

FVI Project Development Team Meeting #7

Draft Meeting Minutes

July 7, 2005, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Jackson County Auditorium

ODOT Present: Debbie Timms (Project Leader), Jerry Marmon (Environmental PM), Brian Sheadel (Roadway), Peter Schuytema (TPAU), Christina Fera-Thomas (TPAU), Leslie Schwab (Cultural), Ray Lapke (Traffic)

Non-ODOT Present: Jim Wear (City of Phoenix), J. Wyntergreen (City of Phoenix), Dale Petrsek (Jackson County Roads), Vicki Guarino (RVCOG), Dan Moore (RVCOG), Emily Moshofsky (URS)

1. INTRODUCTIONS, REVIEW AGENDA, APPROVE MINUTES

The PDT last met on June 2, 2005. The group approved the June minutes as presented.

2. REVIEW OF CAC July 6, CAC MEETING RECOMMENDATIONS

Vicki Guarino provided a brief overview of the previous night's CAC meeting (July 6). The CAC reviewed and voted on the west side connections and the recommendations will be presented today to the PDT. To summarize, the CAC agreed with ODOT's recommendations to drop South Stage Road and the Northridge Terrace overcrossings. The voting results of the downtown westside connections were unanimous to keep Bolz Road, unanimous to drop Cheryl Lane, and 9 for and 1 against dropping the Ray's Connection. For the 4th Street Connection, the vote was 8-2 to drop, based on the traffic information and environmental impacts.

The meeting had high attendance. Most of the City Council members and most of the Planning Commission attended. Both groups are interested in keeping the South Stage Road option for further consideration.

Peter Schuytema and Christina Fera-Thomas presented the same information to the PDT that they presented last night to the CAC. Even though the CAC voted to recommend dropping the South Stage Road overcrossing option, the PDT agreed to put it on hold for now, so they can get more information from Jeannell Wyntergreen regarding the Regional Problem Solving (RPS) process.

3. REVIEW EAST-WEST CONNECTIONS

Westside Connections

C. Fera-Thomas presented the results from her traffic analysis. The baseline conditions were modeled using a diamond interchange.

First the group looked at the results of the baseline conditions with overcrossings added. Northridge Terrace and South Stage Road don't meet the Purpose and Need for the project. The current modeling information is based on the existing Phoenix Comprehensive Plan, which doesn't include future growth for Medford or surrounding areas. It appears that people are using South Stage Road to access I-5, not as a cross-town corridor.

J. Wyntergreen asked if an overcrossing is more bike/pedestrian friendly. Jerry responded that in general, overcrossings are more bike/pedestrian-friendly than interchanges.

Regional Planning Process/PH5/Economic Growth

J. Wyntergreen was invited to discuss the City of Phoenix's concerns regarding the new interchange. The city is planning for and anticipating a lot of future industrial and commercial growth and activity. There's a request to expand the UGB to the north and update the Economic Plan. The City of Phoenix is slated to be the employment center for this section of the Rogue Valley. J. Wyntergreen is tasked with leading the economic study and getting it adopted by December 2005. Approximately 250 acres are to be incorporated and included in the UGB expansion. The city is motivated to build the area up quickly. The economic study and expanding the UGB will start the expansion process. Phoenix isn't planning on waiting until the RPS process is complete. The DLCDC and the Governor's office support this area as the future employment center. Currently, the city is using a conceptual plan. Some neighborhood residential and mixed-use areas will also be included. This should better balance the east and west side of the city. The eastside neighbors currently travel to Medford for business and entertainment activities.

This discussion raised a number of questions. If Phoenix does expand the UGB, what happens with the zoning in the area between Phoenix and Medford? Even if the city economic analysis is completed in 6 months, the County economic analysis and Comprehensive Plan wouldn't be ready by December 2005. How does this impact our project today?

P. Schuytema responded that if the UGB expands, it would affect everything in our process. We would have to rerun all the models with the new future data. We'd have to start over with the original interchanges, and reevaluate everything we've examined to date. However, updating all those plans is a lengthy process.

