

The Powell Boulevard Project

A Short History

Introduction

After over 12 years of planning and project development, construction of roadway improvements to Powell Boulevard, from Gresham west City limits to Burnside, is nearing completion. Powell Boulevard, prior to January 1st, 2006, was under the jurisdiction of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Even so, in 1995 Gresham identified the need to widen Powell Boulevard from Eastman Parkway to west city limits, and allocated \$ 7.3 million in City Traffic Impact Fees (TIF) funding to the widening. The TIF project description called for widening to a 5-lane cross section and included landscaped medians. The project was prioritized as 22nd out of a list of 24 projects approved by City Council for funding through TIF revenue.

Project Initiation

Successes in applying for grant funding from various sources resulted in boulevard retrofit projects on Division Street, Wallula to Kelly, and on Stark Street, 181st to 190th. As those projects were being developed and implemented, concern was heard from city leaders that Gresham's "living room", Powell Boulevard, was being ignored. At that time, staff began exploring options for funding and improving Powell Boulevard in downtown Gresham.

In 2001, the Oregon legislature enacted the Oregon Transportation Investment Act (OTIA). ODOT was tasked with soliciting and selecting projects for OTIA funding. Gresham submitted an application for improving Powell Boulevard from west city limits to Burnside. To enhance Gresham's chances of success, Gresham added \$6 million in TIF revenue and offered to take over jurisdiction of Powell Blvd. During the initial round of project solicitation, ODOT did not select Gresham's project for funding.

OTIA is funded by revenues raised by selling state issued bonds. Actual revenues exceeded ODOT's revenue estimates. At that time, ODOT did a second round of project solicitations and Gresham's Powell Boulevard project was selected.

Schematic Design

In 2002, the Powell project was awarded a \$60,000 Transportation Growth Management (TGM) grant to analyze and develop a schematic (preliminary) design. That effort commenced in fall of 2003 and was completed in July of 2003. Public involvement and outreach were key elements of this effort. An interagency technical advisory committee made up of 21 agency staff members, met 6 times. The City's Council Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) was briefed on the TGM effort 4 times. Meetings to inform project "stakeholders", made up of residents and businesses located on Powell, were held 4 times. Seven meetings were held with various neighborhood associations, Gresham Chamber of Commerce, and Gresham Downtown Development Association. Two public meetings were held by the TGM project team. City Council was briefed on the project in May of 2003.

In addition to “thematic” alternatives (i.e. landscaping features, wider sidewalks, etc), the TGM analysis included a traffic analysis performed by DKS Associates. The traffic analysis identified the number of travel lanes and turn lane configurations necessary to meet the City’s level of service standards in the design year of 2020. As described below, the “preferred alternative” will meet all City LOS standards in the year 2020 except for the intersection of 181st.

The TGM effort looked at multiple project alternatives. Based on comments from staff, stakeholders, the various community groups, and the general public, the project team recommended a preferred alternative that includes:

- Incorporate landscaped medians between intersections from west city limits to Birdsdale.
- Add a southbound right turn lane at 181st.
- Retain the existing 3-lane section (one travel lane each direction and a center turn lane) between Duniway and Birdsdale. Note: Stakeholders played a large role in this recommendation, noting the design meets all applicable roadway carrying capacity needs, while preserving their homes and yards. Figure 6.5 from the Schematic Design Report is included below.

Table 6-5: Future Intersection Level of Service (2020 Preferred Alternative)

Study Intersection	AM Peak Hour			PM Peak Hour		
	Delay	LOS	V/C	Delay	LOS	V/C
182 nd Ave./Highland Dr./Powell Boulevard	53.1	D	0.94	70.6	E	> 1.0
Powell Loop East/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	24.1	C	0.88
Birdsdale Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	27.6	C	0.81
Towle Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	16.7	B	0.81
Eastman Parkway/Powell Boulevard	40.8	D	0.75	50.1	D	0.85
Walters Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	3.2	A	0.48
Main Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	13.2	B	0.71
Hood Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	12.5	B	0.53
Cleveland Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	16.0	B	0.65
Hogan Drive/Powell Boulevard	37.0	D	0.68	53.0	D	0.88
Rene Avenue/Powell Boulevard	-	-	-	16.4	B	0.47
Burnside Road (US 26)/Powell Boulevard	32.6	C	0.75	42.8	D	0.84

LOS Level of service
 Delay Average vehicle delay in seconds for all movements at the intersection.
 V/C Volume to capacity ratio of the intersection.

- Incorporate bioswales to mitigate for increased impervious surfaces.
- Widen Birdsdale to Eastman to a modified 4-lane cross-section, including 2 travel lanes westbound, one travel lane eastbound, and a continuous center turn lane (except add a landscaped pedestrian refuge island at Florence).
- Add northbound and southbound turn lanes at Birdsdale.
- At Eastman, convert the southbound left-through lane to a through lane only to allow a safer and more efficient protected left turn with overlap phasing.
- Install landscaped medians between 1st and Burnside (five areas).
- Provide focal point “gateway” feature at Eastman and at Burnside.
- Install full traffic signal at Walters.
- Install pedestrian refuge islands at Miller, Roberts (both intersections of Roberts), and Kelly.

