

February 2000

From: John Morrison, RVCOG

Date: February 3, 2000

Attendees: Solution Team members: Mark McQueen; Brian Dunn; Reeve Hennion; Joe Strahl; Julie Brown; Skip Knight; Robin Marshall; Jeff Graham; Lisa Owens; Mark Gallagher; Greg Holtoff; Mike Burrill; Jim Oldland. Others attending: Elton Chang, FHWA; Jeff Griffin, DLCD; Chris Haims, DLCD; Mark Bailey, CAC.

Re: SOLUTION TEAM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES for FEBRUARY 2, 2000

Location: ODOT/Jackson County Annex Conference Room, 200 Antelope Road, White City

Guests: Elsie Williams, Paul Williams, Gary Hanson, Tom Oldenburg, Pat Oldenburg, Kristy Miles Dysart, Norbert Leiberg, Larry Frank, Eric Stark.

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

1.0 Call to Order/Approval of Minutes

Frank Stevens called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM. He welcomed the public, reviewed the agenda and asked for approval of minutes of the previous meeting. Minutes were approved unanimously without change.

2.0 Citizen Input

Frank Stevens asked if there was any citizen comment. There was none.

3.0 Purpose of Meeting

Dave Mayfield presented a brief overview of where the project is to date. He explained that the project team has now "optimized" the seven proposed alternatives based on traffic modeling only. Mayfield said it was his original hope that the Solution Team could review the seven optimized alternatives and, based on their traffic performance, take five to seven forward for further evaluation. He mentioned that the Citizen Advisory Committee had recommended that three alternatives move forward and the four receive no further evaluation -- the same four that Jim Hanks considers to be inferior to the others due to traffic issues. Mayfield then said this conclusion raises another possible course of action. The Solution Team could make a watershed decision. If the Solution Team concurs with the CAC recommendation, the project could move straight into an EIS with three alternatives. Greg Holthoff said he felt it didn't make sense to further evaluate what doesn't make sense to build from a transportation standpoint.

Mayfield also discussed briefly the regulatory hurdles facing the project. He said we need to consider which alternatives avoid regulated resources such as wetlands, park properties, and significant historic sites. Another issue would be considering any alternative which might disproportionately impact minorities or the economically disadvantaged who are protected by the Executive Order on Environmental Justice. Mayfield said alternative #14 and possibly #8 might avoid adverse impact on wetlands and park properties, and local connectors extending down Franquette or Portland might trigger Environmental Justice concerns.

4.0 Summary Results of Traffic Modeling

Jim Hanks began with a brief explanation of how a model functions, what it can and can not do. He said the current model is a very good one, yielding accurate data on replicating neighborhood traffic patterns. Mark McQueen asked how the Origin & Destination Study done for this project fit in. Hanks said it was part of the calibration process.

Hanks said the Consultant Team has gone through a lengthy modeling process analyzing the seven alternatives and several other alternatives as well. He said that while full written findings are not yet available, a number of general conclusions have been reached:

1. By themselves, Transit-TDM-Alt Modes will not solve the problem. They need to be included as part of other alternatives, but will not do the job alone.
2. Small intersection or interchange modifications won't significantly change traffic demand at the interchange.
3. Under a 20-year scenario, it is likely that Barnett will have to be widened, possibly at the interchange and from Ellendale to Black Oak. He noted that this would be needed for an adjacent transportation problem, not our project.
4. A South Stage Road interchange or overpass would reduce congestion at South Medford Interchange by up to 15%, but would not affect the need for major improvements at the South Medford Interchange. A South Stage Road Interchange or connection might have regional or community importance, but is independent of the South Medford Interchange process.

Hanks then reviewed the alternatives thus far analyzed, and the attributes of each. He began with several model runs that were not among the seven developed by the Solutions Team.

1. A Regional Transportation Plan scenario that widens Barnett, and includes a Garfield/Highland over crossing has a number of operational difficulties, he said. The primary problem is that Highland is too close to the interchange, and this does not comply with state transportation design guidelines. It is also likely to increase traffic on Highland.
2. A second scenario included a number of local street improvements. Hanks said this alternative works only if all the connections within it are used. Analysis of sets with less local street improvements shows increases in congestion at the interchange. He said using all the options is not possible due to operational problems with several of the components. Elton Chang and Dave Mayfield pointed out regulatory difficulties with the Alba Extension shown on this scenario.
3. Two "east-side connector" concepts were also tested. Hanks said it would draw traffic, but had little impact on the traffic using the Interchange. The east-side connector might well serve other community needs, but it does not solve the congestion problem at the Interchange.