J. Marmon asked whether additional development would simply worsen conditions if they were already failing before. The answer is that it depends on the expected growth pattern. Hundreds of acres of heavy industrial would generate thousands of trips. Traffic will spread out in different ways than it does now. Hwy 99 is almost already at capacity. In order to accommodate more traffic, North Phoenix Road would have to become a 4-lane road.

The city streets and new infrastructure would be required to handle the new growth. The City of Phoenix will have to update their Transportation System Plan to accommodate the new growth. When the City amends the Comprehensive Plan, they would include the "Future Urban Reserve" area. However, the process of expanding the UGB will take much longer. It is important to keep in mind, in these project discussions, that the interchange is a failing state facility, not a county or city facility.

The Home Depot was brought up as an example of a development that was included into the growth plans very quickly. However, that really is a separate process from the process of developing and integrating a new interchange into an existing urban area.

Jackson County is requiring that one of the cities (Phoenix or Medford) take Stage Road (SSR) into their UGB. There is an ongoing debate over which city will take jurisdiction of SSR and which will encompass the nearby parcels for development. The future Phoenix and Medford UGBs will be immediately adjacent to one another.

The group discussed the potential impacts of incorporating the anticipated growth and the Fern Valley project process and schedule. One option would be to progress with the current schedule, get the FONSI, and then, if the RPS process truly has caught up with the project, revise the Final EA.

J. Marmon stated that it seems as if the only danger is a shortened lifespan of the new interchange. D. Petrasek commented that if the RPS and the interchange really are developing as separate processes, it may be possible for a jurisdiction to develop South Stage Road as a separate interchange project. If that were to happen, the question then is what happens to the interchange spacing requirements. B. Sheadel said that basically, ODOT is required to completely maximize all current facilities to get a spacing standard exception granted.

The City of Phoenix is committed to expanding and Jackson County supports them. It is important that the city is committed to the needed infrastructure improvements and that appropriate funding is available. Air Quality, water, sewer, and traffic management are the areas the County wants to see addressed in order to approve the UGB expansion.

It is important for the City to know that the PDT has discussed their growth plans, the UGB expansion, and PH5 (the urban reserve area that Phoenix is planning to grow into), regardless of how these get resolved.

Options

Northridge Terrace

The Northridge Terrace option connects directly through a neighborhood. South of that, it would be located immediately adjacent to a mobile home park. The overcrossing did not show any significant improvement to Fern Valley Road.

The group voted on the Northridge Terrace option. Six (6) voting members were present. All 6 voted to drop the Northridge Terrace option because of its impacts on adjacent neighborhoods and because it would not improve the area's traffic situation.

East Glenwood

An East Glenwood option was brought up. J. Wyntergreen mentioned that ODOT Rail wants to close Glenwood Street. The City wants to avoid truck traffic traveling into the Glenwood area. The railroad crossing at Glenwood Street is not a safe crossing. The crossing was not designed to be a regular traffic crossing. Additionally, the Glenwood area is not part of the urban containment area for Phoenix. The East Glenwood area already has water and sewer and probably won't be incorporated into the city. The City's Conceptual Plan includes four businesses interested in the "Old Mill" area, two of which need rail access. The Fern Valley CAC and PDT considered an interchange with a crossing at Glenwood, but dropped it early in the process. A Glenwood crossing would have potential impacts to nearby housing and to the rail crossing.

South Stage Road

After the discussions, the group opted to table the South Stage Road overcrossing and revisit it later because there was no significant improvement to Fern Valley Interchange with the South Stage overcrossing. Because of the City Council's concerns, the PDT decided to table the discussion instead of voting on the option at this time.

4th Street Connection

The group reviewed the slide presentation to look at the existing information on the 4th Street Connection. At this time (based on 2005 average daily traffic) there is no significant queuing. There are no signals with the other options to compare with 4th Street, which has signals. By the year 2030, the average queue is projected to be about 200 feet, which would completely fill up 4th Street in the vicinity of the couplet.

