

## 82nd Avenue changes hinge on Metro bond

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### Body

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Metro is in discussions with state and local officials about the possibility of turning over to the Portland Bureau of Transportation state highways where they function as city streets within Portland.

Oversight of streets such as 82nd Avenue, which is also Oregon Route 213, would be transferred. That could set in motion a change in priorities from enabling fast-moving vehicle traffic to instituting greater safety features for bicycles and pedestrians.

“At Metro, we want these roadways to best reflect our land use and our regional goals,” said Margi Bradway, deputy director of the regional agency’s planning and development department.

Many obstacles remain for the plan, not the least of which is funding. If control of streets were to shift to the city or county, responsibility for maintenance and upgrades would shift as well.

Neighborhood residents and community groups are eager to see improvements on 82nd Avenue, which they said has suffered from years of deferred maintenance by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

“I think there’s great interest in getting it done; it just comes down to finding the money,” said Duncan Hwang, associate director of the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, which has an office at Southeast 82nd Avenue and Division Street.

Metro is serving as the facilitator of the jurisdictional transfer assessment. The regional agency aims to have draft recommendations completed by the end of 2020, with an implementation plan to follow.

Funding hinges on passage of Metro’s regional transportation bond measure that is expected to appear on ballots in November. The package of projects included is still taking shape, but a Metro task force recommended the bond measure include \$400 million for improving 82nd Avenue. The Metro Council will weigh which projects to include in the funding package at a public hearing on Monday.

82nd Avenue has changed little for decades, remaining a four-lane vehicle corridor with little infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists. It also has one of the highest rates of crashes in the Portland area.

Local leaders hope to reduce pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle crashes. A 12.9-mile section of 82nd Avenue (Oregon 213 North) through Lents and Gateway had 117 crashes involving pedestrians, 48 involving cyclists and 3,270 involving vehicles from 2013 to 2018, according to Metro.

“Many of the state-owned highways, the state-owned arterials, have the highest crash (rates) in the region,” Bradway said.

Brian Wong, a local activist with the 82nd Avenue Improvement Coalition, lives off of 82nd Avenue near Southeast Stark Street. His main concern is pedestrian safety, he said. His children cross the highway every morning to reach their school bus stop.

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"I really would like to see more pedestrian-activated crossings along 82nd Avenue," he said. "If you're not at a lighted intersection, it's really playing 'Frogger,' and you're just hoping you don't get stuck in that middle turn lane. It just can feel really threatening to get across the road. "

While 82nd Avenue has remained a car-first thoroughfare, PBOT has worked with TriMet to transform other streets that it controls with features such as red-striped bus-only lanes and larger bus stations that facilitate access by pedestrians and bicyclists.

"I visualize the local street as having pedestrian movement, transit movement (and) bike lanes, versus the interstate which is about moving cars quickly," Bradway said.

Many of the state highways, including 82nd Avenue, were originally used to move farm products to urban consumers. The old highways have changed since completion of the interstate system, Bradway said.

"These roadways continue to function more like local roads and densify," she said.

Aaron Brown, who runs the local group No More Freeways, said he welcomed new ideas for the state highways, but was concerned ODOT would dump the roadways onto local jurisdictions without the funding to improve them.

"It's like inheriting your uncle's beat-up car and having to fix it up," he said.

Bradway said ODOT's Region 1 leaders have been open to the discussions.

"ODOT has been a great partner on this," she said. "They really have. "

Much remains to be negotiated between the state agency and local authorities, ODOT spokesman Don Hamilton said.

"Each of these is a separate process that would require an (intergovernmental agreement) between ODOT and the city to determine what steps are necessary before the transfer is complete," he said.

ODOT has a memorandum of understanding with PBOT that is essentially a to-do list before jurisdictional transfer. Among the items are cost estimates to bring 82nd Avenue to a state of good repair and to implement safety improvements, PBOT spokesman John Brady said.

"The expectation is that ODOT will need to chip in and contribute to get 82nd up to a state of good repair," he said.

Encouraging development is not an immediate goal of jurisdictional transfer, but it's not hard to see more housing and commercial potential in a revitalized 82nd Avenue. The ongoing urbanization of 82nd Avenue and potential changes have given rise to fears of gentrification.

"That's definitely a fear, but we have to balance that with the public-safety issues that are a community priority now," Hwang said.

Portland's communities of color are clustered around the state highways, including 82nd Avenue. The East Portland corridor has thriving Chinese-American, Vietnamese-American, African and Slavic-American communities.

"It's just a really diverse community all along," Hwang said.

Besides funding, legal liability has been top of mind in the intergovernmental talks. The high-crash corridors have attracted lawsuits.

Other highways are under discussion to change jurisdictions include the Tualatin Valley Highway (Oregon routes 8 and 47) and McLoughlin Boulevard (Oregon 99E).

The Legislature has occasionally weighed in on highway jurisdictions, including a 2017 transportation bill that called for the Oregon Transportation Commission to study a stretch of Southeast Powell Boulevard between Southeast Ninth Avenue and Interstate 205. State Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, D-Portland, sponsored a bill in the 2019 session to establish a formal statewide process to transfer road jurisdictions, but it did not move forward.

Local advocates said they recognize 82nd Avenue is critical for motor vehicle transportation, but added that improvements must be made for pedestrians and drivers alike.

"No one's winning on that road at this point," Wong said. "Any improvement will be an improvement for anybody. The road is in such bad shape that the cars aren't getting any service out of it, and neither are pedestrians at this point. "

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