

January 2002

From: Vicki Guarino

Date: Jan. 30, 2002

Attendees: Solution Team members present: Pam Lind, Dan Moore, Scott Chancey, Mike Burrill, Skip Knight, Greg Holthoff, Jim Oldland, Mark McQueen, Brian Dunn, Reeve Hennion, Mark Gallagher, Alex Georgevitch, Nick Fortey, Dale Petrasek (with Joe Strahl), Robin Marshall

CAC members present: Wade Six, Jani Hale, Mike Mahar, Mike Montero, Jean Milgram, Patty Claeys, Tim Alford, John Ferris, Jon Deason. CAC members absent: Teresa Hogan, Jim Buckley, Jane Podolsky

Re: SOLUTION TEAM and CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES FOR Jan. 29, 2002 -- Draft

Location: Red Lion Inn, Crater Lake Conference Room, Medford. Ore.

Guests: Approximately 70 members of the public.

Consultant Team Present: Jim Hanks, JRH Engineering; Mike Gallagher, Dave Mayfield, URS; Frank Stevens, Gary Leaming, ODOT; John Morrison, Vicki Guarino, RVCOG.

Call to Order

Frank Stevens called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. He recounted history of the project, noting that the Solution Team began work in January, 1998, and the CAC held its first meeting in February, 1999.

At this point in the project, more that 300 comments – containing more that 1,000 comment items – were received on the DEIS. If the Solution Team proceeds today with selecting a build alternative, the selected alternative will be forwarded into design work, which would incorporate public-comment issues into detailed project plans for the FEIS. The FEIS would be ready in 6-7 months. If the Solution Team chooses the No Build Alternative, the project would be shut down, and funding allocated for this project would be distributed to other projects around the state. The smaller projects at the interchange, identified with the No Build option, would have to compete with other highway projects for state funding.

Public Comment

Frank Stevens noted that news reports had incorrectly announced a lengthy comment period. With only limited time available, Stevens asked speakers to observe a two-minute limit.

Susan McKenzie said she has done considerable study of transportation issues. Transit is crucial and she asked the team to choose the No Build option. She said the project was only intended to justify the Garfield Road extension and southwest Medford development. Barbara Griffin read a prepared statement (attached in project file)

Jim Key read a prepared statement (attached in project file).

Mary Heath said the Highland Alternative would funnel downtown traffic to Highland. Fred Goings said the project is needed to ease congestion on Barnett. However, he suggested that freeway on-ramps on Barnett remain in use. The project is needed because the community can't stop growth, but only prepare for it.

W.L. Stevens asked the teams to consider keeping the on-ramps at Barnett to save money. Robert Cort said he supports the project because it is needed for traffic now, and the teams have examined all possible alternatives.

Carl Bartlett said that in the past other good road plans in Medford haven't been built because citizens rose up and killed them. He hoped that this time, the community will come together to solve the problem. The interchange needs to be built.

James Uri said there is no easy solution. He hopes the project will work to accommodate his business. There needs to be cooperation and support all around. There are ways to solve problems through cooperation. He asked decision makers to look into their hearts and do what is best for everyone.

Jim Potter said the first cost estimate was \$33 million, and now it's \$50 million, so how much will it cost. The build alternatives move the problem, but don't fix it. He suggested extending existing ramps while coming up with a better idea. Medford needs a third interchange.

Harry Patel said he owns a business in the area and sees that the problem is only at rush hour. All that is needed is to add traffic lanes. The build alternatives would hurt all businesses and the neighborhood.

Purpose of the Meeting

Dave Mayfield said the purpose of the meeting is to select a project alternative. He recapped the DEIS process, noting the evaluation document, which delineates how well the project's original goals are met by each of the alternatives.

DEIS Comment Summary/Discussion

Mike Gallagher introduced the DEIS Comment Summary memo (attached in file) and noted that the original comment documents were all available for examination. He concluded that the DEIS complies with NEPA and that no supplemental DEIS is needed. He noted that Highland neighborhood concerns and need for a third interchange were the most mentioned comments. He also noted an alternative proposed by the Eastside Neighborhood Association that would reroute Barnett Road south and create two SPUIs – one at Interstate 5 and the other at Hwy. 99. All comments and response will be incorporated into the FEIS. He reviewed the memo in detail, and asked for discussion.

Wade Six asked about available funding for the No Build. Frank Stevens said the project would have to compete with many other projects in this area for limited funds, so there could be a long wait for funding. Jim Hanks noted that Eugene has been waiting since 1975 for arterial funding.

