

## OR 126 Expressway Management Plan 3/4/10 Property Owner Meeting & Open House Summary

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The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) held a property owner meeting on Thursday, March 4<sup>th</sup> beginning at 4:30 pm at the Thurston High School library in Springfield for the OR 126 Expressway Management Plan Project. An open house began around 5:30 pm and extended until 7:30 pm. The purpose of the meeting and open house was to:

- Share information about the recommended design concept alternatives for the OR 126/52<sup>nd</sup> Street and OR 126/Main Street locations.
- Gather input about the recommended design and access concepts and short-term solutions and any fatal flaw issues that exist (from the community perspective).
- Share information about the project's next steps.

Both events were advertised several ways. A press release was distributed to local news media and a news radio talk show announced the open house before the event. At least one newspaper reporter from the Springfield Times attended the meeting. One-page flyers were distributed to the project mailing list via postal delivery. Posters were distributed to businesses in the Main Street area. Local businesses were called one week before the event to make sure that they knew about the meeting and were encouraged to attend. ODOT advertised the event using Twitter. An email was sent out the Monday before the event to remind the project mailing list to attend. The ODOT-hosted project website also outlined the details.

Approximately 30 people signed in, for either the property owner meeting or open house.

### Property Owner Meeting

A majority of attendees arrived for the property owner meeting and then stayed for the open house. Comments were collected on a flip chart during the property owner meeting, for the entire room to speak and see comments recorded. Written comment forms were distributed to all attendees; however, only two comment forms were returned.

The property owner meeting included a presentation/discussion about property owner concerns/preferences. The presentation included information about concepts, including visualizations, and access concerns. The majority of attendees had met with the project team during earlier steps of the project and was familiar with project developments. Details are provided on the next page.

Comments and responses provided orally during the presentation:

- Many attendees acknowledged that the growth patterns for Springfield have encouraged east/west movements and there have been few alternatives provided. Widening isn't always an option, but some were concerned that additional east/west corridors may take away business.
  - The City of Springfield is taking a comprehensive look at the traffic movements within the city and considering connectivity issues.
- There were questions about who is responsible for Main Street in the long-term and who the decision makers were.
  - ODOT is responsible for Main Street and they are currently conducting a pedestrian safety study that is separate from this project. The City, ODOT, and the County are the three decision makers for the OR 126 Expressway Management Plan (EMP).
- Roundabouts were strongly discouraged by the attendees, particularly in relation to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Street intersection which sees high levels of freight traffic. The public was concerned that a roundabout wouldn't keep westbound truck traffic flowing. There was concern that the high level of truck traffic would impede car travel if there was a roundabout- there are about 200-300 trucks at 52<sup>nd</sup> Street each day. The roundabouts at Jasper Road/Pioneer Parkway/ Harlow were given as examples of poor roundabout design, since you can see the tire marks on the side (turns too narrow for trucks). Additional concerns were voiced about the large footprints of roundabouts and the effects on nearby properties and buildings.
  - While ODOT requires roundabouts to be considered where any signal is suggested, they are not always found to be the best option. If a roundabout was considered, it would be designed to meet heavy truck standards.
- There was a question about dropping Bob Straub below ground and if that was considered.
  - The PMT (project management team) and steering committee decided it was too costly to pursue (approximately half of the entire cost was dedicated to this portion). However it was considered.
- There were concerns about some of the Main Street alternatives and the impact to delivery truck movements. Particularly the south to west curved exit for alternative C4.2.
  - This exit would either remain as is or be tighter. This would mean that trucks would need to exit here and cross many lanes to get over to the businesses that they are serving. Or they could exit through the existing signal and turn onto an inner lane.
- Others wanted to know if ODOT was looking for money now to help complete construction sooner, as an economic stimulus project. They also suggested that a change in assumptions is needed because of the economy; that puts a change in the

plans and need to focus on immediate benefits to jobs and the businesses that are in place now.

- ODOT and the City of Springfield are exploring funding options but it is necessary to have a plan in place to get the money. Short term solutions are an important piece of the project. No dates have been set for the short-term improvements. Funding has not been identified for construction at either the OR 126/52<sup>nd</sup> Street or OR 126/Main Street location.

### Driveway Recommendations

The access plan is the same for each alternative presented. The project received legal counsel from ODOT; while access management has been more prescriptive in the past, legal counsel suggests that recommendations be more flexible in the future until further clarity of interchange design. The new direction is to have further discussions regarding access changes upon certainty of facility improvements. This can occur at various stages (i.e. NEPA or design/right-of-way negotiation) All public streets will remain open (e.g. 58<sup>th</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>).

