

2002

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CONTEXT

New Improvements: The Streetcar and the Bridge

As Portland's prosperity grew during the 1880's and 1890's five bridges were built. The Burnside Bridge became the fifth crossing of the Willamette and the last Portland bridge to be built in the 19th Century. In 1903, the Burnside streetcar line opened to link the old Nob Hill neighborhood on the west to the newer Buckman neighborhood to the east. The line was short-lived, closing in 1915, possibly due to the undesirable nature of the street through which it passed. However, various other streetcar lines continued to run over most of the same tracks for many more years. The Bennett Plan of 1912 proposed to widen Burnside and make it the great east-west axis of the city, dividing the retail district from the wholesale district. The plan also envisioned a "grand cross" of intersecting axials of Burnside with Union Avenue on the east and with the Park Blocks on the west. On the east side, Bennett also encouraged the city to extend Sandy Road west to meet East Burnside. In 1919, the Report on City Planning and Housing Survey by Charles Cheney recommended a new bridge at Burnside Street to

relieve congestion on downtown bridge crossings. Voters passed a bond issue that included funding for rebuilding the Burnside Bridge. Traffic had become a big issue in Portland as the number of cars in Multnomah County increased from 20,000 in 1917 to 79,000 in 1925. Businesses built up along both sides of Burnside serving waterfront workers and local residents. Streetcars provided regular services on Burnside, Grand and Union (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) connecting neighborhoods and businesses. The new bridge carried streetcar rails for the Portland Traction Company and improved access for automobiles. Upon its completion in 1926, one could purchase a new Ford Roadster for about \$460 and Portland's population exceeded 250,000; nearly 180 time the City's population when Burnside Street was first platted. The bridge actually worsened auto congestion downtown because it increased the number of cars that could get across the river. The new bridge included wide walkways, balustrades and ornamental lighting. The center lanes were dedicated to the streetcar lines with an underpass providing passenger access to the stops in the middle.



Streetcar Line, Historic Images of E. Burnside
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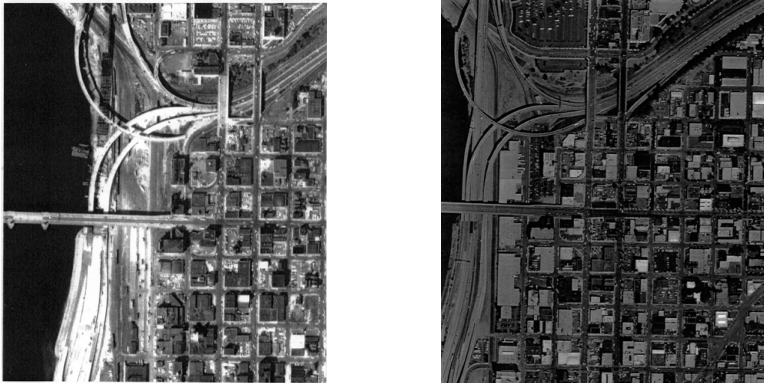


Burnside Gets Wider

By 1931, the need for more roadway space led to a street-widening project on both East and West Burnside. On the west, Burnside was widened from the bridge approach to the Park Blocks. Building fronts were chopped off and rebuilt at the new sidewalk line to add an extra lane. On the east side, the first floor of many buildings became an arcade to accommodate a new sidewalk as the old sidewalk gave way to another traffic lane. Originally, the building's storefront at street level met the sidewalk at the building line. Another citywide plan to propose changes to the street was the 1932 Bartholomew Plan, which proposed widening Burnside to 100', or an eight-lane capacity, from West 21st Avenue to East 12th Avenue. The plan also proposed changes to the intersection at Burnside, 12th and Sandy on the east side. Washington Street west of 16th became Burnside Street in 1933 when the city systemized the street names and numbers. A couple of years later, property owners petitioned to change Burnside's name to Bonneville, but historical organizations protested and the name remained Burnside.

Growing Auto Congestion

As early as 1935, recommendations to remove the streetcars from the Burnside Bridge to provide more room for cars were made. Also during the 1930s, Burnside was home to most of the city's auto dealerships, because most of the people who could afford to buy cars lived in the surrounding neighborhoods of Nob Hill and the West Hills. During World War II, little changed on Burnside. But as soon as the war was over and the economy was booming, Burnside and other city streets began carrying a heavier traffic load with more people driving. Even with the increased traffic, upper Burnside still retained the wider sidewalks, ornamental lighting, and on-street parking at least part of the day through the 1950s.



Aerial Photographs Showing Development: 1936, 1948, 1963, 1994.

E. Burnside, 2002

Arcaded Buildings are a dominant building type due to 1931 widening of Burnside.