John Ferris asked why the alternative offered by the Eastside Neighborhood Association would not be acceptable. Mike Gallagher and others noted environmental problems because it would take Veterans Park. Jim Hanks and Dave Mayfield noted that it would require extensive bridge structures to clear both the Interstate and the railroad tracks. Structures would conflict with other roads and a half-mile viaduct would span the gateway shopping center. Greg Holthoff noted that federal law relating to park protection requires that if a reasonable alternative that avoid park land exists it must be chosen. Others noted the historic value of the park dedicated to World War I veterans. Jon Deason said the idea shows that the existing interchange can't be fixed without going to absurd effort.

Jani Hale asked for a response from engineers to neighborhood impact concerns. Mike Gallagher said the project would include sidewalks and bike paths on Highland to Siskiyou Boulevard. Jim Hanks said the traffic analysis showed no substantial difference between the No Build and Highland alternative because traffic counts are more determined by destination than by where the interchange is located. There would be some increase because of the direct route afforded by the Highland extension, but street standards would not be exceeded. There would be about a 1 car per minute increase on Barneburg, but much of that increase is attributable to growth in general. Ultimately, residents in the area might not be able to perceive an increase.

Regarding leaving existing on ramps, often suggested by the public, traffic from existing ramps would conflict with traffic on the new ramps. Having on and off ramps at different locations also was suggested, but would be contrary to federal policies. Dave Mayfield noted that these ideas were considered, but would have caused significant environmental impacts because they would require extensive frontage roads. Greg Holthoff noted that the project would be changing in some cases to respond to public comments.

Mike Montero asked about the skateboard park and proposed bike safety facilities. Mike Gallagher said that Barnett Road would have bike paths. Dave Mayfield said the public would be involved in specifics of these features. Frank Stevens said this public involvement process would involve the CAC or a subcommittee of the CAC, and would result in improvements over existing facilities.

Tim Alford questioned traffic predicted on Highland between Barnett and Siskiyou. With 5,000 cars going through this area, there would be a big impact on Siskiyou. Jim Hanks said there would be an increase north of Siskiyou, but it would not be significant. Some of the traffic would go on Siskiyou, however, some traffic would leave Siskiyou for new better routes that would result from this project.

Jean Milgram asked why the northbound on-ramp on the north side of Barnett could not remain. Jim Hanks said it would conflict with traffic from the new interchange. It would not cause traffic problems now, but by 2030 it would be unsafe. Jon Deason asked why the ramp couldn't be kept until there is a problem. Brian Dunn said the ramp also would create traffic problems on Barnett and reduce pedestrian and bicycle benefits. Jani Hale noted that the area is terrible for pedestrians and bicyclists now. Joe Strahl noted that this could be studied further for the FEIS. Jim Hanks said he would send a copy of the traffic analysis on the ramp issue to Deason.

Mark Gallagher noted that the No Build Alternative would not meet the project's purpose statement. For that reason, could someone sue if it is chosen? Dave Mayfield said the No build is viable under NEPA.

Wade Six asked how the purpose and need statements relate to projected traffic impacts at Highway 99 intersections. Mike Gallagher said all goals do not have to be met, but the Build Alternatives met key goals.

Regulatory Compliance Summary/Discussion

Mike Gallagher introduced the Regulatory Compliance summary (document attached in file) and reviewed key elements. He noted that additional local approvals would be required.
(break)

Evaluation Criteria & DEIS Impact Summary/Discussion

Mike Gallagher introduced the Evaluation Criteria developed by the Solution Team two years ago, and the summary of environmental impacts. He reviewed both documents in detail, noting that the impacts summary contains recent changes and corrections. Frank Stevens noted that there were other, feasible alternatives developed that would have had significant neighborhood impacts. Neighborhood concerns are reflected in the criteria, which were adjusted after CAC and public comments, to give neighborhood issues added weight. Nick Forty asked about traffic impacts from both the regional and local traffic perspectives. Jim Hanks said the traffic flows would be very similar on the Highland and Ellendale scenarios. Local traffic would be able to use Barnett to reach local destinations because the road would be less congested by Interstate traffic, which would use separate access at the SPUI.

Jani Hale asked for details about impacts to the Highland Apartments. Mike Gallagher noted that some landscaping is in the Highland right-of-way, so it would seem that the project would be encroaching. But the project would not actually displace the apartments, according to more recent, detailed road planning. Gallagher said this is an adverse impact to the apartments, but Alex Georgevitch suggested that it was not an adverse impact because the area would get a sidewalk.

