

# Vancouver consultants tout light rail

*Transportation has a place in developing communities that work, the two men tell a group of interested citizens.*

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THE OREGONIAN

VANCOUVER, WA — Although a light-rail line linking Vancouver and Portland is years or decades away, citizen planners were told Tuesday that such a system could become a citizen-driven tool for neighborhood revitalization.

Consultants Don Arambula and George Crandall, speaking to the Vancouver Planning Commission's "First Tuesday" training session, said citizen input and good planning can increase private investment dollars, whether the center-piece is a light-rail line or a dying downtown.

Crandall and Arambula, whose Portland firm consults on community revitalization projects, focused on planning five station areas along the nearly completed Interstate MAX light-rail line between

the Kenton neighborhood and the Kaiser medical campus.

The strongest challenge at Tuesday's meeting came from Rep. Tom Mielke, R-Battle Ground, who said his constituents think light rail does nothing to relieve freeway congestion. "Light rail costs billions, and the trains are beautiful, but people come to me and ask the congestion be removed, he said.

## Taking cars off roads

Crandall said one train can take 3,200 vehicles off the freeway each day. But he said his task is to plan for communities that "must stand alone with or without light rail."

Mielke said he fears the electric-powered trains would become worthless in a major power outage.

Crandall said all modes of travel are needed, from cars to buses to light rail to heavy commuter rail.

Crandall asked what would happen if more roads are built just before gasoline becomes too expensive.

As far as light rail is concerned, Clark County is in a

gray area. Voters rejected a sales tax to build a light-rail line in 1995, and C-Tran director Lynne Griffith has stated that the county's transit agency will never build or operate a light-rail line.

But various officials — city, county and state — have been talking up light rail recently, and requests have been submitted for federal money for designing a light-rail loop from I-5 to I-205, and for money to design a replacement I-5 bridge that could carry two rail lines.

Any light-rail project would require local matching funds, which would trigger an election.

## Investment potential

Crandall said "good neighborhoods" will draw new investment. In calculating whether an area is good, subtle differences such as a narrow sidewalk can hurt a neighborhood's potential. He cited Hillsboro where light rail runs along a street where parking is banned. Most businesses have their windows covered. But around the corner, where sidewalks are wide, parking is legal, and streets are lighted, developers want to build.

Crandall said Interstate MAX is expected to attract \$234 million in fresh money to the train corridor.

He added that a new train line is not mandatory. He said Racine, Wis., was dying several years ago. Business was leaving. He proposed the city buy several blighted blocks and turn them into park blocks leading from a cluster of parking lots down to the shore of Lake Michigan. Investors responded, and now Crandall is looking at the next phase for Racine.

## Stick to original plan

Arambula said it is key to do the planning and then hold to the plan. Pointing to the Beaverton Round, a long-delayed residential project along Westside MAX, he said, "You don't just hand control to the builder."

He said the Rockwood MAX station was never planned.

"Now, 17 years later, it is in need of redevelopment. You have to offer the people alternatives and create the environment to encourage development. A rail station alone doesn't stimulate growth."

The consultants said they try to avoid condemning property because that puts the public in competition with the private sector and usually results in raising everyone's property values. Usually, the goal is to put public money to work on public projects such as streets or utilities, thus attracting private dollars for housing or stores.

When an audience member asked whether the government would buy out a business like a strip club, Crandall said no, adding that sooner or later the owner would realize there's more money in uses the neighborhood wants.

The consultants described a complex program to get citizens informed about such a planning process. They discussed mass mailings, advertising and even kiosks in supermarkets and churches.

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