

PLAN TO MOVE FREEWAY STAYS ALIVE

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Summary: The three newest members of the council revive the issue, and Commissioner Hales will take a new look at the past studies

Supporters of a plan to move the east bank freeway won a victory Wednesday as the Portland City Council voted 4-1 to keep the idea alive for at least another six months.

Mayor Vera Katz said the review would look with "fresh eyes" at all the issues on the east bank of the Willamette River downtown, including the state's plans to spend about \$200 million on the existing alignment of Interstate 5.

"We owe nothing less to our city and the region in times of scarcity of funds," Katz said.

It is the fresh eyes of the three newest members of the council that have revived this issue.

"There is a new dynamic on the council," Commissioner Mike Lindberg bubbled after the vote. "Last time, I was pretty lonely." Four years ago, Lindberg was the lone vote in favor of moving that stretch of Interstate 5, but this time Commissioner Earl Blumenauer found himself a minority of one.

"It calls for more process, more money into studies and more delay," Blumenauer said. "And I strongly believe we have higher priorities for funding and greater needs, not only downtown but throughout the city, than moving a freeway a few hundred feet."

Katz's resolution puts Commissioner Charlie Hales in charge of reviewing previous studies of this issue.

In 1989 the council rejected a study committee recommendation to move the freeway. Since then, Hales said, the eastbank area has seen a ferment of activity, including the opening of the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and the Oregon Convention Center, and the proposal for a new Blazer arena.

Hales will assemble a team of citizens and officials to search for the best way to reclaim the riverbank from cars and trucks, while still improving traffic flows in the area.

"This is an effort to find a new balance between livability and mobility," he said.

While the action keeps one long-sought project alive, it puts another on hold.

Bruce Warner, regional manager for the state transportation department, said work would cease on a plan to provide southbound freeway access for the central eastside industrial district until the council made up its mind.

The controversial Water Avenue ramps project, which has been in the planning stages since the late 1970s, is not scheduled for completion until after the turn of the century.

Lindberg noted that the "rise and fall of western civilization does not depend on a six-month delay."

Katz frequently reminded people who came to testify that the resolution didn't cancel the Water Avenue ramps, or move the freeway, it merely kept all the options open for a bit longer.

But clearly, that's what people came to talk about.

Alex Pierce, a member of an Oregon Arts Commission committee that vehemently opposed the original freeway alignment in 1964, urged the council "not to allow the opportunity to pass again."

And central eastside businessmen pleaded with the council to make good on its 15-year-old promise to provide freeway access.

"There are no circumstances that justify re-examination of this commitment," said Gary Coe, president of the Central Eastside Industrial Council.

George Van Bergen, a member of the Metro Council, and chairman of the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation, which sets regional priorities for spending highway money, warned the council not to upset the delicate political applecart in the region that has led to light-rail funding.