

January 2000

From: Kathy Helmer, RVCOG

Date: January 27, 2000

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

Re: CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) DRAFT MEETING MINUTES for JANUARY 26th, 2000

Location: Rogue Federal Credit Union, 1270 Center Drive, Medford

Guests: One hundred twenty-three members of the public.

Project Team Present: Frank Stevens, ODOT; David Mayfield, URS; Jim Hanks, JRH; John Morrison, RVCOG; Kathy Helmer, RVCOG.

1. Introduction/Approval of Minutes

John Morrison convened the meeting at 5:35 PM. He welcomed the public, reviewed the agenda and explained Public Comment Period towards the end of the agenda. He stressed that the meeting was a working session of the CAC and that he would be keeping the meeting on schedule.

Dave Mayfield provided an update on the process to date. He explained that new information from the modeling process had been needed to test the seven alternative concepts. Recently gathered information from the modeling process has shown that some components of the alternatives are not needed to solve the transportation problem. The next step will ensure that the forwarded alternatives solve the transportation problem. It is possible that some of the seven would not be forwarded because of poor performance from a transportation standpoint. We have been anticipating that five to seven of the alternatives can be made to work from a traffic standpoint; then we would evaluate them further using the value assessment process to check how well the remaining alternatives perform on broader, community-held values. The project will move into the draft Environmental Impact Statement with two or three alternatives plus the no-build alternative.

The CAC approved the minutes as written.

2. Presentation of the No Build Alternative

Jim Hanks began by describing the model and the kinds of assumptions that one can make with a model about people's traffic behavior. He explained that the project has a significant amount of information on traffic behavior in the Rogue Valley. The model allows you to predict trips on the road system. The model has been expanded to predict traffic volumes and travel behavior for the year 2020. It can predict what people living in neighborhoods will do. The model has data for every hour of the day, but this modeling run used afternoon peak hours when the greatest congestion problems are experienced.

Describing the No Build Alternative is required because it is necessary to prove that there is actually a problem that has to be solved. In the No Build scenario, you assume that all other

planned network improvements are constructed, with the exception of those intended to solve the South Medford Interchange problem. Then you identify the traffic patterns that result by the end date, in this instance, the year 2020. To illustrate the approach, Jim Hanks showed the group a bar chart of base and future volumes. The chart used three colors to reflect different levels of service. Jim explained that the chart revealed that by the year 2020, most places in the vicinity of the interchange would be significantly above capacity. When volumes get that high, the number of peak hour volumes increases and traffic problems spill over into neighborhoods, as people try to avoid the congestion along main routes.

Referring to his overhead handouts, Jim described the iterative modeling process. With three rounds completed, the project team has a good handle on traffic in the area. They have run forty different scenarios. The refinements have provided a good framework for a solution.

Some general conclusions were reached with information from the modeling process:

1. By themselves, Transit-TDM-Alt Modes will not solve the problem.
2. Minor changes do not make significant differences in traffic demand.
3. Under every 20-year scenario, it is likely that Barnett will have to be widened.
4. A crossover or interchange at S. Stage Road would not have enough effect on the South Interchange to solve the problem at the South Medford Interchange. A major improvement would still be needed at that location. However, South Stage Road Interchange might serve other types of community needs in the future.

The team did test a S. Stage Road to Foothill to Highway 140 "east-side connector" idea. It was shown that the east-side connector would not solve congestion problems at the Interchange. This is because the Interchange area is such a focal point for activity that people want to go there. Thus, the east-side connector might well serve other community needs, but it does not solve the congestion problem at the Interchange.

A set of local street improvements was modeled. It was shown that if all identified local street improvements were implemented, it would have enough impact that you could preclude improvements directly at the interchange. It was important to note, however, that if you left one of the street improvements out, there would be an increase in traffic volumes at the Interchange. This alternative would have community impacts. Jim noted that all the local street improvements had been modeled as 2-lane streets and that they did have the capacity to hold the traffic volumes.

Jim also explained that the "Regional Transportation Plan Scenario" which widens Barnett, and includes a Garfield/Highland overcrossing would not adequately solve the transportation problem, even with a South Stage Rd. Interchange.