John Ferris asked for a description of the sound wall (Ellendale Alternative). Mike Gallagher said it would be on the north side of Ellendale Drive. Frank Stevens said it would be pre-cast concrete, 10 feet tall and about 1,400 feet long.

Jani Hale asked whether the cost estimates for the Ellendale Alternative included relocation of residents. Mike Gallagher said no, those costs would be additional. Frank Stevens said that because the low-income housing that would be taken is in short supply in Medford, the project might have to build new low income housing to mitigate the loss.

CAC Discussion/Recommendation of Selected Alternative

John Morrison thanked Citizens Advisory Committee members for all the time they have volunteered for this project. He distributed ballots for their recommendation to the Solution Team and asked for discussion.

Jon Deason said he would speak for himself and not as the chairman of the CAC. He said he joined the group out of respect for the new way of traffic planning, as distinct from the old way of putting together the engineers and the power elite. This process has been public and open. The car is threatening the community, and he had considered the No Build as a way to stop the car. After listening to the engineers, he would vote for Highland. He noted the conflict between listening to the public and voting on an alternative people have spoken out against. He reconciled the conflict by stepping back and seeing his role as representing all users, including people who don't come to meetings. Regarding listening to people who do come to meetings and responding to them, there are potential damaging impacts that will have to be dealt with. The Barnett Road interchange can't be fixed and other ideas didn't work. The city has a responsibility to mitigate the Highland impacts.

John Morrison noted that CAC members do not have to announce their vote. Deason announced that Patty Claeys had to leave early but wanted everyone know that she had cast her ballot for Highland.

Mike Mahar praised Deason as chair of the CAC, which represents a wide cross-section of the community. He noted that he is a property owner who could benefit by the project. He is convinced that building an interchange at South Stage Road is an answer, but not the

best answer. The best alternatives are before the group today. He said the project should commit to helping the people who will be impacted. He would vote for Highland.

Mike Montero said he would vote for Highland. The process has taught him that transportation planning is complex. All members of the CAC are concerned for people who would be adversely impacted, and he hoped future planning would lessen impacts, especially the joint CAC, neighborhood, city and ODOT effort to minimize impacts.

John Ferris noted the growing valley and traffic studies showing that even the No Build has substantial neighborhood impacts. Congestion increases on Barnett will increase the traffic into neighborhoods. He owns property in the area of the Highland Alternative and he likes the design of the Highland Alternative and believes it is the best choice.

Wade Six said he staffed the No Build information area at the last open house and talked to visitors about the implications of this choice. He noticed that those who favored the No Build either opposed growth – often saying they had moved here but didn't want anyone else to come – or have concluded that the project's purpose has been to benefit a select group. He said those who might benefit are generally people who are trying to improve the community. The project is not a band-aid. There will be more growth and more traffic. It will lead to more sprawl if congestion forces business out to rural areas. It would be better to confine development. Also, South Medford serves important employers. The project would foster orderly growth and the community would get and keep jobs and schools. He suggested that if this process were to be repeated elsewhere that someone from the local newspaper be named to the committee to assure accurate, timely reporting. At this point the city should be very open about its plans for arterial streets specifically a link between Delta Waters Road and Highland Drive. The project also has to assure safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Jani Hale said she has been most concerned about impacts on kids. As a 4th generation valley native she has been concerned about a lack of an overall image for the valley in 30 years. At times she has been uncomfortable thinking the CAC was window dressing. Her ties to the community make the decision difficult. She is concerned that facts have been overshadowed by emotion and fears of development. Comparing this project to a project on Stewart Road that did not include sidewalks because of small opposition, she was concerned that small opposition destroys a project that could have greater benefits.

CAC members filed written ballots, which were tabulated by Frank Stevens with Wade Six and Mike Gallagher assisting. All nine ballots were cast for the Highland Alternative. Three ballots included comments read aloud by Stevens. Stevens said ballots would be made part of the project record. (Originals subsequently turned over to RVCOG). Stevens said safety around the park would be an important issue in project design.

Solution Team Discussion/Decision on Selected Alternative

Frank Stevens noted the broad makeup of the team and read the agreement that all team members signed when they joined. He asked for discussion.

Alex Georgevitch responded to CAC concerns about Medford street plans by noting that the city was about to begin its Transportation System Plan. It will be an open, public process and he asked people to remain involved in such planning. He disagreed with people who say the interchange project has not been open. It has been as open and public as any project he has been involved with.

