

November 2000

From: Vicki Guarino, Rogue Valley Council of Governments

Date: Nov. 16, 2000

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

Re: CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING DRAFT MINUTES for November 15, 2000

Location: Rogue Federal Credit Union, 1370 Center Drive, Medford, OR

Guests: Thirty-six members of the public, and Rogue Valley Transportation District . representatives Scott Chancey and Julie Brown

Project Team: Jim Hanks, JRH; Mike Gallagher, URS; John Morrison and Vicki Guarino, . RVCOG

1. Introduction/Approval of Minutes

John Morrison convened the meeting at 5:40 PM. He welcomed the CAC, members of the public. He reviewed the agenda, noting that the project update agenda item would be incorporated into Mike Gallagher's NEPA process update later in the agenda. Meeting objectives were: 1) to present new traffic analysis information; 2) to receive public transit options studied by RVTD; and 3) to hear an update on the NEPA process. The Sept. 27, 2000, meeting minutes were approved as presented.

2. Traffic modeling studies for three alternatives

Jim Hanks updated the CAC on significant developments in traffic modeling since the last meeting. He began by explaining that engineers from the state and the City of Medford met and came to agreement on which entity would have jurisdiction over specific intersections (and roadway segments) throughout the study area. In the past, it had been assumed that state jurisdiction and state traffic volume standards would apply to all intersections, but that is no longer the case. Several intersections surrounding the interchange site will be under City jurisdiction and City standards. At the proposed I -5 interchange ramp intersections, the state mobility standards associated with freeways will apply. State standards would also apply to the Highway 99/Stewart and Highway 99/Garfield intersections. Street intersections at Barnett and Highland, Barnett and Ellendale and Barnett and Oregon Highway 99 will come under City standards (Level of Service D). Also as background to the traffic study, Hanks said project traffic planning forecasts have to carry forward 20 years from construction. Assuming a year 2010 construction, studies had to be projected out to year 2030. To begin the modeling process, the cities of Medford, Central Point and Phoenix presented year 2030 population projections, identifying specific development locations. Hanks cautioned the CAC that such long-term projections are difficult to make and prone to some uncertainty: "What may be inconceivable now may be what actually happens." He invited CAC members to further examine modeling methodology, but warned that the process is complicated and technical. Wade Six asked if he could review the raw data from the traffic projections that were made. Jim said he could provide the data.

From that introduction, Hanks proceeded to outline traffic study results for three proposed alternatives. It was noted that the information is in the final stages of internal review. The

Solutions Committee has dropped the Couplet Alternative because it would require unacceptable triple-lane turns, so no modeling was done on it. Three alternatives being considered are: No Build (consideration of which is required by federal law), Highland Alternative and Ellendale Alternative. He also noted that both the Highland and Ellendale alternatives appear to "work" from a traffic standpoint substantially better than the No-Build Alternative. The new interchange under both build alternatives would work well. Hanks indicated that there are some local intersections and street segments in the vicinity of the project that, in the long-run, are not likely to meet city standards due to problems with the overall street system. Many of these problems, and their potential solutions, are not part of the interchange project and will need to be addressed later. For example, modeling is showing that Highway 99 will need to be widened in the future. Although roadway improvements in the vicinity of South Stage Road might improve the traffic on Highway 99 in the future, it would have little effect on solving the existing interchange problem.

No Build Alternative: Traffic at existing ramps would exceed state standards, lengthening present delays. Present traffic volume-to-capacity ratios of .95 and 1.0 would increase to 1.33-1.52.

Highland Alternative: Projected ratios of .69 and .62 at the proposed new interchange intersections would meet state standards and allow a margin for growth beyond 2030. The Stewart-Hwy. 99 intersection, remaining under state jurisdiction, would exceed standard with a volume ratio of 1.19. Traffic volume would be acceptable, however, because the intersection would be providing a better level of service with the Highland option than if the option were not built.

Ellendale Alternative: Projected ratios of .62 and .61 at intersections, with about the same impact on Stewart as the Highland option. Hanks noted that this connector poses problems of access to adjacent Rogue Valley Manor property. Ultimately, both build alternatives work traffic-wise, so deciding between the two may be based on some other criteria.

Hanks noted that independent of ODOT plans, Medford has plans to widen Barnett Road to six lanes with a center turn refuge.

Mike Gallagher noted that the traffic analysis has shown that both build alternatives also would necessitate adding turn lanes at the Hwy. 99/Stewart and Hwy. 99/Garfield intersections. Plans for that are being developed now by project staff.