J. Wyntergreen noted that, showing that traffic slows down is not necessarily a bad thing. The mayor and City Council think this would be good because they want people to slow down in their downtown area. She asked if ODOT has looked at the "Downtown Plan" (which has parking available) and the City Center Plan. ODOT has considered these plans. However, the situation is that the public has to wait in the traffic line. Drawing business and track into the downtown needs to be accomplished primarily through urban renewal. J. Marmon commented that having excessive gridlock would be a deterrent to that urban renewal.

J. Wear noted that the city is in the process of taking over Hwy 99 and paying for traffic lights. V. Guarino added that the CAC is concerned about the access issues on 4th Street. J. Wear agreed that during Christmas, queues from the Post Office on 4th Street back onto Hwy 99. P. Shuytema noted that signals are included in the future projections.

The CAC's recommendation was 8 to drop and 2 to keep, the 4th Street Connection. J. Wyntergreen is concerned that the CAC may not have been aware of the City Center Plan when they made this recommendation. The City Council wants to ensure that the CAC members know about the Plan when they vote. (For example, the Bolz Connection is in the TSP.) J. Wyntergreen felt the PDT should keep this option for further review and not concur with the CAC's recommendation. J. Wear requested that a qualifier be added to his vote, specifying that the vote assumes the CAC did consider the City Center Plan in making their recommendation.

The PDT voted 5-1 to drop the option because the option would increase traffic through downtown, because of excessive queues caused by signals and high volumes. The average queue length would extend the entire length of 4th Street between OR 99 north and southbound and there is insufficient storage on 4th Street between OR 99 north and southbound thereby increasing the westbound queue at the intersection of 4th and OR 99 northbound.

Ray's Connection

B. Sheadel showed Ray's Connection on the screen. With this configuration, Cheryl Lane is completely blocked and there is no connection to Fern Valley Road. It is unknown what the outcome of Luman Road would be. It is important to keep in mind that with two-dimensional drawings the best guess is a conceptual guess. The CAC is concerned about losing Cheryl Lane and Bolz Road. Additionally, there would be some business impacts. The option could be shifted to the south to avoid the businesses, but that would not help because of the spacing standard issue. Another problem is that Ray's parking lot would become a roundabout for people trying to access Fern Valley. The CAC voted 9-1 to recommend dropping this option.

The PDT voted to drop Ray's Connection based on the above concerns.

Cheryl Lane

Issues with the Cheryl Lane option include: The road taper would cross Coleman Creek; Ray's access would be off of Cheryl, but traffic wouldn't be able to get into Ray's because of the queue on Cheryl. The culvert at Coleman Creek is on the list of ODFW as a fish barrier. It would cost \$3 million dollars to fix and would probably require a bridge. The CAC recommended dropping this option because of these impacts.

The PDT agreed with the CAC recommendation and there was a unanimous vote to drop Cheryl.

Bolz Road

There is some flexibility with this connection, but issues will still arise with accesses, etc. Surrounding Bolz, the land is zoned Commercial. If the businesses are interested, the city could add those businesses to the urban renewal plan and these businesses could be relocated at the appropriate time. Fern Valley Road Bridge has to be replaced regardless of which option is chosen. With Bolz Road there are three crossings of Bear Creek: one at Fern Valley Road, one at Bolz, and one at Bear Lake Estates. The city has received a pre-application for high-density housing adjacent to Bear Lake Estates. The SPUI option chosen will affect the west side connection and Luman Road.

J. Wyntergreen expressed the desire to have a 1st Street connection to get seniors and children from the eastside of I-5 into downtown Phoenix. J. Marmon commented that housing and business densities are high in this area. A 1st Street connection poses some difficult problems. Environmentally, a Luman Road and Bolz combination would be preferred.

Fern Valley Road Bridge has cracked girders. It is currently a safety issue. There could soon be 6-ton limit, which means school buses could not cross it.

The PDT voted to keep the Bolz Road option because it provides the needed east-west connectivity, it is a better option regarding environmental impacts, it would keep Cheryl Lane open, it offers some flexibility in design, and it would solve the basic traffic problem.

