

## **March 2001**

**From:** Vicki Guarino

**Date:** March 9, 2001

**Attendees:** Solution Team members present: Pam Lind, Dan Moore, Andreas Paulsen (for Julie Brown), Mike Burrill, Skip Knight, Greg Holthoff, Jim Oldland, Mark McQueen, Brian Dunn, Reeve Hennion, Mark Gallagher, Eric Niemeyer, Alex Georgevitch, Mark Ashby, Frank Stevens

Members absent: Robin Marshall, Jeff Graham, Julie Brown

**Re: SOLUTION TEAM MEETING MINUTES FOR March 7, 2001 -- Approved**

**Location:** ODOT Conference Room B&C, 200 Antelope Rd., White City.

**Guests:** Bon Dysart, Laurie Dysart, Bob Dysart, Pat Oldenburg, Tom Oldenburg, Pat Healy, Edward Healey, Barbara Davidson.

### **Consultant Team Present:**

John Morrison, RVCOG; Mike Gallagher, URS; Frank Stevens, ODOT.

### **1.0 Call to Order**

Frank Stevens called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. Minutes of the Dec. 6, 2000, Solution Team meeting were approved without comment

### **2.0 Public Comment**

Frank Stevens asked if there were any citizen comment. There was none. He said there would be another opportunity for comment later in the meeting.

### **3.0 Purpose of the Meeting**

Frank Stevens said the team would be reviewing evaluation criteria, and deciding whether members were comfortable identifying a preferred alternative at this point in the evaluation process.

Mike Gallagher said that by identifying an alternative now, the project could proceed with a simpler Environmental Assessment rather than Environmental Impact Statement. However, staff recommends that a full Environmental Impact Statement be done because the selection decision is not clear cut at this time – both alternatives may pose important impacts. The team could indicate a preferred alternative now, and proceed with the EIS on both alternatives.

### **4.0 Project Overview**

Mike Gallagher reviewed the process that was used to develop project goals and criteria for measuring whether the alternatives meet stated goals. Both remaining alternatives (Highland and Ellendale) meet the goals and come out equal in many respects, particularly with respect to several traffic criteria. Gallagher presented and reviewed an evaluation criteria chart, which describes the goals, and generally compares the two alternatives using preliminary data generated from project studies. Distinctions occurred in assessing the environmental goals. Regarding social impact, low-income housing, Ellendale poses substantially greater impact because a road would go through low-income retirement housing, and would have greater impact on residential areas in general. Also, the Ellendale alternative would put more road in the floodway, create more impervious surface, encroach

more on habitat, and conflict more with Rogue Valley Manor development plans. For traffic, the Ellendale alternative would likely create more out-of-direction travel for local motorists. Costs are substantially greater because of the bridging needed in and around Bear Creek. Gallagher noted that costs have increased substantially from previous estimates because of new federal requirements regarding flood plane and habitat protection. Less fill will be allowed than earlier expected, so bridges will have to be larger. Building the Highland alternative now is estimated to cost \$43.9 million, and the Ellendale alternative would be \$57.2 million.

Skip Knight questioned cost-estimating processes that have resulted in steadily increasing costs for this project. Original estimates were \$30 million. Frank Stevens said the first estimates were really guesses based on generalities about interchange-construction costs nationwide. Only as more is learned about the project through this planning process can costs be more accurately identified. Also, this new increase is mostly related to the new federal standards for building in waterways. Estimates will change again as planning continues. Solution Team members discussed how all of this costing information needs to be presented to the public, so that the public isn't surprised by rising estimates. Stevens and Gallagher noted that estimates are still very rough because they are based on planning that is only about 5 percent completed. Knight suggested that perhaps estimates should be made on the high side at the start of the planning process; then they could be reduced as planning precedes. Dan Moore cautioned that if estimates are too high they skew the planning process: in budgeting, money would have to be set aside unnecessarily, reducing the pool of available money for other projects. Other important projects might have to be abandoned unnecessarily with that kind of budgeting practice.

Regarding the fishery impact, Gallagher said the impact to Bear Creek amounts to .5-acre more in the Ellendale plan. National Marine Fisheries would likely consider that amount of difference to be important. Ellendale also would have greater impacts on the Bear Creek bike path.

Noise impact, a new criterion, finds Ellendale with a higher impact. Construction of noise walls would not help.

Mark Ashby noted that protecting low-income housing is important in transportation project guidelines regionally and locally.

