



Beltline Highway: Coburg Road to River Road Plan

Do Travel Forecasts Reflect Changes in Gas Prices?

This question has been frequently asked since the rapid increase in gas prices over the last several months. Many people want to know how long-range planning projects will account for changes in fuel prices. One source of information that helps us understand problems and define solutions in transportation planning processes is travel forecasts. Travel forecasts are developed by technical experts using locally agreed-upon assumptions about land uses, and growth in population and employment to determine future demand. However, travel demand forecasts are only one piece of information used in planning improvements. Transportation planning decisions are made by considering a wide-range of information including environmental impacts, community context, costs and overall benefits.

The recent increase in gas prices has affected travel demand nationwide. Compared to May 2007, total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) decreased by three to four percent in May 2008. However, the demand for personal mobility, particularly during peak commute times, continues to be strong. While we expect overall travel demand to be affected by changes in fuel prices over the next 20 to 30 years, we also expect travel demand will continue to increase and we will still need to improve roadways such as the Beltline Highway. The highway is congested today, even with high oil prices and stagnant regional economic growth.

ODOT and transportation forecasting professionals around the state are working on a more definitive response to this question. In the meantime, here is a brief summary of how we are addressing this topic:

- Assume demand for personal mobility will remain strong and will likely be supported by a transition to alternative fuel vehicles including hybrids, electric, natural gas, and hydrogen fuel cells (national vehicle fleet turnover occurs every 10 to 15 years).
- Even if growth in overall VMT slows, this slower growth would typically only delay the need for increased capacity for a few years and does not mean the improvement is not needed.

Additional Information

If you would like more information about this planning process, or would like to be added to the mailing list, please contact:

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