February 2001

From: Vicki Guarino, Rogue Valley Council of Governments

Date: Feb. 22, 2001

Attendees: Tim Alford, Jim Buckley, Jon Deason, Patty Claeys, Jani Hale, Jean Milgram, Michael Montero, Jane Podolski, Wade Six. **Absent Members:** John Ferris, Teresa Hogan, Mike Mahar.

Re: CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING FINAL MINUTES for February 21, 2001

Location: Rogue Federal Credit Union Financial Center, 1370 Center Drive, Medford, Ore.

Guests: Thirty-two members of the public.

Project Team: John Morrison, Dan Moore and Vicki Guarino, RVCOG.

1. Introduction
John Morrison convened the meeting at 5:40 p.m., welcomed the CAC, members of the public and introduced Dan Moore, who would be describing region-wide traffic studies and plans. Moore will report on Alternative Mobility Standards, and short and long-term road projects beyond the scope of the interchange project. Time would be set aside for CAC members to discuss their level of comfort with the planning process.

2. Project update, schedule review
John Morrison gave an update of the project, reporting that team members are completing the many technical reports – noise, hydrology etc. – required for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

In March, the Solution Team is expected to consider whether to recommend one of the three remaining project alternatives: no build, Highland connector, or Ellendale connector. The DEIS is expected to be published in May, with a final decision on the project alternatives coming in July or August. The Final EIS is expected to be published in January, 2001.

As the planning process draws to a close, the CAC will not have to meet as frequently as it has in the past.

According to initial reports of technical data coming in, there appear to be more problems with the Ellendale alternative than the Highland alternative. While both alternatives solve the traffic problems, the Ellendale alternative poses greater detrimental impacts to low-income housing, the Bear Creek Greenway and the creek itself. Information at this point, however, does not preclude selection of the Ellendale alternative.

Morrison also reported on an outreach effort to update business interests in the project area. In January, 325 businesses and owners of commercial property were sent maps of the two connector alternatives, and an information sheet. Recipients were invited to arrange personal meetings with project team members. Several chose to call Morrison for additional information, and a few arranged meetings.

Patty Claeys wanted to know about scheduling for Solution Team recommendation of a preferred alternative. How will the CAC have time to review environmental justice-related reports and make a recommendation before the Solution Team meets in March? Morrison said the information would be available to the CAC, but he would have to check and get back with her on timing for a CAC recommendation.

3. Alternative Mobility Standards

Dan Moore distributed a report and gave a presentation on Alternative Mobility Standards (AMS). Late last year, the AMS was adopted by the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC). City officials from Central Point, Medford, Phoenix and Jackson County participated in the AMS process. The AMS is a temporary measure that allows traffic volume to increase beyond standard state limits while the community works to resolve the congestion problems. Solutions include construction of the new South Medford Interchange once funding becomes available.

The AMS recognizes that standard state volumes at the Interstate 5 off ramps at Barnett Road are being exceeded – and under the AMS, will continue to be exceeded – because funding is not available now to build the new interchange. The AMS also will apply to traffic flow at the intersection of Highway 99 and Stewart Avenue.

Creating the AMS allows the continued compact development in the interchange area, in accordance with existing land use plans. The benefits include continued compact development, which is preferable to the urban sprawl outside the project area that would occur if development were stalled within the project area because of traffic problems. AMS also benefits air quality. Urban sprawl forces motorists to travel greater distances to work, services, stores, etc., which puts more exhaust fumes into the airshed. Because of the benefits, and the temporary nature of the AMS, the new standards are seen as a way to permit the kind of development encouraged in the Oregon highway plan.

Construction of a new South Medford interchange is projected in state highway plan budget for 2002-2005. Meanwhile, the Oregon Department of Transportation and the City of Medford have to work out jurisdictional issues at some of the project-area intersections. If the construction project were to be cut from future state highway budgets (STIP) other traffic volume mitigation measure would have to be put into place – for instance, the addition of another turn lane on the Interstate 5 southbound exit ramp. Other measures include public transit programs to increase ridership, such as carpooling programs with the area's large employers.

Work also is underway to identify funding for improvements at the Phoenix interchange. Wade Six asked about the future for mitigation measures such as the additional off-ramp turn lane. Moore said it would be a throwaway project that would be abandoned with the ramp once the new interchange is built. However, it appears that the interchange will be in the 2002-2005 STIP, meaning construction could start in 2003.

John Morrison said funding depends on political will. In the interim, the AMS prevents disruption of land use planning and development processes.

CAC members discussed the construction timeline, and asked whether a start date could be roughly penned down. Moore said the goal is to begin construction within five years.

Jean Milgram said the plans allow congestion to worsen at the Highway 99-Stewart Avenue intersection. Moore said traffic studies show that it is not possible for communities to build their way out of all traffic problems. Other traffic-reduction means will have to be employed.

Morrison noted that traffic projections for 2030 show other failing intersection, including Barnett at Black Oak.

Six commented that without the AMS, development projects would have been killed, inhibiting compact growth. In that way, the AMS is a benefit to the region.
Mike Montero added that inhibiting compact growth would be detrimental to air quality. The AMS trades short-terms problems of traffic congestion for a long-term gain in air quality. Not having the AMS would lead to irrevocable damage from urban sprawl. Also, the scope of the CAC's assignment is limited to the state interchange project, to the exclusion of Medford city streets, and regional growth issues.

