

Levi Pennington

People

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Pennington to Russell Gainer, April 7, 1948

Levi T. Pennington

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April 7, 1948.

Russell Gainer,
Newberg, Oregon.

Dear Friend: --

Our telephone conversation yesterday left us about as wide apart as we had been, which I suppose is unnatural if we were both omniscient, but since neither of us make any such claims it is not surprising. As a famous churchman once said, "People are bound to disagree as long as they think -- and some of them do not think right."

It looks to me as if both the city council and the state highway commission are trying to "pass the buck", if you will pardon my French. The city council, in so far as any of them have been willing to talk, want to make the state highway commission responsible for the selection of the College Street route; the state highway commission clearly and emphatically lay the responsibility on the city council. They say you asked for that route, and their estimates were made for that because you asked for it. They do not deny the disadvantages of the College Street route, the extra tracks, the double turn on entering the city from the north, the passing of four churches, the crossing of First street at the busiest local corner, and worst of all, the routing of the highway down the street where hundreds of students pass two to four times a day, five days in the week. I do not feel that they were so strongly impressed with the fact that the people in twenty blocks will have to cross the highway every time they go down town if the route is on College street who would not have to cross it if it went down Meridian.

Some things in your statements do not seem to me to be very consistent. You said, as I understood you, that it is not the plan to widen North College street at the present time, but that the state highway commission says that the much wider Meridian street would have to be widened if the route went down that street. Does that make sense?

You say that a stop and go sign at First and College would put an end to the speeding through town. Would not a stop and go sign two blocks from there have the same effect?

All this talk by Baldock or anybody else about the state locating a highway and then cities building schools on that highway does not have a thing to do with this case. Our schools are already located, and we are not going to build any on this highway. But the fact is that the route proposed does go right down the street where hundreds of students travel day after day, while the Meridian street route would avoid that danger entirely. And nobody can claim without making the claim ridiculous on the face of it, as I see it, that there would be less danger with this through highway on this College street than if it were put two blocks east, making this student-traveled street entirely.

I've no quarrel with anybody who wishes to maintain that South College street should be widened. If that is the thing that ought to be done, you know that it can be done, and the cost assessed to the property. You did not ask me whether I wanted a pavement in front of my garden on this street, and I was not asked whether I wanted pavement on two sides of the property where I live. And if the city wanted to restrict parking to one side of the street instead of widening, that could be done, though it would be a hardship to the Christian Church, I grant you. It could easily be done on North College Street.

So far as I have yet been able to see, there is only one argument in favor of the College Street route, and that is the \$50,000.00 which you say the state would pay for the improvement, which would save some property owners from paying for the widening of the street, as I had to do when the streets here were paved. And if the other route were selected the state would spend a considerable sum, especially if they did widen Meridian, though it would not be spent on the same streets. The Meridian street route would send the traffic down your street instead of Dr. Van Valin's, but of course that does not influence your decision as it does Dr. Van Valin's, for widening Meridian two feet on each side would have little effect on your parking.

As I told you in my other letter, I'd not want you to decide the matter otherwise than as you see is the best way for the city, not for you nor me nor Dr. Van Valin. If the council made a mistake in selecting the College Street route, it seems to me they would be showing more wisdom in reconsidering than in pushing the thing through, without, as it seems to me, giving proper consideration to the views of other folks. I confess that it did not set well when some of us appeared before the city council a long time ago, and what I said was apparently considered of no account because I was not personally and financially interested. I am interested in the welfare of the city and the safety of our citizens, especially the young folks in the schools.

You urged me to have an open mind in the matter. Do you think the city council has evidenced an open mind? I do not like to criticise, but if they have maintained that open mind it certainly has not been evident to me. It seems to me that that body decided what it wanted done, without any attempt to consult the wishes of the people, and that they are determined to carry it through, no matter what the people think. But I could not feel easy in my mind to let what seems to me a great mistake go through with no effort on my part to prevent it. If the route does go down College street and some student is killed by some through vehicle, I can feel that I did my best to send the road somewhere else where it seems to me the risk would be far less and where several other important advantages would be had over the College street route.

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.