Highway 199
Expressway Upgrade
Oregon Department of Transportation

Meeting Date:	Friday, March 11, 2005
Purpose:	Project Development Team Meeting
Distribution:	Project Development Team Members
From:	Vicki Guarino, Rogue Valley Council of Governments
Date Prepared:	February 14, 2005
PDT Attendees:	Laurel Samson, Steve Hodge, Lt. Tanya Henderson, Jeff Hunter, Dorothy Upton, Jerry Marmon, Tracy Rico, Eryca McCartin, Angela Findley, Gary Leaming, Vicki Guarino, Ray Lapke, Jason Sheadel, Brian Sheadel, Connie Kratovil, Rowdy Bates,
PDT Absent:	Jon Jordan
Other Attendees:	Del Robertson

1. Call to Order/Introductions

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG Facilitator

Vicki Guarino called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She introduced Rowdy Bates, who was elected chair of the CAC the night before, and will be representing the CAC on the PDT.

2. Agenda Review/Meeting Objectives

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

Vicki reviewed the meeting agenda. She said that today's meeting objectives are to complete work on the project Purpose and Need statement, and begin addressing Goals and Objectives. By consensus, the PDT approve the minutes of the Feb. 11, 2005 meeting.

3. CAC Update

Rowdy Bates, CAC

Bates said the CAC received much of the same information that the PDT will receive today. He said CAC members generally agreed that the information they received will give them the foundation they need to make good decisions in the future.

4. Open House and Community Update

Gary Leaming, ODOT

Leaming said more than 80 people attended the March 3 Open House in Grants Pass and 15 people filed comments. He said that was a high turnout compared to Open House sessions held at the start of other projects.

He also talked about the recent crashes in the project area including the fatal crash in late February that killed a woman and her fetus. He noted that some improvements may be made on the highway to improved safety on a temporary basis until work can be done on the plans identified in this project. Henderson said police are continuing to investigate the fatal wreck and have found some issues about the truck driver. She expects OSP to ask that charges be filed against the truck driver.

5. Master Project Schedule

Eryca McCartin, ODOT

McCartin presented the schedule leading up to a 2009 construction start. Copies were distributed to members. It includes 2-3 years for right-of-way acquisition. Final FHWA approval on the NEPA process would come in summer 2006. By that time, the general design of the project will have been identified.

Samson wanted to know what the difference is between an open house and a public hearing. Marmon said the Open House last week was a scoping meeting to identify problems. Between publication of the draft and final documents, there will be a formal public hearing for people to file comments. There will be a presentation and a court recorder will take comments.

6. Introduction to Design

Brian Sheadel, ODOT

Sheadel presented a PowerPoint, and copies of slides were distributed at the meeting. He presented the CAC's list of design aspects including meeting driver expectations, functionality, meeting pedestrian needs, additional capacity, traffic flow, safety, accessibility for all, affordability (being within budget), and serving multi-modal needs. The PDT added: access for business.

Other concerns for the CAC were: compatibility with Grants Pass' future urban growth boundary, pedestrian friendly, noise, business friendly, right of way, environmental justice, aesthetics, natural resources, right-of-way and relocations, land owner and city/county coordination. The PDT asked if there was a particular concern about environmental justice and Sheadel said no, but it is something the project must consider. PDT members agreed that this was a good list.

Sheadel pointed out potential conflicts between the various concerns and said the decision-making process will involve finding a balance between, for example, accessibility and safety, and noise and capacity. The key will be to come up with balance.

Sheadel also introduced a CAC list of areas of expertise that will be required as the project proceeds: roadway, traffic, pavement, structures, geo-tech, signals, right of way, survey, hydraulics, environmental (biological, historical and archaeological resources). The PDT added: landscaping and signs.