Jim Hanks reviewed the alternatives as follows:

Alternative #1: East/West Connecting Roads, SPUI on Realigned Barnett/Stewart. The Ellendale/Groveland extension was eliminated because it encouraged more traffic to go to the Interchange.

Alternative #2: East/West Connecting Roads, SPUI at Garfield/Ellendale. Jim stated that this worked well.

Alternative #5: East/West Connecting Roads, One-way Couplet/Split Interchange. Eliminated from this alternative were the S. Stage Road component and the

Garfield/Ellendale component. There were serious problems with this alternative due to the need for railroad crossings.

Alternative #7: South Medford Interchange, Realigned Stewart/Barnett/Garfield/Highland Connection. The Biddle extension was eliminated since it increased problems at the Interchange. This alternative creates much congestion at Stewart and Riverside. Additionally, there is a railroad crossing.

Alternative #8: Single Point Interchange concept. Realigned Barnett/Stewart. The Crater Lake to Siskiyou component was left off because it made the congestion worse. This alternative created congestion problems at the Riverside/Stewart intersection.

Alternative #11: East/West Connecting Roads, SPUI at Garfield/Highland. There is not much difference between this alternative and the Garfield/Ellendale alternative. This splits the volume east and west. It maintains the Barnett bridge.

Alternative #14: East/West Connecting Roads, One-way Couplet with Alba and Barnett. This is very promising with respect to total impacts of the alternative. It could be built fairly easily and with little or no environmental impacts to parks and wetlands, it may be an "avoidance alternative". It adds a lot of capacity without adding a new interchange. It accommodates the traffic flow.

4. Review Alternatives/Develop Recommendations

Chairperson Jon Deason addressed interested members of the public, saying that the CAC had been waiting a long time for information from the model and were glad to have it in hand. He said that CAC members had been concerned at first because they were a small group of people who couldn't represent the entire community. The CAC had been pleased when so many members of the public began to participate in the process. Many had come become "lines had been drawn through their neighborhoods". He encouraged people to continue coming to the meetings, to stay with the process, even though some of those lines were no longer drawn.

John Morrison asked the CAC to walk through each of the revised maps with Jim Hanks, provide their comments, ask questions and offer recommendations. The Solution Team had not yet seen these revised alternatives, so feedback from the CAC would be particularly useful. Comments made by the CAC follow each numbered alternative below.

Alternative #1. Jim Buckley was concerned about whether the new route would lie north of the hotels off Alba and thus, disrupt the ball fields in that area. Jim Hanks responded that the map was still at a conceptual stage; precise engineering had not been done and it might require some veering. Jim also shared that it does not keep the existing bridge or alignment. Jim Hanks said that they would later consider how well the configuration would work beyond 2020. Mike Mahar noted that it looked expensive to build and should be eliminated. No CAC member expressed interest in continuing to consider this alternative.

Alternative #2: Jani Hale said that this alternative was similar to #11. The benefit is that it allows Barnett to continue as a 2-way street, thus maintaining relatively straight access to the school. Jean Milgram said that it makes it easier to travel south. Tim Alford asked if this alternative didn't redistribute the same traffic to the Barnett/Ellendale intersection. Jim Hanks noted that a Garfield/Highland interchange could be replaced by a Garfield/Ellendale interchange. Jean Milgram expressed her concern that this alternative might go right

through Rogue Valley Manor. Mike Mahar suggested that this alternative be left in for further study and the group went with this recommendation.

Alternative #5: CAC members were not enthusiastic about this alternative due to the problems that Jim Hanks presented regarding railroad crossings and the expenses related to purchasing rights of way in the area. Jim Hanks noted that this alternative "combines disadvantages of several of the projects". The group did not express interest in further consideration of this alternative.

Alternative #7: The CAC recommended that this not be further studied due to the fact that it creates increased congestion at Stewart and is located so close to the Interchange.