Mike Burrill commended ODOT for including so many people with such diverse interests in the planning process.

Reeve Hennion agreed with Burrill and noted that many citizens have been involved throughout the project and he thanked them for their efforts. If hard decisions about roads had been made 40 years ago the community would have these problems. If hard decisions are not made now the problem will be extended to 30-40 years. This project is a step to solving traffic problems.

Greg Holthoff said the process has been good and thanked the CAC members and the public for their help

Skip Knight thanked the CAC for serving on the front line in the project. This is just a piece of the solution. There is a need to look long term to provide for both the city's growth and the growing number of people doing business in Medford.

Joe Strahl said the process has been good and that the many alternatives considered were all rejected for good reasons. All road projects create impacts, including the No Build. Highland is the best alternative because it represents a balanced need and has the least impact.

Dan Moore said he appreciated the CAC. Highland best meets the need and regulatory requirements and has the least impact.

Mark McQueen thanked the CAC. He said he grew up in some of the affected neighborhoods. In the past, good plans were not built, creating many of today's problems, so No Build is not a solution. The Highland Alternative will make the area more livable.

Mark Gallagher thanked consultants. The city already has identified the Highland-Garfield crossing, and this project works well with that plan.

Jim Oldland said he comes from a business background and believes money spent on this project will be well spent.

Scott Chancey said No Build is not an option.

Pam Lind said livability is a big issue for citizens. This is an opportunity to enhance pedestrian, bicycle and park facilities.

Nick Forty said the most important feature has been the active CAC and the full discussion of all issues. Regarding project design, he likes the way it would sort out local and regional traffic.

Brain Dunn said engineers would not have come up with this plan, that it reflects citizen involvement and local issues. He appreciated the process.

The Solution Team cast written ballots. Frank Stevens tabulated the results with Wade Six and Mike Gallagher assisting. All 15 ballots were cast for the Highland Alternative. Stevens read aloud comments written on 7 ballots. He said the ballots, including those with comments will be made part of the project record. (Originals subsequently turned over to RVCOG.)

Stevens announced that the Solution Team had identified Highland as the Selected Alternative. A document will be prepared for ODOT acknowledgement. Subteams will be organized to refine the plan for the FEIS. Public input will continue to be important and community meetings will be organized.

Reeve Hennion commended Frank Stevens' leadership and prompted a standing ovation.

Meeting Critique

Frank Stevens asked Solution Team and CAC members to critique the meeting. Jani Hale said the solution was a good one and she was ready to continue work.

Mike Mahar agreed.

Brian Dunn said he appreciated the volume of information

Dan Moore called today's votes a watershed event.

Reeve Hennion thanked ODOT for a well-run process that brought in the public.

Joe Strahl said he appreciate the effort.

Dale Petrasek said he is ready to continue work on the project.

Pan Lind said the project has had good leadership and a good process.

Alex Georgevitch said he was proud to be part of the process and looked forward to going on with the project.

Mike Montero commended ODOT for its flexibility, including altering the planned format of today's meeting to permit unscheduled additional public comment. He suggested a recommendation to the OTC to endorse the open process used in this project.

Skip Knight said he was happy with the process, especially in comparison to the way decisions were made here in the 1950s, when a few power brokers made the decisions. The open process will lead to better transportation systems.

Robin Marshall said she got a lot out of the process. AAA had never been involved in such a process before, but now wants it to be considered in other areas around the U.S. Scott Chancey said the meeting had been a good one, and he looked forward to the project design stages.

Jean Milgram said she had been worried that the project would wreck beautiful neighborhoods, but that after she watched the video she saw the project as a positive thing.

Mark McQueen thought the problem had been thoroughly investigated and the process was good.

Mike Burrill said the deck was not ever stacked – that many different opinions were considered. Everyone had courage to make a good decision. He recalled a time when he was the only non-ODOT person working on ODOT projects and there is a place for non-technical people on highway projects.

Jon Deason said he already spoke.

Jim Oldland said he appreciated ODOT's efforts.

Greg Holthoff said the process has been grueling. He was comfortable with the result, but there is a lot of work left to do.

John Ferris said he came into the process skeptical, but found that his concerns were not justified. He learned a lot from the process and the project is needed.

Wade Six thanked ODOT. He was adverse to the project for a while, but now sees the need, and sees the overall long-term impacts.

Frank Stevens acknowledged the contributions of the consultants and hundreds of others who have contributed to the project.

Frank Stevens adjourned the meeting at 1:05 p.m.