3. RVTD Report on Transit Options

Scott Chancey described present bus services and usage, and projections for use by the year 2020 given present service levels and various potential changes to service. RVTD has 756,000 bus boardings per year, removing 260,000 car trips from local roads annually. Boardings could increase to nearly 7 million annually by 2020 if service frequency could be increased to what Chancey called "optimum." Usage has dropped since RVTD cut service and increased fares two years ago. Unless RVTD receives more funding, service would have to be cut more by 2020. In particular, routes extending out to the east and west of I 5 would be eliminated.

An optimum level of service would offer maximum waits of 10-15 minute, and cost the district \$18 million annually. About \$4 million of that would come from fares. Additionally, RVTD has studied developing park-ride facilities, but they may be too expensive and offer too little service to the public. RVTD is pursuing voucher programs in

which businesses and agencies buy bus service for their employees, increasing ridership. Companies earn a tax credit for the service.

Also, RVTD is using a \$170,000 grant to upgrade shelters and improve signs, which Chancy expects will draw more bus riders. The district is moving from having a central station to a series of smaller transfer stations to ease traffic congestion throughout its service area. Mike Gallagher noted that the RVTD information is being used in developing the multi-modal element of the project, including public transit facilities/routes, pedestrians, bicyclists and Bear Creek Greenway bike path features.

Jim Hanks noted that significant work has progressed on designing facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians through the project area. A presentation on that portion of the project will be brought to the CAC at a later date.

Jani Hale asked whether RVTD has been preparing to serve the new sports park planned for Hwy. 99 south; Chancey said bus stops will be added as the park develops.

4. NEPA Process Update

Mike Gallagher reported on work his company is doing to complete the Environmental Impact Statement for the project required under the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act. The NEPA EIS is triggered because of anticipated federal funding, the need to obtain federal permits to encroach into wetlands in the Bear Creek area, and because of the potential the project has to impact the natural environment of the creek and local neighborhoods. Completing the EIS process requires public involvement, including the work of this CAC. Data is being gathered for numerous technical reports that will be combined into a draft EIS, due out early next year. The draft will be subject of a public hearing; public comments and agency responses will be incorporated into a final EIS, due out Fall 2001. The NEPA process for the project is to be completed December, 2001. EIS information is to be a tool for decision makers to use in planning the new interchange.

Gallagher delineated the specific reports that comprise an EIS, including: A rights-of-way report discussing impacts on property in the aggregate; socio-economic report addressing impacts on neighborhoods and businesses, including those at a distance that could be effected by possible traffic changes; land use study looking at compliance with various laws and ordinances; noise study projecting noise levels and possible need to mitigate increases with walls or other abatement measures; biological report, including ultimately a Biological Assessment considering in this case impact on endangered Coho salmon migrating in Bear Creek; cultural resources study investigating archeologically significant sites; a building survey looking for sites of historic significance; an energy balance analysis is done to show how energy used to build the project balances against energy saved by project's operation. Other reports will address hazardous substances, visual resources, and Traffic.

All EIS analyses address the remaining three options: no build, Highland and Ellendale alternatives. Examining impacts of the no-build option is not only required, but it importantly provides the baseline for evaluating the proposed alternative solutions – it serves as a backboard against which the solutions are evaluated to determine their advantages/disadvantages.

5. Public Comment Period

One woman asked a series of questions about precise location of wetlands and traffic impacts. Mike Gallagher answered that the wetlands are in the areas of Bear and Larson creeks. Jim Hanks answered that building a S. Stage Road interchange would not be sufficient to resolve traffic problems in the study area. Also impacts on traffic at the

northern end of the study area would be reasonably comparable with either of the build alternatives. Both Mike and Jim noted that their conclusions are preliminary at this point and could change as more information comes to light through the ongoing study process. A man asked whether construction of the South Gateway commercial complex is to blame for the interchange's traffic problems. Jim Hanks said that if the site were vacant, there would still be problems at the interchange, however, the situation wouldn't be as critical as it is today.

Barbara Griffin, 10 S. Keeneway, Medford, expressed concern about the impact the Highland Alternative would have on users of Bear Creek Park. The skateboard element of the park draws many kids that walk/skate to and along Highland to get to the facility. The outdoor theater, with its movies and concerts draw many more motorists and pedestrians. She said the Highland Alternative threatens the first signs of "neighborhood" life in the East Medford area. She said it also would damage Bear Creek Park and deteriorate the livability of Medford, particularly the nearby neighborhoods along Highland.

6. CAC Comfort Check

At this point, John Morrison said the meeting was running late and that because of automatic alarms, everyone had to be out of the room by 8 p.m. Therefore, he said, the CAC members' comfort check had to be postponed.

7. Adjournment

John Morrison adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.