Sheadel also reviewed highway design policies and standards -- who sets them and why. The team discussed the definition of expressway. ODOT representatives said it's a declaration that the route is crucial for Oregon, needed to move volumes of traffic. There are about 12 expressways in the state. Their characteristics were discussed. Generally, these roads have limited access, but it was noted that expressways don't always meet definition. The attributes are something to try to achieve. Upton said this project can't change the expressway designation. Samson said this project might not meet all standards, but should try to achieve some of them. Upton said the project would have to justify not following standards. Asked about traffic flow, Upton said she was not done with modeling but is close. Marmon noted that this project will have to show the expressway will meet standards 20 years from now, as well as today. Henderson asked why ODOT allowed a new signal to go in for the hospital, exceeding expressway standards, if the highway already was designated an expressway. Signals now are too close together to meet the standards for an expressway. Upton said the lights went in after the expressway was designated, but the signal went in for hospital. The decision was an attempt to balance the need for hospital access and the demands of an expressway. Samson said the light was part of a larger plan to remove another light. McCartin said that taking out a light has been put off until this project determines the need. There is an expectation that eventually the fairgrounds and Redwood Avenue lights will be removed. Funding to do that work is available, if those decisions are part of this project's plan.

Sheadel said that ultimately, whatever is decided has be buildable, and a collaborative effort. He suggested that the team be creative within policies and standards. He said the PDT should demand to know specifically why something will or will not work according to standards.

7. Introduction to Traffic

Dorothy Upton, ODOT

Upton presented a PowerPoint; copies of slides were distributed at the start of the meeting. She said the modeling will look at present and 2020-2030 range. She said traffic analysts are involved from the beginning of a project, to work on problem identification, then through the design, to work out details such as how long a turn lane has to be. Samson asked about future action regarding the barrier at Willow Lane; Upton said modeling will show traffic flows with and without the barrier to help determine whether it would be needed, and what its impacts would be on project alternatives.

Responding to a request from Henderson, Upton said that later in the project she will bring in traffic flow standards for the city and state. She said Grants Pass has a new model based on its comprehensive plan and road system, and includes communities outside city limits. The model also uses the adopted transportation plan. The first step is to create a baseline model showing what conditions will be if nothing is done. Then the process will be to start showing impacts of elements of the various alternatives, shown as percent change from the baseline.

In response to a question about the South Y, McCartin said the South Y project follows this one so the alternative for this project will be considered when developing the South Y alternatives. McCartin said it will be struggle, but safety issues on 199 are outside the South Y, so this project needs to focus on safety. The South Y fix is most likely 10 years out. Marmon said the focus of this project is to improve safety and ease congestion in an area of the highway. Hodge said it is a mistake

not to consider the South Y. Bates asked how it could be considered given the scheduling and issues. Hodge said that as alternatives are suggested for the South Y, they must be analyzed to make sure they fit with this project. McCartin said she will produce a timeline that shows how both South Y and this project come together.

Upton said the model will help identify how well alternatives meet the needs identified by the project. She is in the process of finalizing the traffic counts, and then will start working on existing and future year traffic volumes this month.

(*10 minute break)*

8. Draft Purpose and Need Statement

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley reviewed comments from last month's homework assignment, which identified some 75 needs. A memo with a draft purpose statement and needs was distributed at the start of the meeting. From those comments, Findley drafted the purpose statement. The draft purpose statement reads: "The purpose of the project is to address vehicular and pedestrian safety, and current and future congestion and operational deficiencies, along Highway 199 between Tussey Lane and Midway Avenue." Henderson noted that the project area includes the Redwood Avenue intersection and that area needs to be worked into the purpose statement. Marmon said the intersection will be addressed in the project, but if it is in the purpose statement (i.e. the area we are trying to fix) then the project wouldn't be able to consider any alternative that doesn't address that intersection. Findley said the intersection could be addressed in the goals portion of the project. Samson said the statement needs to address connectivity, bike-ped facilities, working with current uses, and tourism—the project needs to say welcome to Grants Pass. Findley and Marmon said the purpose statement is the fundamental reason for doing the project. In the next step, goals and objectives, those other aspects and suggestions can be addressed. Upton said the purpose of this project is not to provide bike-pedestrian facilities, for instance, but it is for safety. Samson said the purpose statement is too narrow, and nothing about it relates specifically to Grants Pass. She said the goals are things that don't have to be done. Marmon said the project will consider connectivity and bike-ped facilities, but all alternatives will address safety. Samson said she was worried that landscaping or bike-ped facilities could be eliminated because they don't further safety and congestion. She didn't want to be part of that kind of process. Findley said this statement sets the boundaries, the minimum. The next step will be to set the needs and goals and objectives. Samson said she feared that those criteria will be secondary and will drop out of consideration.