Jim Hanks then turned to the seven proposed alternatives, in each case comparing the map of the original proposals to the now optimized alternative. Before he started, he asked CAC facilitator John Morrison to give the Team an overview of the CAC recommendations on the seven alternatives. Morrison said the CAC recommended Alternatives #2, #11 and #14 for further consideration and did not recommend alternatives #1, #5, #7 and #8 for further consideration. Morrison said Hanks would go into the specific behind the CAC recommendations as he reviewed the alternatives for the Solution Team. Hanks then commented on each alternative as follows:

Alternative #1: East/West Connecting Roads, Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI) on Realigned Barnett/Stewart. Hanks said this alternative has problems in that the realigned Stewart/Barnett connection requires a significantly enlarged intersection to accommodate the increased side street traffic that would be using it. This is operationally difficult because the intersection location conflicts with the railroad tracks. It also creates more out of direction travel, which adversely impacts Vehicle miles traveled. Dave Mayfield said this was the case with all the Stewart/Barnett connections (1,7 & 8). He also mentioned that the originally proposed improvements to Ellendale north toward sunrise only increases traffic at the interchange and that this holds true for any surface street connection north of Barnett Road.

Alternative #2: East/West Connecting Roads, SPUI at Garfield/Ellendale. The optimized version of this alternative eliminates Ellendale north of Barnett, and the Stewart and South Stage Road connections. Jim Hanks said this was one the CAC recommended for further consideration because it retains the existing bridge, separates E/W traffic flow from the interchange and thus provides more E/W connectivity. Lisa Owns asked if it could make it harder for people traveling south on I-5 to get to downtown Medford. Dave Mayfield said yes, it could possibly create more out of direction travel, but the impact on VMT would be hard to calculate due to the many land use options to be integrated. Mark McQueen asked if there would be a problem at the Garfield railroad crossing, similar to the Stewart problem in the previous option. Hanks said no, because the intersection needed would be much smaller. He added that it might also require some improvements (widening) to Riverside. Mayfield noted that this was not an "avoidance" alternative.

Alternative #5: East/West Connecting Roads, One-way Couplet/Split Interchange. Hanks noted that this alternative retains the interchange and adds to it. He noted that it poses operational problems and a huge intersection is needed to make it work. He also noted possible problems in the neighborhood areas at the west end where Barnett joins Stewart. He said the CAC had problems with the two railroad crossings required and the difficulty in providing for U-turns or traffic wanting to get back to where they came from. Brian Dunn said it would be very difficult to make this alternative work

Alternative #7: South Medford Interchange, Realigned Stewart/Barnett/Garfield/Highland Connection. Hanks said this alternative is the closest to keeping the existing interchange. He said the problems lie in the close proximity of the interchange ramps to Highland. He said there were additional operational spacing problems at Center and Stewart and at Stewart/Hwy99. Brian Dunn added that the plan doesn't pull much traffic out of the interchange.

Alternative #8: Single Point Interchange concept. Realigned Barnett/Stewart. Hanks said the Crater Lake to Siskiyou component was left off the optimized map because it made the congestion worse. This alternative presents many problems, including ramp spacing problems, the requirement for a large intersection at Stewart and Barnett, and, because Stewart Barnett would be over the freeway, a very big structure would be needed. Mayfield added that this might be a wetlands and parks avoidance option.

Alternative #11: East/West Connecting Roads, Interchange at Garfield/Highland. Hanks noted that the optimized version of this alternative was significantly changed from the original with the elimination of Biddle Road, Crater Lake Ave and S. Stage Road connections, and any street connections north of Barnett Road. Hanks said it moves the interchange to the south, but keeps Barnett Road for E/W connectivity that the CAC liked. Hanks added that the local spacing is adequate with this option, but it may make the future locating of a S. Stage interchange difficult due to FHWA spacing guidelines for freeway

interchanges. There was discussion as to whether there would be adequate spacing for an intersection between South Medford and Phoenix at some point in the future. The answer is unclear. The Consultant Team will address this at the next Solution Team meeting. Mike Burrill said he hoped the group would not make a decision on an option based on just to avoid an exceptions process that it doesn't understand. Frank Stevens noted that we would come back at a later date to explain the process. (Group expressed the need for more information on this subject.) There is not much difference between this alternative (#11) and the Garfield/Ellendale (#2) alternative. When asked which was better, Mayfield said each has impacts and they are about the same in potential for congestion reduction. It was also noted that this alternative could not be constructed as a SPUI as is. The Highland Street angle of entry to the interchange would require changing, or a diamond design might be used. Barnett Road is a freeway overpass in this design.

