

September 2000

From: Kathy Helmer, Rogue Valley Council of Governments

Date: October 3, 2000

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

Re: CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CAC) MEETING DRAFT MINUTES for SEPTEMBER 27, 2000

Location: Scottish Rite Center, 955 N. Phoenix Road, Medford, OR

Guests: Twenty-three members of the public.

Project Team: Frank Stevens, ODOT; Paul Coffelt, JRH; John Morrison and Kathy Helmer, RVCOG.

1. Introduction/Approval of Minutes

John Morrison convened the meeting at 5:40 PM. He welcomed the CAC, members of the public and introduced Paul Coffelt, Transportation Engineer, JRH. He reviewed the agenda. Meeting objectives were: 1) to review project progress; 2) to review progress on outreach to business and property owners; and 3) to discuss developments regarding the shelving of the Couplet alternative.

The June 21, 2000 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

2. Section 4(f) issues and the Couplet alternative

Dave Mayfield updated the CAC on progress to date. At the June 2000, CAC meeting, CAC members had been concerned about issues raised about the Couplet alternative. Since then, traffic studies of the Couplet had continued, but written reports had not been produced. Dave referred to the letter received from Steve Pfeiffer, an Oregon land use attorney, regarding the Couplet alternative and noted that Pfeiffer had made a compelling point regarding the importance of considering other federal regulations and their relative weight vis-à-vis 4(f) issues. After more traffic studies have been completed, there will be more discussion of those regulations. Studies of that alternative's ability to solve the transportation problem are continuing. They are not yet complete, but Paul Coffelt was present to share some preliminary information on the three alternatives.

3. Project Update and Schedule Review

Dave explained that traffic modeling was delaying the project. Modeling will project beyond the year 2020 to 2030, in a special effort to ensure the long-term viability of the solutions. Paul Coffelt explained that the team had decided it would be best to start the modeling with an analysis of each alternative in the year 2030. Traffic volumes are based on the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and revised in concert with ODOT's Transportation Planning Analysis Unit (TPAU) to arrive at a 2030 model. Those volumes were then projected onto the No Build and three alternatives.

Paul began with the 2030 No Build scenario. This reflects the development of buildable lands. He indicated that major intersections in the S. Medford Interchange area would fail

with respect to level of service. Regarding the southbound I-5 off ramp, queuing would extend back to and onto the Interstate.

Turning to the analysis of the alternatives, Paul explained that in each instance the questions to be answered were: "How does this alternative help solve the transportation problem?"; and "What can be done to mitigate problems foreseen for the year 2030?"

He first reviewed the analysis of the Couplet alternative in the year 2030. If implemented as currently designed, several main intersections would fail in 2030. After mitigation, including the addition of several new lanes, there would still be failing intersections. It would be difficult, spatially, to add the number of turning lanes, etc., required to mitigate the problems with this alternative. Paul concluded by saying that this alternative was problematic; the details would be presented in the final traffic analysis.

With respect to the Highland alternative, as currently designed, some major intersections would fail in the year 2030. While mitigation would be required, it would not be as extensive as that required by the Couplet.

Tim Alford asked if it made sense to upgrade several intersections and push them into a failing intersection. If it were not fixed now, it would have to be fixed at a later date. Dave noted that the information presented was from a technical traffic engineering perspective. Dialogue between CAC, community and engineering perspectives needed to occur before reaching conclusions. Also, the modeling only includes transportation projects that are highly likely to be built, not all the projects in the 20-year plan, so that makes the traffic analysis a "worst case" analysis. In all likelihood, other transportation "fixes" would be constructed to work in concert with the South Medford Interchange Project.

Regarding the Ellendale alternative, Paul noted that it appeared to push traffic further south and that the mitigation of failing intersections would occur further south than in the other alternatives. The projected traffic volumes along Barnett were similar in the Highland and Ellendale alternatives. The Ellendale alternative required the least extensive mitigation.

Paul concluded with the fact that all alternatives were still being studied. Basic conclusions about the alternatives were not likely to change considerably. In general, the Highland and Ellendale alternatives were less of a mitigation problem than the Couplet alternative.

Dave noted that the study was a work in progress. The issue of route width is clearly an issue from the livability standpoint. The 2020 scenario was easier to solve than the 2030 scenario. The team will look at the Couplet alternative to see if it can be saved. He noted that the 4(f) issue is of less consequence if the Couplet does not solve the transportation problem. The project may need to weigh Endangered Species Act regulations against 4(f) regulations. If the Couplet stays in the mix, the previously recommended park access alignment, which is favored by the City of Medford, should be revisited.

Jean Milgram noted that the problems seemed to emerge with the 2030 scenario. By then, the city would certainly have added another interchange, making the current modeling outdated. Dave responded that the modeling was being done because it was important not to create problems with this project.

Mike Montero said he would feel more comfortable when the project had quantified all the information. Pfeiffer's letter had raised lots of questions and issues regarding the set of pertinent regulations. He said that the group needed to look at the pure traffic study and then overlay community livability concerns.

Dave noted that if the Couplet didn't work, the full set of studies associated with that alternative would not be conducted. The Solution Team must decide whether or not it should be put back into the overall study.

John Ferris said that, given the number of lanes required for mitigation of the Couplet, it was just not buildable. Dave noted that there could be livability issues with such a large area of asphalt in town. He said he was confident that the project could solve the problems with the other two alternatives. Paul said that the Couplet also had other problems with heavy weaving that could not occur safely.

Tim Alford stressed the importance of not creating new bottlenecks on the periphery by focusing so closely on one specific existing bottleneck.

Jim Buckley noted that over the next 20 to 30 years, new things would feed into this traffic issue that might blow the numbers out of the water. Dave agreed that many potential improvements were not included in the model, since funding had not yet been committed to them. The picture looked bleaker than it would actually be.

