

Aerial Tram Design Team Selected

Portland's South Waterfront neighborhood, formerly known as North Macadam, has been the home base for the Zidell Companies for over 50 years. Currently the home of Zidell Marine Corporation, the neighborhood will undergo many changes over the next several decades. Those changes include expansion of Oregon Health & Science University from Marquam Hill and the addition of high-rise condominiums sprouting closer to the Willamette River. Other changes will be improvements to the transportation service such as improved roads, a streetcar linking NW Portland to South Waterfront, and an aerial tram that would connect to Marquam Hill. While all of these anticipated changes to the neighborhood would take place south of ZMC's current facility, Zidell has been engaged actively in the planning and development of a vision for the future of this new neighborhood.



A composite image showing the upper terminus on the left, the mast-like supporting tower in the center and the "subterranean" lower terminus on the right.

The most public aspect of the upcoming changes has been the planning for an aerial tram to be used by OHSU to link its Marquam Hill campus to its facilities to be built just south of Zidell's site. After a very public process that started about at the end of 2002, an international design team, Angelil/Graham/Pfenninger/Scholl, was the unanimous choice of the national design jury as the team to design the aerial tram. Portland native Sarah Graham, who used to work with Will Martin, the designer of Pioneer Courthouse Square, leads Angelil/Graham/Pfenninger/Scholl.

The selection was the culmination of an international design competition sponsored by the city of Portland and Portland Aerial Transportation, Inc., known as PATI.

While the public process started about six months ago, the genesis of the idea for an international design competition was at the Zidell offices. Convinced that the tram's design could establish high standards for the future development of the neighborhood, Jay Zidell began an investigation of an international design competition for the tram. It was clear that a common thread among other competitions was their ability to engage and enlighten a community in an international dialogue of contemporary ideas, including notions of place making and experience. In January 2002, Zidell met with a local architecture firm, Allied Works, which recommended an approach for the design competition for the tram. With this proposal, Zidell solicited other stakeholder partners to convince them of the importance of this idea. OHSU supported the concept, realizing that the aerial tram needed to be more than just a connection from the hill to the waterfront. OHSU understood that a well-designed tram could be integral to help distinguish OHSU. With

OHSU on board and supporting the international design competition, PATI was formed with other local stakeholders and civic-minded individuals to be the sponsor of the competition and to get the tram built in a timely fashion.

The actual design process was started in late December 2002 with the four design finalists selected in January 2003. The four finalists for the competition were: Angelil/Graham/Pfenninger/Scholl based in Los Angeles and Zurich, Guy Nordenson and ARO based in New York, Sharples Holden Pasquarelli from New York and UN Studio from Amsterdam. Reed Kroloff, the former editor of Architecture Magazine, managed the process. Each design team was required to present a lecture locally. The lectures were held in January and February at OMSI to overflow crowds, each lecture typically having over 200 people in attendance engaging in the desired dialogue of contemporary ideas.



The four finalists presented their concepts to a national jury in late March 2003. The jury's objective was to select a team best suited to work on the project not to pick a specific design. Angelil/Graham/Pfenninger/Scholl was selected by the jury because the designer's attitude, flexibility and approach to the tram design offered a sense of evolving possibilities.

The winning team's concept followed a minimalist approach, reflecting deep appreciation of the local landscape and a sensitivity to the need to minimize the visual and other impacts of the tram on the affected communities. The conceptual design is of brushed metal tram cars, carrying up to 60 people each, disappearing against the sky as they travel down from Marquam Hill before dipping under the tram's grass covered landing on SW Gibbs Street. The tram's structural proposal includes an upper terminal constructed with delicate lines and covered in solar panels. The design proposal for the lower 185-foot tower would be made of wood laminate anchored by guy wires reminiscent of the yarding poles used by lumberjacks. The preliminary design will change over the next few months as Angelil/Graham meets with PATI, and the City of Portland. Final designs could be ready as early as Fall 2003 with construction following in late 2004. Further information about the tram can be found at PATI's website: www.portlandtram.com.