May 1999

From: John Morrison

Date: May 21, 1999

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

Re: Minutes of May 19, 1999, meeting of the South Medford Interchange Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)

Location: RVCOG Senior Services Office, 2860 State Street, Medford.

Guests: Dan Moore, Transportation Program Manager, Rogue Valley Council of Governments (RVCOG).

Consultant Team Present: David Mayfield, URS Greiner Woodward Clyde, Gary Shaff, JRH Transportation Engineering; John Morrison, RVCOG, Kathy Helmer, RVCOG.

1. CALL TO ORDER.

John Morrison opened the meeting at 5:35 PM. Mike Montero, CAC Vice-Chair, presided over the meeting due to the absence of Jon Deason, CAC Chair.
The objectives of the meeting were:

- To respond to information requests made by CAC members at the April meeting.
- To educate the CAC about the project so they are better prepared to make recommendations to the Solutions Team.
- To provide the CAC with ample opportunity for discussion and comment.

CAC members had received a packet of pertinent information for their review in advance of the meeting. This packet included: a memo from Mayfield describing the regulatory framework for the South Medford Interchange Project; sections of the Origin and Destination Study; a chart of the Interchange Project Process Through Construction; information on the Metropolitan Planning Organization; and minutes of the April 21, 1999 CAC meeting.

2.0 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved as written.

3.0 REPORT ON SOLUTIONS TEAM /CAC BUS TOUR

John Morrison reported briefly on the May 6 Bus Tour of the project area. Several members of the CAC had participated in the tour and some had been able to stay for the small group session to develop and present a broad range of alternatives. John asked CAC members for their reactions to the tour. They had the following comments:

- The tour was very informative. Some of the neighborhoods we traveled had set backs; others did not. Imagine the impact of going through some of those beautiful neighborhoods! South Stage Road looks like you could do something. The main thing for me was seeing the area and understanding the impact that the project could have.

- It's a real eye-opener to look at the property itself, rather than just see a street name on a map. It helps you see what's feasible. (John said he would get a copy of the tour route for those who were not able to attend.)
- The North-South routes through Medford impressed me most. You can see the lack of connectivity. The Crater Lake and Biddle dead end areas. You can see the costs and the problems with all the alternatives, but something has to be done. I was somewhat disappointed with the afternoon session; there didn't seem to be enough focus to our work. (John noted that it took a while for small groups to get started on their development session; it picked up momentum after a while.)
- I could see the need for connectivity in the city and why local residents use I-5. There are daunting topographic options that are logical, but there are so many regulatory constraints. There's not a clear path to what needs to be done. Then you overlay the practical aspects, like right of way purchases, etc. There are impacts to Bear Creek Park and to livability. The issues of multi-modal transportation are significant.

David Mayfield explained that there are now 12 alternatives from the session that will be screened down to 6 or 8 for more intensive scrutiny. Proposals with serious operational problems, such as destruction of the park or unacceptable weave distances, were discarded by participants during the presentation period. Others, such as the South Stage Road alternative, with known constraints were kept for continued consideration. Mike Montero suggested that Dave document the constraints of each alternative for review by the CAC. David described an assessment tool that allows the scoring of each alternative with a bulleted list based on project goals.

Once the set of alternatives is down to 6 or 8, the analysis becomes very rigorous. They will be modeled to see how they perform. Then there will be a more rigorous look in quantitative terms at impacts, for example, how many houses are impacted, before moving on to the EIS stage.

The maps displayed on the walls are the result of the brainstorming work done during that afternoon session by the 4 small groups. Mike Montero emphasized the importance of those maps for the greater community's understanding that alternatives have been considered.

4.0 THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

David Mayfield reviewed aspects of the memo that had been distributed to CAC members on the variety of regulations affecting the project. He reminded members of the 5 steps in project process, namely, Problem Definition, Alternatives Analysis, Draft EIS-MIS, Preliminary Design of the Best Alternative, and the Final EIS (Environmental Impact Statement). David focused on the Department of Transportation Act - Section 4(f) which protects public parks, recreational areas, wildlife refuges and historic sites. If such areas are necessarily part of the solution, significant mitigation is required.

CAC members asked for clarification on the alternatives. Are they being prioritized as potential single solutions or being considered as a mix of improvements to solve the overall problem? David responded that there may be a package of alternatives that become part of the final solution. It is likely that the solution will not be a single change, but a combination of changes that optimizes the package and its effect. Would these changes be made at once or phased in? That will depend on practical issues such as funding and support from the city of Medford. A concern was raised that lack of funding or support could make this project a futile exercise.

David proceeded to review the implications of the Environmental Justice issue. No area with high minority and/or low-income populations may be disproportionately affected by a transportation program. David noted that the Biddle area, 12th Street, and other central areas have concentrations of Hispanic and low-income people in sections. David stressed that these people also must benefit from a project. It may be that improved transit facilities would benefit them.

