetcar line is scheduled to reach a bit farther into the neighborhood-to-be. The Oregon Health & Science University's wellness center, another big, green building with gardens on upper floors, already seethes with patients and healers. But the main attraction is that new aerial tram.

It turns out to be a quick trip. For \$4, you get a three-minute ride and wraparound views full of treetops, rooftops, downtown skyscrapers, at least four of the bridges that cross the Willamette and, on clear days, the snowy tops of Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Hood. Because there's not much for a tourist to do on the hilltop campus of OHSU, you'll soon be descending again and wondering where to go next.

One easy answer, which comes with another great view, soft chairs and ready access to steak, seafood and alcohol, is the Portland City Grill. It's perched on the 30th floor of a downtown high-rise on Southwest 5th Avenue, in a space that's held restaurants for about 20 years. Easy elevator ride. Very comfortable.

And because this is Portland, I should also mention the ascents and descents favored by the people who gather on Sunday nights outside Rocco's Pizza.

They call themselves the Zoo Bombers, and many of them pedal customized creations made from children's bicycles. Rookies borrow from the bike pile at Southwest 10th Avenue and Southwest Oak Street, which masquerades the rest of the week as a piece of public artwork.

First the Bombers catch a MAX train up to the Oregon Zoo in the hills. Sometimes some of them drink a little. Then they mount their bikes and hurtle through the dark down Southwest Fairview Boulevard and other steep residential streets. Annoyed neighbors?

Danger? Blood? Yes, yes, yes.

"Our employees have not had good luck with it," Rocco's employee John Harrison, 38, acknowledges one afternoon between customers. "Everybody who does it seems to crash and burn pretty hard."

With that in mind, Harrison has hatched his own strategy. He'll go down the hill, all right, but he'll do it differently. On a skateboard.

"Keep Portland weird," the bumper stickers say.

Absolutely, I say. But if it's all the same to you, I'll do my rolling on the streetcar.

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