Alternative #8: Jim noted that this alternative increased traffic at Riverside and Stewart and presented issues with regulations related to spacing distances between interchanges. Tim Alford suggested that this alternative would be extremely expensive and would be like "money out the window". David Mayfield noted that this alternative might allow the project to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, such as parks and wetlands. Jim Hanks felt that it would be difficult to make this alternative work well. Jon Deason noted that removing the Barnett interchange and replacing it with a new one a short distance away would not result in a real solution; there would still be only one way onto the freeway. It didn't solve the problem and it was too costly. The CAC recommended that this alternative be dropped.

Alternative #11: Jim Buckley liked this one because Highland has undeveloped spaces near its intersection with Barnett which would allow for turning lanes and maintain traffic flow, while Ellendale has a commercial complex at the corner. David Mayfield noted that this alternative featured a diamond interchange, not a SPUI, as titled. Wade Six asked what impact this would have on Highland. Jim Hanks responded that it would likely increase traffic on Highland. Jani Hale noted that this alternative maintains Barnett as a two-way arterial and that would benefit her school. Tim Alford noted that if traffic increased north of the Siskiyou/Highland intersection, it could create traffic problems, due to the way that roads wind in and out of Highland. Jean Milgram suggested that the project should include fixing the Highland/Siskiyou intersection. The group favored further study of this alternative.

Alternative #14: A positive aspect of this alternative is that it probably avoids environmental constraints. A negative aspect was the awkwardness of the turn where the northern route connects with the Riverside/Central intersection. The group favored further study of this alternative.

5. Public Comment Period

John Morrison invited interested members of the public to speak. Jim Kee shared that his concern with the modeling process was the changes to city streets that would be required by changes to the interchange area. Jim Hanks responded that the modeling showed that changes to city streets worsened congestion problems at the Interchange. David Mayfield noted that the Garfield/Highland and Garfield/Ellendale overcrossings were the only local street options being advised by the consultant team.

Regarding the Garfield/Highland proposal, a gentleman asked if all southbound I-5 traffic would flow onto Garfield and Jim Hanks answered yes. The same gentleman also asked how the model could be accurate if it was based on 1995 traffic counts that pre-existed all the new businesses and traffic in the interchange area. Jim Hanks answered that there has been post-model calibration since 1995. All that has been planned for the area and all that has

happened since 1995 was included in the model. Thousands of surveys were done at the time and Jim Hanks is confident that the model is as accurate as it could possibly be.

Another gentleman asked about alternative #14. He told the group that two new ball fields were planned for the area north of the hotels on Alba and he wondered if they would have to be moved. Jim Hanks responded that the new road could possibly be placed west of the hotel buildings.

Susan Hand read a written statement, summarized for these minutes as follows: The argument to keep traffic out of existing neighborhoods can be summarized very simply: It will be bad for Medford. To allow traffic patterns to develop and increase in the existing neighborhoods will destroy them. Owner-occupied property values will go down and there will be a transition to rental or rezoning for commercial. It's not necessary if you consider the absence of a commuter rail system between Ashland - Eagle Point - Jacksonville with connecting bus service. It is not smart when you consider Medford's developable area is limited to a valley which will not permit the expansion of Medford into a megalopolis whose future population numbers could serve as the tax base needed to support an inner city area for traffic flow. Your service and our tax dollars are being squandered through this process...I for one am not only voting No on the gas tax, but Hell No.

Bon Dysart asked what happened to the Evergreen alternative. Jim Hanks said that it was no longer on the table because it did not reduce congestion at the interchange area.

Nelson Powell asked what would happen to the project if the gas tax were defeated. Frank Stevens responded that the current project would result in a recommendation, rather than in construction. Ultimately, any construction that resulted might be funded from a variety of sources, including, potentially, gas tax monies. If the gas tax passes, there would be \$15 million for construction purposes.

Another gentleman expressed his opinion that alternatives #s 2 and 11 dumped all northbound and southbound traffic at a stoplight. Many people would go onto Barnett. He asked if we would be worse off. Jim Hanks responded that traffic wanting to go south would not have to go onto Barnett at the interchange area. For access to the shopping center, people would not have to go onto Barnett.

6. Adjournment

Given the hour, John Morrison did not ask CAC members to comment on the meeting's process. The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 PM. The next CAC meeting will be on February 16, 2000.