5.0 THE ORIGIN AND DESTINATION STUDY

Gary Shaff reported on the O & D Study. He reviewed roadway classifications and their role in Medford. He then described the role of the Interstate and that when the Interstate is jeopardized by local travel, this jeopardizes the economic life of a region and state. Turning to the study, he showed that the travel volumes moving from the North Interchange to the South Interchange account for about 50% of the volume. This could ultimately cripple the Interstate.

Another significant volume of traffic is flowing over the Interstate, moving from East to West on Barnett Road. This traffic, accounting for some 50% of the volume at certain times of the day, is not related to the Interstate; it is simply using Barnett to move across town. This happens because there are so few options to taking Barnett. Siskiyou is the only parallel route.

Traffic from Phoenix and Central Point to the South Interchange accounts for additional volume at the interchange area.

Comments on the study centered on making the study graphics more accessible, including using site names rather than numbers. Gary will be preparing an Executive Summary of the study and this will provide greater clarity. CAC members were interested in receiving colored copies of the O & D maps; Gary will work on doing this. David will also provide a copy of the Transportation Problem statement for CAC members.

6.0 PROJECT PROCESS THROUGH CONSTRUCTION

Mike Montero referred to the chart of organizations, such as Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation (RVACT), and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). All these groups become involved once there is a transportation problem. They are jurisdictional bodies. Working back from the goal of construction, OTC gives the final approval and funding for a project. OTC receives this money from the state for improvements related to capacity. OTC prioritizes how the money is spent. The federal government is the actual source of much of the money. It lays the ground rules requiring regional planning. This explains the genesis of the MPO which covers the region from Phoenix to Central Point. The MPO reviews the project and ensure that it is beneficial. Then, when funds become available, the package is ready and approved.

RVACT is involved as the regional transportation commission. RVACT has oversight over state highway systems. A major purpose of the organization is to bring a unified regional approach to funding opportunities. Its members include one representative from each jurisdiction, ODOT, and 4 private sector representatives from each county. They have established a good track record of cooperation with respect to the allocation of funds. OTC respects the priorities set by RVACT.

Dan Moore described the 4 major activities of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) which include: Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) amendments; Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program amendments; Air Quality Conformity amendments; and Local Transportation System Plan and Capital Improvement Plan amendments. In essence, the MPO ensures that state and local transportation plans are compatible. The South Medford Interchange solution will have to be incorporated into the Regional Transportation Plan. Additional steps necessary, depending on a variety of factors. The MPO works with local jurisdictions and their City Councils to make required plan amendments. CAC members asked if further communities in the Valley would be included in the MPO and Dan responded that the inclusion of Ashland and Eagle Point was being considered in the long term.

A CAC member asked what would happen if Medford decided that the interchange solution would not work well with their local plans. MPO would not approve a plan without Medford's approval. It was noted that Medford is very supportive of the South Medford Interchange Project; it is providing financial backing the planning process.

7.0 MEETING CRITIQUE

John Morrison asked CAC members to comment on this meeting's process. The following comments were made:

This is an impressive process. I don't think the same kinds of mistakes that have been made in the past are going to come out of this process.

I'm starting to understand what we will be doing.

This felt like Lecture 101 today. We got into the real meat and potatoes. Could materials be tabbed to correspond with the agenda?

The regulatory information was very useful.

We're on a big learning curve here. Tonight's meeting was good. I'm here to understand the whole transportation issue better. I feel good that you've looked at all the alternatives. This should be comfortable for the community—unbiased review. But we could get fantastic ideas that are not funded for 10 –12 years and where will the area be by that time? How can we help the state find more funding?

There's a spotlight on this group, but this is a good group of people who are up to the task. I'm concerned about the hitches in the process. There are so many organizations and interests involved in this process. What will the impact be on our process?

The meeting minutes are good. I live on the west side of Medford and we have no problems going north to south. Why don't we just improve what we already have, rather than making big changes in neighborhoods? That's what I think we should do.

This was a great meeting. We got great information in advance of the meeting. And there were great presentations on the transportation groups involved in the process.

The people in this group are good people who leave their egos behind when they come. They have the right kinds of attitudes. There will be compromises in this process. In the end, people will be glad that they've been on the team.

8.0 SUMMARY

Dave Mayfield ended the session by encouraging CAC members to ask any and all questions as process proceeds. He noted that the next CAC meeting is on June 16th. The agenda will include consideration of alternatives. He reminded people that at lunch time on June 2, the Federal Highway Administration will be meeting with the Solutions Team at the Jackson County Public Works Auditorium, 200 W. Antelope Road, White City. All CAC members are invited to the meeting.