4. Regional planning perspective
Dan Moore outlined and presented maps delineating dozens of road-improvement projects in the Medford area proposed for the next 20 years. There are "Tier 1" projects for which funding has been identified, and "Tier 2" projects that have no funding at this point.
Tier 1 projects in the South Medford Interchange area include:

- Improvements at the Holly-Garfield intersection (compatible with the extension of Garfield as the west-side connector to the new South Medford interchange);
- Widening Barnett Road to six lanes between Alba and Highland, crossing Bear Creek;
- Improvements to Highland in the area of Siskiyou and Keeneway.

Tier 2 projects include extending the 6-lane section of Barnett Road from Highland to Black Oak.

Jani Hale and Montero noted that various organizations – the CAC, MPO, City of Medford – are involved in traffic planning.

Moore said public transit planning is an important part of the planning process. Presently, RVTD runs buses along a north-south corridor from Eagle Point to Ashland at a projected cost of $85 million over the coming 20 years. A "preferred system' would add a network of east-west routes and other service enhancements for a total cost of $400 million over 20 years.

Jan Podolski asked why a South Stage Road freeway interchange is not included in the traffic plans. Moore said the area does not have the traffic volume to warrant planning for that interchange. Also, the interchange would have significant impacts on farmland. The interchange is in plans for 30-50 years in the future.

Tim Alford asked for information about plans for the Phoenix interchange. Moore said plans include widening the bridge over the interstate at the road extending to Highway 99. The project includes realigning the North Phoenix Road intersection.

Hale was concerned that steps be taken to make sure that all the various projects are coordinated and mesh together.

Six noted that the plans outlined on the presentation map, when put together indicate a beltway pattern developing, which would skirt the core or Medford. Moore said the beltway idea has been considered, but is not generally favored because traffic volume does not warrant the expense. State planners discourage beltways because they can lead to sprawling development. The emphasis in traffic planning is to foster the smooth flow of traffic through developed areas, not around them.

Alford noted the disruptive impacts of major highway projects in developed areas – the City of Meford's planned widening of Barnett to 6 lanes, for example.
Montero said that instead of widening roads, which disrupts existing neighborhoods, it would be better to pursue projects that would improve connectivity throughout the city. Besides, there seems to be no funding for the big road projects.

Morrison noted that there is consideration of expanding the MPO area to take in the entire Air Quality Maintenance Area, including Eagle Point and Talent. This is seen as a way to encourage region-wide traffic solutions.

5. CAC comfort check
This is an expanded discussion of CAC members' concerns and satisfaction with the planning process. Morrison said its inclusion in the agenda stemmed from concerns raised briefly at the last CAC meeting (November, 2000) by Jon Deason and others. At the last meeting, there had been no time to continue the discussion. Deason said he asked for this session because he sensed a growing discomfort among CAC members with the interchange planning process. However, Moore's regional planning presentation and the discussion it prompted seem to have gone a long way toward clearing the air. Personally, he has a sense of horror at the direction traffic planning is taking. With the emphasis on road building, it appears that the true solution to congestion would make Medford look more like Los Angeles. The extension and expansion of Garfield as a corridor to the freeway, and the widening of Barnett to 6 lanes, will have profound impacts on neighborhoods. Medford seems to be developing in a southeasterly direction, with the emergence in the area of the Rogue Valley Manor, Assante, Bear Creek Corp., and Kogap developments as the region's biggest employers. The trend raises issues of how best to serve community interests, and creates pressures to find transportation alternatives to the car. He brought up a newspaper item from 40 years ago, as the interstate was being built, mentioning traffic congestion.

James Buckley suggested that by making commitments to highway projects before areas are developed and congestion occurs, neighborhoods wouldn't be sacrificed to road projects. Six said a benefit to implementing the AMS will come in a long-term reduction in the length of citizens' commutes to work, shops and services arising from compact development. Motorists here will pay a short-term price of traffic delays until the new interchange is built.

Montero said the situation now is one of the transportation tail wagging the land-use dog. Communities have long-term comprehensive land-use plans, but transportation planning fails to support managed growth because road planning always plays catch-up to need. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity to develop a desirable urban core, but communities need to work together.

Deason noted the problem of personal driving habits: no one carpooled to the CAC meeting. In the rush-hour delays on the southbound freeway off ramp, virtually every car has a lone occupant driving to work.

Alford said that after a decision is made regarding the new interchange connector – either Highland or Ellendale – planners will need to consult with affected residents and negotiate mitigation measures. People will be willing to negotiate if they feel as though they are being heard, and that what they say will have an impact on what is built.

6. Public input
John Morrison asked for public comment

Matt Claflin asked whether other cities in the area view the South Medford Interchange as strictly a Medford matter, or one of regional significance. Morrison said cities see it as being significant to the region.
Barbara Griffin said the existence of the freeway viaduct over Medford has been damaging to the city. The selection of the Highland alternative will wind up being equally damaging. That alternative will create huge problems for the city in the future.

Kevin McLoughlin said up to date aerial maps of the interchange area, especially in the Ellendale area, would be helpful because they would show the low-income housing and indicate the impacts to it.

Scott McKay asked that construction plans include traffic calming devices to protect neighborhoods. There needs to be ways to deal with big streets being built through neighborhoods.

Dan Thomson said he lives on Garfield Street and has become frustrated with the planning process. He said he wanted to know the status of Ballot Measure 7 (the "takings'' measure). Claflin asked whether the traffic-volume prediction for the Stewart-Highway 99 intersection, showing the intersection failing to meet standards, took into account the impact of the extension of Garfield. He was told that it does.

Janet Blight said CAC discussion of road projects constantly playing catch-up to development raised a good point. She suggested that the community be more pro-active and proceed with development of the South Stage Road interchange even though traffic flow doesn't warrant the project now. She said building such facilities in advance of development would protect people and neighborhoods.

7. Adjournment
John Morrison adjourned the meeting at 7:35 p.m.