

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

The people movers

Washougal has its hands full with transportation improvement projects

BY JESSICA SWANSON | of the VBJ

The city of Washougal has plenty of transportation projects underfoot.

Having recently finished a \$6.5 million downtown revitalization with \$14 million in private improvements, the city this month awarded the bid for a \$3.2 million pedestrian and bike tunnel to Oregon City-based Coffman Excavation. The tunnel has been in the works for several years and is part of the larger Steamboat Landing project, which aims to provide access to the Columbia River from downtown, clean up the landing and park, improve trails and rebuild the deck overlooking the river.

But Steamboat Landing is only a glimmer in Washougal's eye as the city works with its stakeholders to improve Pendleton Way and "E" Street, and to build the tunnel that planners said will energize the whole Washougal waterfront.

A trimmer tunnel plan

The plan for the tunnel under state Route 14 doesn't look the same as it did when planning began years ago. Mostly, it has been dialed back to keep within budget. The project is being funded by the federal government in a \$1.2 million earmark appropriated by Congressman Brian Baird,

another \$1.2 million federal bicycle safety grant and about \$600,000 in federal stimulus money.

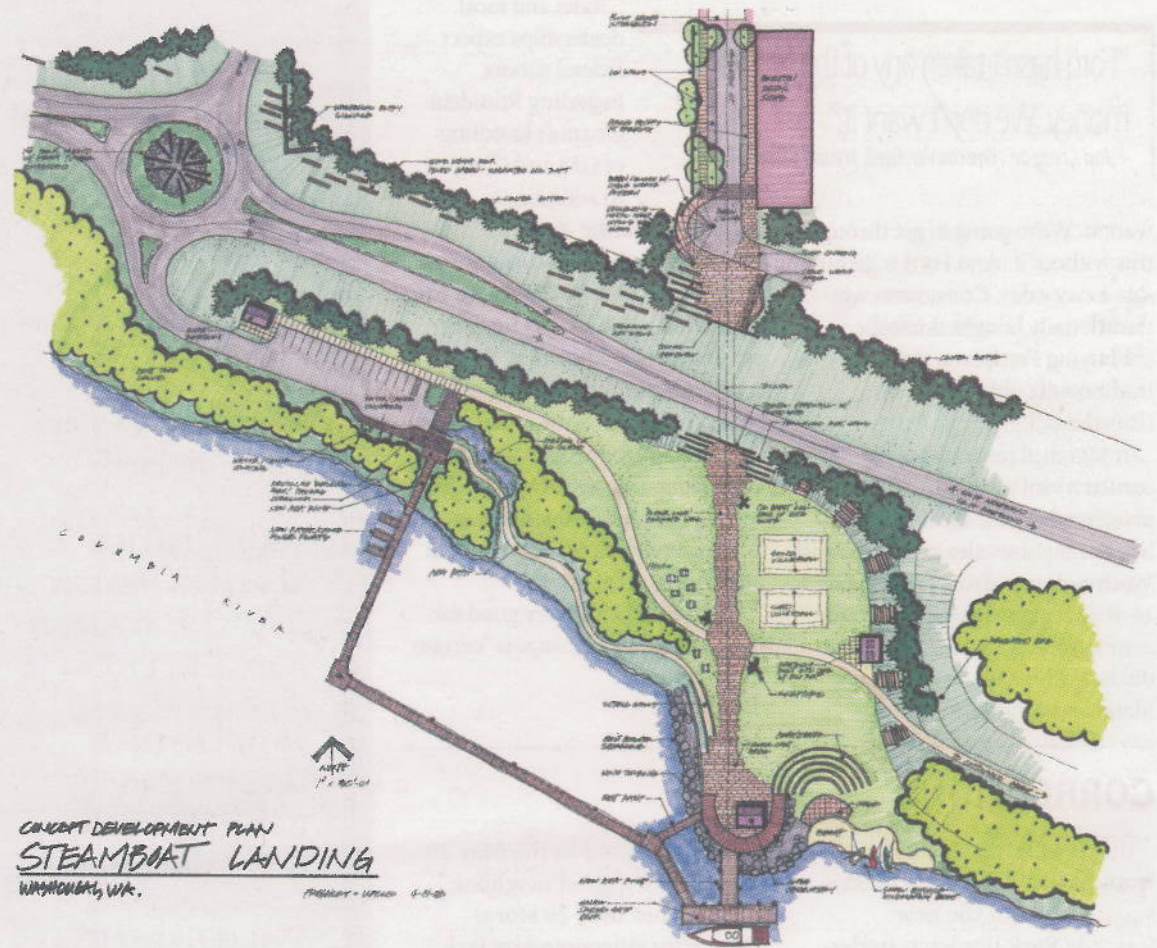
The tunnel and surrounding project area was designed by the same team that collaborated on the downtown project – The Rommel Architectural Partnership and landscape architect Chris Freshley, both based in Portland, and Vancouver-based Wallis Engineering.

The tunnel will be made of white concrete, about 110 feet long, 16 feet wide and 9.5 feet high, and have lighting spouting from the floor up the sides of the tunnel and over the arched ceiling.

Naselle, Wash., artist Rex Ziak will supply seven Columbia Basalt panels with depictions of petroglyphs from the Columbia Gorge. Ziak is a historian and Emmy-winning cinematographer who will work with Washougal students to research and choose the petroglyphs.

Streetlights will bring a design element from the downtown project to each end of the tunnel.