Alternative #14: East/West Connecting Roads, One-way Couplet with Alba and Barnett. The optimized map deleted Crater Lake Ave. and the extension north from Center Drive. Neither helped in reducing congestion at the interchange. Hanks said this alternative works well with its one way couplet, also provides for N/S connectivity and requires less out of direction travel. There is some out of direction travel at the west end. Hanks said there was still uncertainty as to how this might work at Hwy 99 and at Highland. Might have to widen Barnett and possibly up Highland. Mayfield said if that were so, it would reduce the "avoidance" potential of this alternative. Mark Gallagher asked just how complex this alternative would be to drive through. Said it reminded him of the north Medford interchange. Hanks said it is not as complex as it looks so on paper. It actually reduces the number of turn options, and one-ways can be intuitive, he said. Concern was expressed that there could be a queuing problem at the east end on Barnett at Highland. Overall, the alternative adds a lot of capacity without adding an entirely new interchange. It accommodates the traffic flow.

5.0 Revising the Alternative Concepts

Dave Mayfield then asked the Solution Team to if they were prepared to come to a decision in two areas.

1. Does the Team accept the recommended changes to the seven alternatives as presented in the meeting?
2. Was the group prepared to drop four of the alternatives based on the transportation modeling results?

This led to a discussion of the need for a clear understanding of what a decision might do to future South Stage Road options, particularly a decision that would move the S. Medford Interchange to the south. Dave Mayfield said cannot resolve this question, but that it was safe to say that any move to the south would increase the risk to S. Stage's future. Mayfield reminded the group that a South Stage Road overpass or interchange would also have goals exceptions problems. Reeve Hennion said that the more important point right now is not that we don't know what some of the alternatives will do to the future, but that we know that four of the alternatives don't work from a transportation standpoint. Dave Mayfield said there were independent issues here. One issue he said is if four of the alternatives have problems that make them infeasible; the other is what the other alternatives might do to South Stage Road. At his this point, he said, we're stuck with speculation, but we will bring more information on this to the next meeting.

Mayfield then asked the group if they were comfortable with the reductions in the seven alternative designs. Jeff Griffin said he was puzzled why the street connectivity model was narrowed down. He said DLCD would be interested in looking at the process that arrived at that decision. He asked if access management, TDM, etc had been included in the modeling. Hanks said it had and further explained that detailed signal issues were key points in the

decision. The range of street improvements only worked if every component was included. Take out even one, and it fails to provide an adequate interchange solution. And several of the components would not work for operational reasons. Mayfield said it is the worst option from an environmental standpoint, which means FHWA would not see it as a feasible option when other options avoid environmental constraints.

Elton Chang added that this step in the process should focus on the traffic analysis, that the group is trying to winnow down the list of alternatives to further evaluate for environmental impact. Dave Mayfield again asked the group if it was comfortable with accepting the seven revised alternatives. The Team voted unanimously to accept the revised versions, contingent on reaffirmation of the results.

Joe Strahl then moved that Alternatives #1, #5, #7 and #8 be shelved based on their failure to solve the transportation problems at the interchange. He said that for sound transportation reasons he saw no reason they should go through further evaluation. Skip Knight said he was in favor of shelving alternative #2 as well. He said it connects Garfield with Ellendale which is not a collector and it would be politically impossible to carry out. After discussion it was decided that #2 could not be shelved for traffic reasons at this point, but that Skip made some good points that should be more fully discussed at the next Solution Team meeting.

The Team unanimously supported Strahl's motion, with Greg Holthoff saying his yes vote was contingent on the shelving being totally defensible from the completed transportation analysis.

6.0 Meeting Critique

Frank Stevens then asked each member of the Solution if they were comfortable with the meeting and the progress made. Nearly all expressed comfort with the process and the progress being made. Jim Oldland asked if the Team could get photos of the project area as before to begin to assess possible impact on businesses and other features. Mike Burrill said he was concerned for the possible impact on commercial building at the interchange area. He said the South Gateway dollars go toward Urban Renewal, which is critical for the city. Julie Brown expressed concern for the discomfort experienced by people in some of the neighborhoods during the process, but said the good side is that they got involved and it is better for the overall outcome to have the public involved. Jeff Graham said he was comfortable with the decision to shelve the four alternatives, but not comfortable with the problem of the S. Stage Road future location issue. Lisa Owens said she did not entirely understand why the local street alternative had been eliminated. Greg Holthoff said he was uncomfortable with local connectivity options being dropped. Jim Hanks said analysis of the local streets showed it's simply not a solution at the interchange, not that it's a bad idea. It could be good for Medford. Mark Gallagher said he was looking forward to doing the evaluation step on the three remaining alternatives.

7.0 Meeting Adjourned

Next meeting Wednesday March 1, 2000