OMSI/SE Water Ave Station

Providing multi-modal access to a cornerstone of innovation

**Design summary**

The OMSI/SE Water Ave Station is located in the Central Eastside Industrial District, which is largely characterized by warehouse, distribution and manufacturing uses. But the area immediately surrounding the station is occupied by dynamic institutions with exciting plans for the future. The Oregon Museum of Science & Industry (OMSI), Portland Opera and the Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation (ORHF) plan to grow in ways that will transform this district into a vibrant regional destination. The station platform will be located approximately just north of SE Caruthers Street and west of SE Water Avenue, a site surrounded by these institutions.

OMSI attracts more than 900,000 people annually, and the Portland Community College (PCC) CLIMB Center just north of OMSI draws more than 10,000 students each year. The river defines the west boundary of the area, and Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and Oregon Pacific Railroad (OPRR) run along the northeast edge. ORHF, which restores and displays historic railroad engines, has relocated to a site near OMSI and the light rail station. The station area is a portal to Tilikum Crossing, the new transit bridge, which reaches across the Willamette River to other employment, education and research centers in downtown Portland and the South Waterfront district.

Expanding transit options is essential to the livability and economic vitality of our growing region, which is expected to add one million new residents and nearly 100,000 new jobs within the project corridor by 2030. The Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Project is integral to the region’s strategy to manage growth and build more livable communities. This project is about more than bringing high-capacity transit to under-served communities—it is also about helping communities envision and achieve their aspirations. Combining infrastructure improvements, quality design features and new transit-oriented development along the alignment will connect neighborhoods, encourage walking and cycling, and create engaging public spaces where people want to be.
Distinguishing design elements

The overall light rail project is designed to be responsive to the character and aspirations of surrounding neighborhoods, while maintaining a system-wide identity that creates a user-friendly transit experience. The light rail line is dynamic in the way the station areas showcase the character of each neighborhood using distinctive landscaping, public art, sustainability initiatives and other elements. The OMSI station and related enhancements honor the area's industrial history while also embracing aspirations to transition to a vibrant civic, education and employment district.

A few highlights of distinguishing design elements for the OMSI/SE Water Ave Station include:

- **Multi-modal design:** The lively, multi-modal design of this station is a distinguishing feature in and of itself. The station has a separate throughway for bicycles, pedestrians, buses, light rail and streetcar. There are separate platforms for east- and westbound transit; light rail trains will run on the outside and buses will run in the middle and share platforms with the trains. Bike lanes and 12-foot wide sidewalks on each side facilitate bike and pedestrian traffic flow. Green energy wind turbines will be visible at the station.
The area from the Willamette River and the OMSI/SE Water Ave Station to Powell Boulevard includes significant bike and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

- **Furnishings and railings:** The station shares design elements with the South Waterfront/SW Moody Ave Station across the river and the new bridge to create continuity and acknowledge the relationship between the institutions that anchor both districts. The custom designed shelters, as well as the benches, lighting, trash receptacles and windscreens are the same at both stations. The two stations also share a unique custom glass-roofed shelter design.

- **Public art:** Jim Blashfield’s electronic artwork consisting of a video program and two narrow steel enclosures with video screens will be located under the shelters at each of the light rail platforms on either side of the bridge. The video consists of slow moving images that allude to local history, the river, and nearby cultural institutions and business in a poetic, non-narrative form. Underneath the bridge deck, artists Anna Valentina Murch and Doug Hollis designed the abutment walls with a central “Sonic Dish” curved to amplify sound at a single focal point. Soft-colored lights will move across the wall, echoing the rhythms of the nearby river. Lynn Basa blends the color of copper, a key ingredient in the making of computers, into a tree bark pattern for her shelter column mosaics to honor the worlds of science and industry.

- **Landscaping:** Street trees have been added to “new” Water Avenue, a portion of the greenway and the station block. Gingko trees will be a distinctive feature at the station and provide striking gold color during the fall season. Landscaped stormwater features can be seen along the sidewalks of the platform block and the improved Water Avenue.

- **Lighting Concept:** Distinctive lighting features will highlight the station and celebrate the creative energy of the district.

**Trail connections:** After temporarily closing it for construction, the project made improvements to the Eastbank Greenway Trail, a multi-use path on the riverbank that extends from the Hawthorne Bridge to Caruthers Street. New advisory bike lanes on Caruthers Street provide improved connections to the Springwater Corridor Trail and a single, realigned, signalized crossing at SE 8th Avenue provides access to southeast Portland neighborhoods north of Division Street.
Circulation and truck access: Water Avenue accommodates vehicular and freight traffic as well as pedestrians and cyclists—the project widened the street to add bike lanes and sidewalks while maintaining space for vehicle traffic. Sidewalks and street trees have been installed on the east side of the street, and while the west side has a temporary asphalt path and street lighting that will be improved when OMSI redevelops its property. Preserving the industrial vitality of this station area is important, and truck access is fundamental to this objective.

Development opportunities
Integrating the project design with adjacent development plans will be pivotal to the success of both in this station area. The light rail project will set the stage for the development of surrounding properties. Portland Opera is planning to develop its property near the station with mixed-use and office space, and to redevelop the site of its existing facility with a new performance hall.

The Oregon Rail Heritage Foundation (ORFH) has relocated to a triangular site bounded by UPRR, OPRR and the future light rail trackway. Construction of the engine house was completed in 2012, while an interpretive center is planned for the future.

OMSI has completed the first phase of a Master Plan for its 22.5-acre property. The plan envisions expanding the museum's science and educational programs and adding complementary development that could include educational uses, laboratory space, research and development, and other uses. The transit project combined with OMSI and its future campus developments will advance the Innovation Quadrant's vision for a vibrant science and technology corridor that spans the Willamette River.

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