Eastside Connections

Lowry SPUI 2-way stop/4-way stop

The group reviewed the eastside connections, but because the CAC did not have time to make recommendations on the eastside connections, no voting by the PDT took place. First, the PDT reviewed the Lowry SPUI with a two-way stop. This option would have a stop sign on N. Phoenix Road and S. Phoenix Road, with Fern Valley Road through. The v/c would be greater than 2.0. The queue on N. Phoenix Road would extend 1,675 feet. With a four-way stop, the queues would be even longer on three of the four legs and they block accesses.

Lowry SPUI roundabout/signal

The Lowry SPUI with a roundabout was modeled as a two-lane facility. The volume projections did not include trucks from Petro using the roundabout as a U-turn vs. a left turn to go back to I-5. The Lowry SPUI with a signal at Fern Valley Road and N. Phoenix Road had higher queues on all four legs of the intersection. P. Schuytema commented that, regarding a roundabout, a v/c of 0.85 for a roundabout is more critical than for a signal because, if the intersection is at the maximum capacity, the roundabout stops: whereas, with a signal, it still would work, it would just be slower.

Lewin SPUI

The Lewin SPUI would have Fern Valley Road fly over N. Phoenix Road and the two roads would then intersect with a three-way signaled stop. The maximum allowed v/c is 0.85. The model with a three-way intersection had a v/c of 0.79.

Table 1 SPUI

The Table 1 SPUI uses N. Phoenix Road as the through lane with a three-way signaled stop at the intersection of N. Phoenix Road and S. Phoenix Road. This option leaves more room for future development. It has a low v/c of 0.57. The CAC thought that Fern Valley Road should be the through movement, whereas Table 1 preferred N. Phoenix as the through movement.

The Home Depot would be in the northeast quadrant of the current interchange area. It has not been sited yet; only the zoning has been granted. ODOT is coordinating with Home Depot because of the traffic and access issues in this location.

Plans for the land that Phoenix wishes to expand into in the northeast quadrant of the interchange include 85% residential, which incorporates Arrowhead Ranch. The remaining 15% includes commercial and a new school.

4. DISCUSS OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES

The group recapped the discussion. The City has not indicated a preference yet regarding Fern Valley Road through, or a N. Phoenix through. They are primarily concerned about the growth potential of whichever option is chosen.

The west side connection doesn't affect which option is selected for the eastside connection. They can be selected independent of each other. Issues to keep in mind for the next round of evaluation for the eastside connection include access management issues and grade issues, just north of the orchard.

Regarding the traffic accessing Home Depot, ODOT is in contact with Home Depot's traffic engineer. With a fourth leg on a signalized intersection, it could change the projected v/c ratio. Home Depot would include a signal on their property. The current Home Depot site design places their parking on the west side of the site. The main roads, however, will be to the east of Home Depot. Their plan includes more than just Home Depot, it could also include additional buildings, such as restaurants, that will want to access the area.

D. Petrasek asked if the old Fern Valley Road could go underneath N. Phoenix Road to provide another route. The group agreed that this is a good idea to examine.

5. NEXT STEPS

- J. Wyntergreen will come to the next CAC and present information regarding RPS.
- P. Schuytema will start the next level of detailed analysis.
- More information on South Stage Road is needed and will require some internal conversations.
- ODOT will start looking at access management.
- Votes are needed next on the eastside connection and the SPUI type. After these decisions are made and the design is a little more detailed, the Environmental Assessment can begin.

Questions remain about having more than one build alternative, using and accessing Luman Road, and issues surrounding crossing Coleman Creek. More coordination between ODOT Roadway and TPAU is needed before the Environmental Assessment can begin. The PDT will provide the CAC updates, as the process progresses.

NEXT MEETING:

The next PDT meeting is planned for September 8, 2005.

The goal of the next CAC and PDT meetings will be to discuss and vote on the eastside connection and determine the interchange type (i.e., diamond or SPUI) to take into the Environmental Assessment document.