Overall there was frustration about the lack of direction for property owners regarding access changes in the future. Of particular concern were any negative impacts that short- or long-term changes may have to business, particularly in this economic recession. There was also some confusion about how access management works, when there will be the same level of traffic entering fewer access points. Concerns raised follow:

- As the community grows it needs to change, but ODOT needs to allow flexibility to help the existing businesses otherwise they will doom the businesses by limiting access. There were also concerns 54<sup>th</sup> Street and 58<sup>th</sup> Street were too small to handle the traffic if driveways were to be closed or consolidated along Main Street.
- The businesses have full disclosure when signing a lease. There were questions about what they should say during the leasing process about the access discussion.
- Some mentioned that funding is done in 5 year increments (in the STIP) and the money rolls over and will do so for 20 years. The proposals haven't changed in the life of the project.
- There were questions about buying the businesses now and some attendees were concerned that ODOT can't purchase property now even though time and money has been put into the planning process.
  - ODOT no longer buys businesses or property until a project is finalized and funding has been identified.
- There was concern about this process because the public review/discussion at time of design/right-of-way negotiation was not seen as good or effective. There was a concern by most of the group that it may result in businesses hiring their own traffic engineer if ODOT waits to talk about access. A need for more public process during the design review was expressed and that ODOT needs to do a better job talking with businesses about the process. Others thought that one to two years is not

- enough time to talk about access with businesses, especially when signing a ten year lease with a property/business.
- The project team assured the group that future phases and construction will have public involvement, including with property owners.
  - Some people found it difficult to understand the need imposed upon Bob Straub in the future. Will there really be a demand for southern part of the interchange? Seems like a big amount of money and hassle for that work and the amount of traffic on the area now. Others agreed that it might be a good idea if the Jasper-Natron development goes in; it might have a lot of traffic.
    - While the land isn't developed now, planned land designations in the Jasper-Natron area is driving many of the plans and there is projected to be a lot of traffic in the evenings in all directions at the OR 126/Main intersection.
  - There was concern about closing the left turn east into BiMart and creating queue onto 58<sup>th</sup> and creating congestion into the BiMart. There were questions about the constancy of the access management throughout the city and why a similar turn was approved at Beltline (Target)? The same concerns were felt on the other side of the interchange (Safeway).
    - At this time, the plan is recommending closure for the left turn movement to address safety concerns and issues with queues on Main Street. Negotiations will occur later about what to do about this turn movement, when the project is closer to design and construction. Upgrades to 58<sup>th</sup> are assumed to decrease the congestion. We are looking at consolidating the accesses from three entrances to one at Bi-Mart. The exact driveway location is not determined, but it would become a right-in only or a right-in/right-out.
  - There was a concern that decisions will be set in stone at the time of discussion and the businesses will lose most of their evening traffic. There was also confusion over the consolidation of three accesses to one, since there will be the same level of traffic entering the parking lot. Some asked why driveways need to be closed.
    - Cars slowing and turning into a driveway can lead to crashes and a lot of congestion. One of the highest crash areas in the state is the intersection of Main and OR 126, so ODOT wants to move conflicting movements away from the intersection.
  - At 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, the access of the triangle piece of property is onto Highbanks road, so it should be shaded orange. There is not the ability to have access from the back (from a backage road). Have a plan approved to build nine houses in that area.
    - 53<sup>rd</sup> would remain open to Highbanks Road. ODOT is required to provide alternative access to a property, create a deviation, or purchase the property if access cannot be obtained. We cannot guarantee any driveway to remain open, unless it is a public road.
  - Some attendees ask about the personal responsibility at the policy level and why negotiations couldn't start now, especially for undeveloped lots.

- Suggestions were given for improving alternatives. Including adding a merge lane from 42<sup>nd</sup> to 52<sup>nd</sup> to the southbound right turn (lengthen time for light, especially time for pedestrians).

## Open House

The open house was a self-guided format with four stations: (1) Project Background; (2) OR 126/52<sup>nd</sup> Street location; (3) OR 126/Main Street location; and (4) Next Steps. Comments were provided orally and two comment forms were collected. The responses are summarized below:

- Opposed to the alternatives due to the access restrictions. The discussion and resolution of these accesses is a very serious issue that has been pushed to a later date, which is not acceptable for the businesses.
- Concerns about the costs of the projects; propose more cost-effective options including adding a continuous merging lane on eastbound OR 126 between 42<sup>nd</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and westbound between Mohawk Boulevard and Pioneer Parkway.
- Appreciate ODOTs effort to communicate this information to the neighborhood stakeholders, however, disappointed in the unwillingness to work on the access issues.
- Overall approval with the short term improvements at all of the interchange locations.
- Overall approval with the longer term alternatives, apart from concerns about property/business access.