Several basalt benches will be placed at the north end of the tunnel, and at the south end, a trail with a wheelchair-accessible option will join the waterfront trail to Cottonwood



Submitted

A concept of what Washougal's waterfront could look like when redevelopment is complete.

Beach. Security cameras will be posted at both ends of the tunnel.

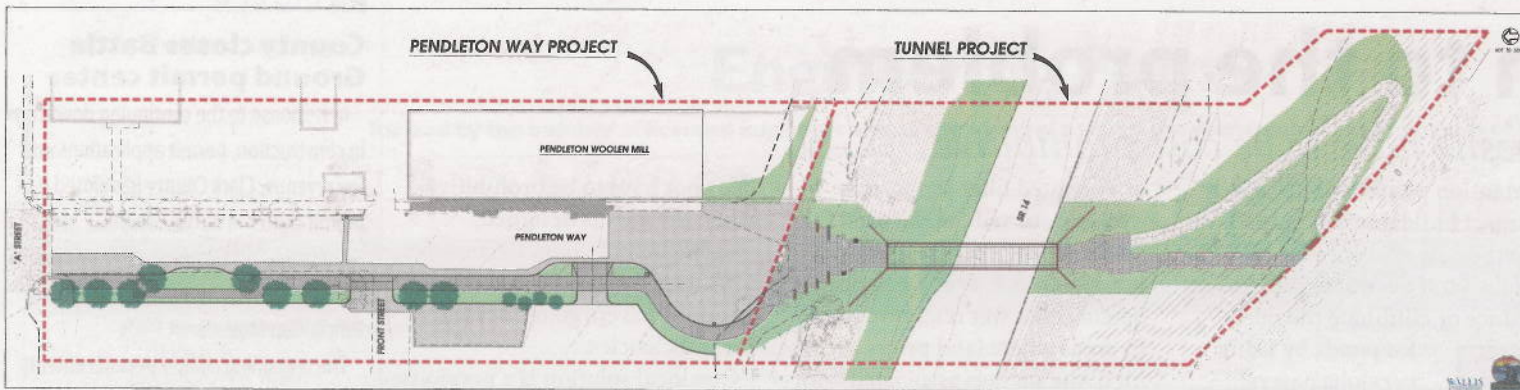
The tunnel project includes 12 alternative additions that likely will be completed. Most are improvements to Pendleton Way. Pendleton Woolen Mills, which operates a retail store

and mill along Pendleton Way, donated the easement to the project.

Along Pendleton Way, sustainable landscaping and other elements from the downtown project will be pulled southward toward the mouth of the tunnel.

Contractors will plant a bioswale along a new sidewalk to catch stormwater runoff from the street.

Chris Freshley, who designed the pervious paver parking strips found elsewhere downtown, is happy to see Washougal taking steps toward



Planners hope this pedestrian tunnel, set to go under state Route 14, will energize Washougal's waterfront.

sustainable practices.

"I'm just really excited the city is pursuing that direction," he said. "It's a good direction for a small city to avail (itself) of. They are setting the pace for Southwest Washington."

Planners originally proposed a weekend closure of state Route 14 to complete the project and save about a half-million dollars, said Wallis Engineering Project Manager Ki Bealey, but the state chose not to shut it down. Traffic will be reconfigured somewhat on the freeway during construction but will not be detoured.

The tunnel project is expected to break ground this summer and be completed late this year or early next year.

The road diet

Slated for construction in 2010, Washougal's next big transportation project is the "E" Street Improvements Project, a high-priority project in the city's six-year Transportation Improvement Plan. The city will turn a four-lane major arterial into a two-mile multi-modal stretch from

Sixth Street to 32nd Street.

Commonly referred to as a road diet, the street will be slimmed down to one lane in either direction with a middle turn lane and bicycle lanes and sidewalks on both sides for most of the route.

A roundabout will replace the signaled intersection at 17th Street, approved to be named Washougal River Road.

The project is designed to "improve capacity and traffic safety," Bealey said.

"E" Street has an accident rate that is nearly three times that of the state and county averages – 6.53 accidents per million vehicle miles traveled versus 2.57 for the state and 2.18 for the county.

The "E" Street project has been a much "bigger political hurdle" than the tunnel project because many citizens do not think the street should be reconfigured to accommodate bikes and pedestrians, Bealey

said. And there is skepticism about whether the roundabout will curb accidents and ease traffic stoppage.

The city has used various studies and analyses to convince citizens that the "E" Street plan is in their best interests. For example, the city of Vancouver's case study on the West Fourth Plain Re-Striping project, completed in 2002, showed a 52 percent reduction in crashes and an 18 percent reduction in speeding.

A study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety indicates roundabouts reduce crashes by 39 percent and injury accidents by 76 percent at intersections where stop signs or signals were previously used for traffic control. And a preliminary traffic analysis found that were the current 17th Street traffic signal to stay, the intersection would be considered a service failure because cars would experience

roundabout has been approved by the Regional Transportation Council and is in its Metropolitan Transportation Plan, said Washougal City Administrator Nabil Shawa.

A diamond interchange was originally planned for the intersection that Shawa said could cost taxpayers \$100 million. As it is, this roundabout and the one slated for 17th Street will cost about \$15 million total, he said.

"We have all the planning approved," Shawa said. "Now it's just a matter of funding."

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a nearly three-minute delay at the intersection by the year 2030, while a roundabout would dramatically improve projected service levels.

Going round and round

A final piece of Washougal's traffic puzzle is another proposed roundabout at 15th Street and state Route 14. The

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