Mike Gallagher said the environmental study no longer includes proposing elements related to public transit – bus stops and routes. However, the project is being designed to accommodate bus stops, which can be included in the final plan.

Skip Knight asked for further discussion of the cost estimating and rising costs. He wondered if inflation has been factored into the new estimates, and was concerned that the public will think the team is inept because the estimates were not more accurate. It was noted that the new estimates include large amounts for contingencies. Mark Gallagher said the estimates have been accurate and that the new figures are almost totally the result of the new federal requirements.

## **5.0 Feedback from Citizen Advisory Committee**

John Morrison reported that CAC members had been concerned about the project because traffic studies indicated that project alternatives would not solve all the traffic problems in the area. So at the last meeting Dan Moore presented information about other projects planned in South Medford. After being shown a bigger picture of traffic planning, CAC members were more satisfied with the interchange project. Regarding the selection of an

alternative, the CAC wanted to know how they would have input to the Solution Team in advance of the team's decision. CAC meetings have been well attended and members remain interested the project.

### **Continued Discussion of Project Overview**

Brian Dunn cautioned against a detailed focus on traffic-flow projections because developments such as traffic lights and side streets also impact traffic increases. A forecast showing a 20 percent increase in 20 years is not substantial; a 50 percent increase might be substantial. Alex Georgevitch said elsewhere in Medford, actual traffic volumes have not been as high as projections made even 10 years ago said they would be.

### **6.0 Discussion of Whether to Choose a Preferred Alternative**

Mike Gallagher recommended against continuing with the simpler EA process because of the significance of potential impacts with either alternative.

Mike Burrill made a motion to identify Highland Drive Alternative as the preferred connector alternative. Skip Knight seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Mark Gallagher asked what effect a preference vote now would have on the EIS. Mike Gallagher said a vote would not change the scope of the DEIS, but merely indicate a direction that the project is taking. The vote would not mean that the Solution Team would ultimately select Highland. Mike and Frank Stevens noted that the vote on the table would be for a preferred alternative, not a selected alternative.

It was noted that three Solution Team members were absent.

Dan Moore said regardless of the vote, both alternatives would continue to be studied, and that the Solution Team was just identifying the alternative that is preferred at this point.

### **7.0 Vote on a Preferred Alternative**

All members of the Solutions Team present voted "yes" to identify Highland Drive as the preferred alternative, with Greg Holthoff abstaining. Holthoff said he was abstaining because some traffic analysis data has not been examined.

### **8.0 Citizen Input**

Tom Oldenburg asked for the "no build" alternative to remain under study. Frank Stevens said the option must always remain under consideration under federal law.

Bon Dysart asked about traffic projections on Siskiyou. Mike Gallagher said studies indicate that both build alternatives would draw traffic from Siskiyou to Barnett because Barnett would become less congested. However, more traffic data is needed.

Pat Oldenburg said she was concerned that money spent now would influence future Interstate 5 expansion decisions. If I-5 has to be widened, she doesn't want the new lanes to run over Medford as does the existing viaduct. Frank Stevens said I-5 may eventually have to be widened to six lanes, but by then other traffic solutions may have been created. Also, traffic would have to increase substantially before expanding the interstate would become an issue.

Barbara Davidson asked about the safety of children around Bear Creek Park, along Highland Drive. Mike Gallagher said that is part of the socio-economic impacts analyzed for both alternatives.

## **9.0 Solution Team Comfort Check**

Members were asked whether they were comfortable with the process, especially with the vote just taken. All members said they were. Greg Holthoff said he is fairly comfortable except for the absence of the Federal Highway Administration representative from the Solution Team meeting.

Holthoff also wondered whether Ellendale now should be eliminated from the EIS process. Mike Gallagher said Ellendale should remain under study because there remains a high level of public concern, and there are public issues that need to be addressed. Frank Stevens said there is no greater cost associated with keeping Ellendale in the EIS process. Also, at the end of the process the Solution team would have to be able to justify its elimination of Ellendale.

Brian Dunn said the comfort with vote reflects the extent and high quality of the work that already has gone into the project.

Pam Lind said the quality of the work made Solution Team members comfortable with the vote.

Frank Stevens praised Solution Team members for their efforts during the planning processes

The next meeting of the Solution Team will be May 2, close to the time that the DEIS is due to be published. The meeting was adjourned.