For a full description and plans of the preferred alternative, please see the Powell Boulevard Schematic Design Final Report, July 2003.

Final Design

Final project design was started in the fall of 2003. Public outreach continued during the final design process. Two public meetings were held. One on November 4, 2004 and again on September 29, 2005 just prior to start of construction. Additionally, numerous community meetings were held including those with Centennial neighborhood association, GDDA, and CTAC.

Final design required the expertise of specialty design firms. MacLeod Reckord was hired to supply landscape design expertise. Retaining wall designs were supplied by Kramer Gehlen and Associates. Squier Kleinfelder was hired to perform an environmental site assessment. And Hanna McEldowney was hired to negotiate the right-of way acquisition. Final design involved over 30 City staff members, 10 private utility representatives, and 15 consultants.

The public outreach combined with input from staff, the utilities, and consultants associated with the final design effort resulted in the following modifications to the project:

- Added a new traffic signal at Holly/Berry Ridge
- Extended the westbound 2-lane section to the west, maximizing its extent yet still avoiding impacts to the floodplain and wetlands.
- Converted a number of signalized left turns to protected/permissive phasing.
- Retrofitted all existing pedestrian signals to “countdown” pedestrian signal displays.
- Deleted two landscaped median islands west of 181st.
- Deleted pedestrian refuge median island at Florence.
- Reduced size of landscaped median between Birdsdale and Bella Vista.
- Modified location of landscaped median island at Miller (moved to the west).
- Added landscaped median island between Main and Roberts.
- Added landscaped pedestrian refuge median islands at Elliott, Linden, Liberty, and Vista.
- Deleted pedestrian refuge island at Kelly.
- Realigned 1st at Powell and added landscaping.
- Reduced size and modified location of landscaped median islands between Burnside and Rene.
- Added underground irrigation to planter strips and median islands between Walters and Roberts, and at Burnside; and enhanced the landscaping plans in these areas.
- Added decorative “Historic Downtown Gresham” and “City of Gresham” gateway signage.
- Added circular raised planter box and fountain in northeast corner at Main Street.
- Added a second northbound through lane at Hogan Road. (This was later changed to just a northbound right turn lane due to problems in acquiring right-of-way).
- Added overhead banner poles between Main and Roberts.
- Undergrounded existing overhead utilities between Miller and Kelly and added decorative streetlights with banner poles.
- Added ADA improvements (new curb ramps, modify existing driveways, etc), Eastman to Burnside.

The project schedule was dictated by the OTIA grant which required the following major milestones be met:

- Environmental Clearance – June 1, 2004
- Right of Way Acquisition – June 1, 2005
- Contract Award – September 1, 2005
- Project Completion – January 1, 2007

By limiting the roadway widening in the area of the Fairview Creek headwaters, impacts to the wetlands and floodplain were minimized. As such, a letter was requested and received from the US Army Corps of Engineers stating that there will be no adverse environmental impacts.

The City hired Hanna McEldowney and Associates to negotiate acquisition of 33 right-of-way parcels. Because of the modified 3 and 4-lane cross section, fewer right-of-way acquisitions were required. Additionally, all the right-of-way acquisitions were “simple” acquisitions not requiring displacement of people or the demolition/modification of structures. Independent appraisals were done on all acquisitions of \$10,000 or more. All but 2 acquisitions were successfully negotiated. Staff was unable to reach agreement with owners of 2 parcels on Hogan Road, north of Powell Blvd, resulting in those proposed improvements to Hogan Road being dropped from the project scope, and thereby allowing the project to stay on schedule in meeting the OTIA milestone. (Note: The improvement proposed to Hogan Road north of Powell was not in the original project scope but was added as a result of citizen comments received during the public outreach).

Construction

Construction bids were opened on August 9th, 2005. Tapani Underground was the successful low bidder and they began work on the project in October of 2005. Public outreach continued through construction. The City created a page on the City website, which is updated bi-monthly. A groundbreaking was held on January 26, and included the unveiling of an informational display sign. Project information was distributed at businesses such as US Bank. Briefings to neighborhood associations (Centennial), GDDA, and CTAC, continued. Numerous press releases were done at critical junctures in the project (e.g. start of paving, Holly Ridge signal turn-on, Eastman signal phasing change, Post Office access control change). Additionally, an ice cream social was held in July along with ads in the local newspaper reminding citizens that downtown Gresham businesses are open for business and asking Gresham residents for their patronage. Project modifications that resulted from ongoing outreach and comments received from citizens and businesses during construction include:

- Deleted landscaped median island nearest Burnside.
- Deleted 12 trees between Duniway and west Powell Loop.
- Modified striping to delete left turn bay into east Holly Ridge driveway (management at Holly Ridge has submitted plans to modify driveway to an exit only).
- Added and extended numerous retaining walls to better fit field conditions.