

RVACT *Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation*

**155 N. 1st Street • P.O. Box 3275 • Central Point, Oregon 97502 • 541-664-6674
FAX 541-664-7927**

To: Members, Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation

From: Kathy Helmer, RVCOG

Re: Summary of September 13, 2005, RVACT Meeting, Grants Pass City Hall

Date: September 13, 2005

Members and Alternates in Attendance: Arthur Anderson and John Vial, ODOT; David Gilmour and Dale Petrusek, Jackson County; John Morrison, Ashland; Jim Raffenburg, Josephine Co.; Tom Humphrey, Central Point; Skip Knight, Medford and MPO Policy; Marian Telerski, Talent; Royal Gasso, Gold Hill; Rich Fahey and Laurel Samson, Grants Pass; Vicki Bear, Phoenix; Ken Johnson, Rogue River; Ernest Garb, RVTD; Craig Stone, Stacey Kellenbeck, Mike Montero, Richard Smith and Jeff Hunter, private sector representatives from Jackson and Josephine Counties.

Members Absent: Butte Falls; Cave Junction; Eagle Point; Jacksonville; Shady Cove.

Staff: Mike Baker, Lisa Cortes, Paul Mather and Gary Leaming, ODOT; Kathy Helmer, RVCOG.

Other: Craig Anderson, RVTD; Damian Mann, Mail Tribune.

1. Roll Call

Co-Chair Mike Montero asked all participants to introduce themselves. A quorum was present.

2. Approval of Minutes

Members requested no corrections to the minutes of the July 12, 2005 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes as written passed unanimously.

3. Public Input

There was no public comment. Art Anderson announced that the Hwy 238 Jacksonville project had been awarded a National Partnership for Highway Quality (NPHQ) Award for the state of Oregon. The award reflected on the fine efforts of the city, ODOT and RVACT.

4. Connect Oregon

Paul Mather referred members to the handout on Connect Oregon. At this point in time, many details of the program still must be developed. The OTC will adopt the process to be used for selecting projects in October. RVACT will be involved in proposing projects for this program. The OTC will ultimately select the projects to be funded. The applications will likely be due in January and the projects selected by spring 2006. Paul will report further on this program at the next RVACT meeting.

5. Earmark Approvals

Paul Mather also reported to the group on earmarked funds. The earmarked funds for the Fern Valley Interchange are among the most notable being given to our region. Paul noted that Oregon has done well in this earmark process. In the past, Oregon would receive 90 cents on the dollar sent to the federal government. With this bill, Oregon is receiving about 101 cents on the dollar sent. Mike Montero asked if there was a schedule for determining when the funds would be used. Paul answered that it would still be several months; the first step is for FHWA to complete the interpretation of the bill.

6. South Medford Interchange

Art Anderson gave a PowerPoint presentation on the South Medford Interchange, including background on why a new interchange was needed and the Environmental Impact Study that ultimately resulted in a preferred solution. Art provided information explaining the increases between the original and current cost estimates. He then shared a set of five scenarios that focused on funding the difference between the two estimates. Art said that ODOT wanted RVACT's approval for how the differences are covered. ODOT favors Scenario 1 over the others because it does not impact STIP projects and there is potential for backfilling on the Hwy 62 project in the future. Art said that the region needs to focus on keeping the South Medford Interchange project viable, since growth and congestion must be addressed. Not constructing the interchange is not an option. After his presentation, Art asked the group to discuss the issue.

David Gilmour expressed his concern that reallocating funds from the Hwy 62 project to the South Medford Interchange project would have a cascading effect on the funding of other projects in the future. He was also concerned that delays in the construction of Hwy 62 would result in increased costs to construct that project. Paul Mather responded that it was hard to provide assurances or opinions, since the Hwy 62 project solution had not been identified. Certainly it would be expensive and phased in over time. Fortunately, Hwy 62 is one of five projects statewide selected to receive any leftover funding from the state bridge program. Paul said that it was hoped that federal funds would help relieve the problem over time.

Skip Knight asked if ODOT would advocate pulling back on the Hwy 62 EIS process. Art Anderson said there was no reason to do that because the process was already funded by the federal government.

Laurel Samson asked if following Scenario 1 would automatically put Hwy 62 at the front of the list for receiving modernization or other funds from the RVACT. If so, all funds would be going for Medford projects and projects in other communities would not happen. She did not support that idea. Rich Fahey seconded that idea, saying that they wanted their Hwy 199 project to be

safe. Art replied that large pots of money would be tapped for Hwy 62. The OTC had approved the funds for Hwy 199 and they were “locked in”.

Mike Montero suggested that members were nervous about the predictability of the three sources of funding in Scenario 1. He suggested that it would be helpful to articulate the phasing for Hwy 62, along with any additional information that could be brought to bear on the funding sources. He reminded members that RVACT had quickly responded to the safety issues on Hwy 199 by reallocating funds and hoped that they would be as cooperative on this issue.

Stacey Kellenbeck asked about the idea of looking at increasing system development charges (SDCs) in Medford. Art Anderson responded that ODOT had signed an intergovernmental agreement with the city several years ago about their costs and the city was not interested in revisiting it. Stacey said she was curious about the relative burden of SDCs in the region’s cities and thought that it should be considered.