Marmon said the project can't put bike-ped facilities in the purpose statement because that is not purpose of the project. Hodge said the project should recognize connector roads are part of the project and purpose statement. Upton said that if other roads are included, then the city and county might have to improve those streets as a result of this project. Findley asked committee members to allow the presentation to continue so that the group could review the needs and get an introduction to goals and objectives; then, the committee can come back to discussing the purpose. Sheadel said these other criteria will have a role in whether an alternative is forwarded. Findley reviewed the needs that the two committees submitted.

9. Introduction to Goals and Objectives

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley referred to a PowerPoint, distributed at the meeting, showing examples of features that could be addressed in goals and objectives, such as enhancing natural habitat, improving trails, public education, restricting or combining access, and complying with local plans. Many of the needs identified in the first homework assignment can be project goals and objectives. She reviewed the comments, and noted that many comments raised questions about how drivers perceive the corridor—that it looks more like an expressway so drivers aren't expecting someone to turn out in front of them.

The goals and objects will be a matrix for filtering out all of the alternatives that work. They represent other factors that are part of the evaluation, going beyond the purpose statement. Kratovil said that if, for example, there are 10 failing intersections as a result of this project, then this project would need to address mitigation measures. Marmon said the project may have to be done in phases if ODOT doesn't have funding for all plans at once. Samson said it seems that the project is optimizing safety and congestion, and she doesn't want to be part of that process. Samson said she would object if it's safety first, and that if anything is left we can address other concerns. She doesn't want to see options dropped because they make the road slightly less safe. Marmon said the group needs to understand that safety is the primary focus but not the only concern. Upton said safety for bikes and pedestrians is part of the safety concern. Samson was concerned that an answer could take pedestrians and bicyclists off the highway. This committee decides which alternatives go forward. Also it has to work 20 years from now.

Hodge said he was uncomfortable because the purpose statement acknowledges needs of the expressway, but doesn't address network roads. Purpose should address connectivity and preserving at least the current level of service on other roads. Findley said that if that is in purpose statement, it would eliminate alternatives that don't address the local roads. She said this is not a situation where if it isn't in the purpose statement then it is going to be ignored. Marmon said if an alternative adversely impacts the county and city system that will be part of the decision process. Samson said this is a mater of trust building. She noted that in the case of the barrier at Willow Lane, the city heard about it in the newspaper first. It impacted Redwood Avenue and there was no partnership with the city. At this point, she said, she will put her faith in this process.

McCartin noted the voting structure of the PDT with six votes belonging to members who don't work for ODOT, so ODOT can't force a decision. She said the project team will come up with several different project ideas to start the alternatives process. The CAC will take those and change or draw others as they see fit and recommend to PDT, which will do the same thing. ODOT is putting faith in city that city won't put forward a plan that benefits only the city of Grants Pass.

10. Next Steps

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley said she will put facts into purpose and needs statement for review and approval at the next meeting. The goals and objects assignment was distributed and is due by April 5. Comments received will be presented at the next meeting. Findley also reviewed the meeting schedule distributed at the first meeting.

Tracy Rico asked if the PDT could attend CAC meetings. Marmon said he would ask the CAC because he didn't want them feel constrained by the PDT watching them.

11. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

12. PDT Comfort Check

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

Guarino said this is a time to check in with each PDT member to see how they are feeling about the process – if they're comfortable with what has gone on, or if they have concerns.

Tracy Rico: Understands more about the project structure; sees the potential for competing interests; is very comfortable.

Jeff Hunter: Like the open process; feels good.

Tanya Henderson: Fine.

Laurel Samson: OK.

Steve Hodge: Still concerned about the South Y; also wants to know the measurements for success of the project, will it be reduced fatalities, and would we look at accidents on other road systems.

Jerry Marmon: Is comfortable, and understands some of the tension. He hoped everyone would feel more comfortable as the process proceeds.

Dorothy Upton: Appreciates the effort to build trust.

Ray Lapke: Feels comfortable, but the expressway presents problem. It is a complex corridor. His concern is in the end how it works.

Angela Findley: Appreciated the tough questions, and felt the group had a good discussion.

Eryca McCartin: Felt comfortable and will go over some details with Hodge.

(Rowdy Bates left during the break)

13. Wrap Up

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

Guarino said the next meeting of the project development team will be 9-11:30 a.m., April 15, in the Rogue Community College board room. The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.