Mike Montero noted that a Gap Analysis was being conducted on state, arterial and county roads. With minor investments, big connectivity options could be created. This looks bleak now, but it shows that we need to get into proactive planning.

Pointing to all the housing going in and the in-fill development, Jim Buckley suggested that the hospital and Bear Creek Corp. would be served by S. Stage Road over-crossing. It would give people an alternative to going through failing intersections. He suggested that the Highland alternative should have a northbound, free-flowing lane towards the hospital to unload traffic efficiently.

4. Outreach to Business and Property Owners

John Morrison explained that the purpose of the outreach effort was to contact businesses that might be impacted by any of the three alternatives. He said that business owners were grateful for the effort to personally contact them. Many still had not heard enough about the project details. Business owners in the area of the Couplet alternative were very concerned with continued access by their customers and with their own visibility. In the area of the Ellendale alternative, business owners were concerned by limited turning possibilities and what that would mean to their businesses.

5. Public Comment Period

One lady suggested that there were no problems with existing traffic at the Interchange and that the existing ramp should be retained for a right turn.

Another lady said she was present because the project affects livability. People are concerned for each other as a community. ODOT looks at the 30-year vision, but these are Band-Aid approaches. What is needed is a long-term vision. The project should use the S. Stage Road area as an interchange. She encouraged the project team to put the S. Stage Road interchange idea back on the table. Mike Montero responded that that idea was in the Regional Transportation Plan, but that it didn't work for this transportation problem. It might be viable in the future.

A gentleman asked if a S. Stage Road alternative would be put into jeopardy by construction of a proposed new interchange, given the rule regarding spacing of interchanges. Dave Mayfield responded that interchange spacing was not the most

important problem facing the S. Stage Road Interchange, one being the demonstration that it would not compromise function of the interstate system.

Susan Hand spoke. She asked if Medford had authorized the additional \$200,000 to continue this planning effort. The City had already put out \$1.5 million; its contribution was capped at \$5 million. The modeling was good to see, but it didn't project a regional multi-model transportation plan. She said that we could just write our tax check out to ODOT. Traffic comes from the whole region into Medford; it's not okay for taxpayers to pay for failing intersections. She asked why the new standards for mobility weren't being given to the CAC? She said that she wanted to be supportive, but the project team would have to help her be so.

A gentleman said that Medford made a mistake in placing I-5. He suggested building an elevated T-shaped deck of two lanes over Barnett in the Interchange area to move traffic between Highway 99W and the Highland area. This would be adding another layer straight out from the bridge.

Another lady said that she lived in the Ellendale area where they had signed a petition against the Ellendale alternative and had presented it to City Council. A copy was given to RVCOG for distribution to the CAC and she wanted to be sure that the CAC had received it. John told her that they had.

Bon Dysart said he assumed that the project had resolution on ideas that had come up before. Dave said that such ideas were forwarded to the team's engineers for their review. Jim's idea had been reviewed and was found to not work.

One lady said that there had to be a better solution that did not affect so many people. Dave noted that the long-range view of traffic in Medford is not good. One of the reasons for that is that the transportation network reflects what a community wants and how it votes. Transit needs support at the community level. He explained that this project has a singular purpose and that there are other venues for the bigger picture work. This project needs to make sure that it is compatible with those other efforts. He encouraged those present to get involved in the bigger picture.

Another person noted that widening Barnett would be difficult because it is already in people's front yards. Would homes have to be demolished to make it six lanes? That would be more expensive than going somewhere else. Dave noted that there were some heavy private property impacts associated with the Ellendale alternative.

Susan Hand said that residents live there and know what is there. It's hard to be confident that they are putting the money in the right place. She asked what ODOT was doing about the southbound off ramp project. Frank answered that ODOT had run out of money to do that project.

Susan asked if it was true that northern cities like Portland were taking funds away from our ability to plan. Frank responded that we have \$18 million to address more than \$400 million of projects. If this planning process moves ahead, then we will be able to get this project on the funding map.

A gentleman reinforced the idea of the elevated T by saying that it would take away the failing intersection at Stewart and Alba.

6. CAC Comfort Check

At this point, John Morrison asked each CAC members to say how comfortable they were with the process.

Jon Deason said he was not comfortable. They had received so much number-wise and that he was waiting for the final numbers to come in. He was glad that people were bringing up the S. Stage Road idea again.

Mark Bailey said that things have been heating up and he loved the comments from the public. He appreciated the effort to reach out to businesses in the area.

John Ferris said that something needs to be done about the problem and that public transportation needs to be looked at. He would like to better understand the analysis of the alternatives.

Jane Podolski said that no matter what we decide to do, in 25 – 30 years, we'd be in trouble if we keep growing at this rate.

Tim Alford said that he wanted to look more at the factual data. He noted that the group needs to do something. He empathized with the potential impacts on people. Whatever we do, he said, would be shortsighted if we didn't look at a complete by-pass, an overall strategy, especially in view of land use. Let's not shoot ourselves in the feet by not looking at the big picture.

Mike Montero said that he was comfortable with the process, but not comfortable over all. He said that the project was going to make more people look seriously at transportation. This may make us wake up about the lack of transit and public transportation. We didn't make good decisions in the past. The challenge is to put in policies that give us flexibility and that the community will support.

Jim Buckley said he was not comfortable with where the project now is. He said that we're dealing with mistakes make 40 –50 years ago. Business people are saying don't close off the ramps. As the city grows, we're moving south and east. That calls for a combination of a southern Interchange and S. Stage Road over-crossing. People need to step outside the box and look at what's good for the city as a whole.

7. Adjournment

John Morrison adjourned the meeting at 7:35 PM.