Vicki Bear said that it made her nervous to count on funds that might not materialize. She asked how the remaining bridge funds were to be distributed. Paul Mather said he had no information on how they would be distributed and that the amount remaining would not be known until February. Craig Stone agreed that it made him nervous, too, but that it was the kind of thing that had to be done on a regular basis to keep the process moving.

Tom Humphrey noted that Hwy 62 would be approved incrementally and reallocating its funding made sense. The benefits would go to many jurisdictions in the region.

Stacey Kellenbeck asked if RVACT might be penalized in some way for reallocating funds for Hwy 62 and Paul Mather said that it was hard to comment so far in advance, but he did not project any penalty.

John Morrison noted that when the South Medford Interchange Solutions Team decided to move ahead with the project, cost was part of the decision-making process. In 1999, the estimate was \$30 million and in 2005, it is \$83 million. Would the group have made the same decision today? John said he was not comfortable with the cost and wondered if there was another option.

Mike Montero said they were forced to do an alternatives analysis on the options. Forecasted growth would be even harder to deal with later than now and that was the same for the entire region. If a remedy wasn’t found, the region would be in bad shape, especially with respect to issues like air quality.

Paul Mather told the group that they were not being asked to make a decision today. There were lots of unknowns and this discussion was a good way to start approaching the problem.

Ernest Garb said that the unreliability of the estimates was making people uncomfortable. Taking funds from Hwy 62 was easy, but Hwy 62 would not take care of itself; it would face the same problems.

Jim Raffenburg said that the size of the cost increases did not explain why the increases had happened. He asked if there had been any discussion of scaling back the costs. The increases

were far beyond simple rising costs; there were real design issues. Art Anderson responded that ODOT was “value engineering” the project along the way, scaling back on costs as feasible.

Skip Knight noted that while the group could not control things like gas prices, it could control where funds were put. The South Medford Interchange and Fern Valley projects were best for the region. Skip held that Hwy 62 would not be built until 2025 and by then, most roads would be built via public/private partnerships and they would be toll roads.

John Morrison asked for other options to be presented, ones that did not assume that the goal was to find extra funds to pay additional costs. What would happen if some things were cut out? It would be good to have as many options on the table as possible.

This topic will be revisited at the next RVACT meeting. A decision is needed by January 2006, so there is time for a good discussion of options.

7. 06 – 09 STIP Approval and 08 – 11 STIP Update

Mike Baker presented information on the recently approved STIP, providing members with a listing and description of all projects. He said he would be working with the JJTC and MPO to solicit new projects for the 08 – 11 STIP.

8. Break

9. List of Acronyms and OTIA III Aesthetics Outreach

Art Anderson presented a glossary of transportation-related acronyms to members. Regarding the Aesthetics Outreach, Art mentioned that RVACT input on bridge aesthetics would be solicited by a team that was holding special meetings in the state geared to designing context sensitive bridges. Skip Knight mentioned that bridges in the Southwest were particularly attractive. Art Anderson said that it was not much more expensive to create more attractive bridges and that they could draw people to the community.

10. Transportation Planning Rule Update

Mike Baker referred members to the two flow charts in their meeting packet. The flow charts depict the process for reviewing plan amendments inside and outside interchange areas. These draft charts will be reviewed and an explicit narrative developed to explain each step. Art Anderson said they were intended to help “non-planners” figure out if there would be an issue with a project.

11. Draft Report to the OTC

Lisa Cortes presented the group with a draft of RVACT’s biennial report to the OTC. This report will be presented to the OTC during their October 18 – 19 retreat in Medford. Art Anderson asked members to send him any desired revisions by e-mail.

12. Freight Route and Highway Designations

Mike Baker reported on amendments to the Oregon Highway Plan related to new freight designations. Maps of statewide highway designations and freight system revisions had been provided in the meeting packet. Rich Fahey asked if there were any special constraints related to freight routes. Mike responded that the designation changed their mobility standard and imposed

requirements regarding levels of congestion and street radii. The designation also raises their priority for funding.

13. Local Construction Projects

Gary Leaming presented a PowerPoint presentation on ongoing construction projects in the region. Work progresses nicely on the two Hwy 199 Illinois River bridges. The N. Medford Interchange project is on track and will be finished by the end of October. The Highway 62-230 paving project is almost complete. The Union Creek bank repair project is proceeding. They have set in lava rip rap to protect the bank. The Highway 140-Kershaw project is almost complete. The Highway 238 Hanley-Long Gulch project is making good progress. Two Open Houses were held recently, both well attended. The first was for the Highway 199 Expressway and the second was for the Fern Valley Interchange. The area was pleased to host both Representative Greg Walden and Governor Kulongoski during local events in August.

14. Josephine County Private Representative

Laurel Samson announced that James Lowe was being supported by Josephine County and the city of Grants Pass as a private sector representative. He has lived in the area for many years and is in the construction trade. Skip Knight moved to accept him as a representative and the motion was seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Laurel will invite Mr. Lowe to join RVACT.

Along other lines, Skip noted that parking was time-limited in the area of the Grants Pass City Council Chambers and he had received a ticket during the last meeting. He asked for members to be accommodated. Laurel Samson said that parking passes for longer parking periods could be provided at the next meeting in Grants Pass.

15. Agenda Build/Next Meeting

Agenda items for the next meeting will include:

- Further discussion on funding the South Medford Interchange, including information on predictability of funding elements and other types of options

16. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM. The next meeting will be held on November 8, 2005 in White City.