Tree preservation, replacement essential to PMLR project plan

Drawing on years of experience, TriMet makes tree preservation and replacement a priority during construction projects, while looking for feasible reuse options for removed trees. On the I-205/Portland Mall Light Rail Project, for example, 30 percent more trees were planted than removed, and many of the removed trees were salvaged to use as materials for furniture, lumber and more.

Construction projects often require the removal and replacement of trees, and that is the case for the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Transit Project (PMLR). It is estimated that the project will need to remove approximately 850 trees along the alignment, but the project will ultimately plant approximately 3,325 trees. The planted trees will include 2,450 in the City of Portland, and 875 in the City of Milwaukie and unincorporated north Clackamas County. These numbers do not include all trees that will be planted for mitigation purposes in riparian and natural areas in Milwaukie and Clackamas County—planning for those trees continues.

Approaches for tree removal and replacement vary between jurisdictions. The project is working closely with the City of Portland’s Urban Forestry office, the City of Milwaukie and Clackamas County to ensure that each jurisdiction’s tree removal and mitigation policies are followed while also purchasing the right trees for each location.

Early tree procurement

For PMLR, the project purchases trees one to two years ahead of planting, similar to the method used with the I-205 segment of the MAX Green Line. Early tree procurement allows trees to grow and be more mature when planted, and it assures the project will have the correct species of trees available when it is time to plant.

Project trees have been procured from three Willamette Valley growers in Brooks, St. Paul and Salem. The trees procured for the alignment include more than a dozen native species, including Oregon white oak, black hawthorne and Pacific madrone. These native trees will be planted in locations appropriate to their growing needs. In locations where native species would not thrive or meet appropriate landscaping needs, other species will be planted.
Trees are important elements of livable communities, providing beauty, shade, visual diversity and habitat, while helping to reduce stormwater runoff. The trees being grown and planted for PMLR will help define the corridor and link it to surrounding communities, adding beauty and providing a natural visual connection along the way.

Tree reuse
When trees are removed, TriMet and its contractors make every effort to find a way to reuse the materials. Leaves and twigs are turned into compost. Depending on the type of tree, the branches and wood recovered may be repurposed in natural settings such as parks and for river restoration projects and fish habitat. When appropriate, the wood may also be used as firewood for low income and elderly households.

If feasible, the wood is donated to local schools, and made available to local businesses or artists working in industries such as furniture making or sculpture.

Protecting birds
The project removed potential bird nest trees and shrubbery outside of the nesting season (approximately March 1 to September 1) as the construction schedule allowed.

The project also contracts with a federal wildlife biologist to ensure compliance with federal law protecting birds. When clearing must occur during the bird nesting season, the biologist surveys the planned clearing areas for protected bird nests from the start of the nesting season until the vegetation is cleared to avoid impacts to active nests. The biologist conducts tree surveys one to three times per week depending on the level of bird activity in a particular area.

Stay involved
Sign up for project email updates and meeting notices at trimet.org/pm. For more information, please call TriMet Community Affairs at 503-962-2150.