Unloved Portland Major Streets & Avenues – Major Streets Revitalization Project

Over the years there were few efforts in Portland to improve pedestrian experience on major traffic streets. Initially, those streets were seen as essential for growing automobile and transport traffic. While many were replaced by the freeway system, most remain as auto oriented streets. West Burnside and NE Broadway are two examples of streets that need attention to bring them back into the pedestrian realm of the city. The idea that these major streets should be consigned to the limited use of moving traffic, rather than maintaining a balance of uses, significantly reduces the density and quality of the central city. This separation of traffic from pedestrians is also wasteful of land, is unsustainable and inefficient.

Proposed is the notion that major streets ought to work equally well for pedestrians, automobiles and public transport. Land ownership and intensity of use along these streets should not be diminished by the lack of commercial viability that often accompanies single usage. Major streets should enjoy active pedestrian usage as vibrant enjoyable places, while fulfilling their role as carriers of traffic and public transportation.

The first example chosen is West Burnside from NW 18th to NW 24th. This important street was widened from its initial two lanes to four lanes by removing parking and narrowing the sidewalks in order to move more traffic. Burnside is a major entry street into the city from the West Hills and the near suburbs. Its demeanor is that of a street that was consigned to be an auto and public transportation oriented street with its numerous fast food outlets. Yet it is between two very vital neighborhoods and would normally be an active pedestrian place in the city. Additionally, there is a substantial amount of underutilized or vacant land along this street which if built upon with proper design standards, would improve the quality of the street, while contributing to its vitality/livability and the two adjacent neighborhoods.

The Studio will explore the problems and opportunities of this currently single use street, through reading, site analysis, and design. Each group (of two people) will examine an aspect of the street. This will include land use/zoning, history, traffic and transportation, building character etc. Each group will also choose an historical example of an important and vital street that successfully encourages pedestrians, transportation and automobiles to equally use the street. After the analysis each student will pick one block or part of a block to design a building and a street cross section that supports pedestrian vitality and activity, while retaining the use of automobiles and transportation.