



Meeting Date: Friday, February 11, 2005

Purpose: Project Development Team Meeting

Distribution: Project Development Team Members

From: Vicki Guarino, Rogue Valley Council of Governments

Date Prepared: February 14, 2005

PDT Attendees: Laurel Samson, Jim Roberts (for Steve Hodge), Jon Jordan. Lt. Tanya Henderson, Jeff Hunter, Mike Arneson, Dorothy Upton, Jerry Marmon, Tracy Rico, Eryca McCartin, Angela Findley, Gary Leaming, Vicki Guarino, John Vial, Dave Breshears (for Ray Lapke), Jason Sheadel

PDT Absent: None

Other Attendees: Art Anderson, Roger Allamarch, Leslie Schwab, ODOT

1. Call to Order/Introductions

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG Facilitator

Vicki Guarino called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She asked everyone to introduce them self.

2. Agenda Review/Meeting Objectives

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

Vicki reviewed the meeting agenda. She explained that today's meeting objectives are to gain an understanding of the project's scope, learn about the role of the PDT and others in the project, and receive an introduction to the Purpose and Need Statement.

3. Project Introduction: Why Are We Here?

Mike Arneson, ODOT

John Vial, ODOT

John Vial said he would talk about what this project will involve and will not involve. He referred to a PowerPoint presentation, (slides included in project binders distributed to each PDT member at the start of the meeting). The presentation included background regarding growth in the area, and an increasing accident rate. Accident rates on the highway have been exceeding state averages for similar highways. More than half of fatal crashes in Josephine County occurred on Hwy. 199. Tanya Henderson noted that none of the accidents was linked to failure to use seatbelts or intoxicated drivers. Also, she noted that all fatal crashes on state highways in Josephine County investigated by OSP were on Hwy. 199. Vial said there was nothing significant about the conditions surrounding the accidents: They happen at all locations, during daylight hours, and in fair weather. He said this project grew from concerns about safety. ODOT obtained \$10 million to address safety in the corridor, allowing this project to begin. Mike Arneson said that of non-injury accidents, about half go unreported, so the statistics under-represent the danger.

Arneson discussed the traffic problems associated with having two different kinds of users—through and local travelers. Also the conflict of urban to rural uses appears to be responsible for problems. Most accidents involve local drivers. Purpose of the highway is to be an expressway, intended to move through traffic efficiently, by direction of the Oregon Transportation Commission. Vial noted that Hwy. 199 is the only route to the coast in this part of the state. This is only one of two expressways in Region 3 – the other is Hwy. 62 in Jackson County. Arneson brought up the concept of access management, and talked about the conflicts between through traffic and local traffic, the cause of problems this project will have to address.

It also was noted that some work has been done on the highway, including designating it as a safety corridor, allowing the cost for speeding tickets to double, permitting lower speeds and other measures. Vial said a goal of this project should be to be able to decommission the safety corridor designation because the upgrade project's improvements will make it unnecessary. Vial said that given the current conditions on the highway, if a driver makes a mistake, the consequences can be deadly. Arneson noted that traffic signals generally increase accidents on rural, high-speed roads, and that has been the experience on this road.

4. Other Transportation Projects

Eryca McCartin, ODOT

This was an overview of projects in Josephine County. McCartin said it is exciting to have money in hand to do something about safety on Hwy. 199. She described the funding history, noting that the work represent combined projects consisting of the Hwy. 199 Signal Removal at Josephine County Fairgrounds, work at Hwy. 199 and Allen Creek including removal of signal at Redwood Ave and Hwy. 199, and an additional \$5.7 million in modernization funds to look at entire corridor. The money for this project and other projects will come from Oregon Transportation Investment Act. Beyond the project area, there are other projects under way now and through 2008, in the county and Grants Pass. Laurel Samson said city is working on Parkdale and Cloverlawn area adding pedestrian and bike improvements. The hope is to make the project a model to revitalize area. Samson said funding is coming from ODOT. McCartin said a planning study on the South Y is just getting started. She said it will focus on the intersection of the highways including north-south traffic and

will include looking at the 4th bridge. The 199 Expressway project should focus on east-west traffic for the safety problem.

5. PDT Roles and Responsibilities

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

Guarino referred to PowerPoint slides describing public involvement in the project and the make-up and role of the Project Development Team. The presentation noted that the team will be meeting monthly and will receive regular recommendations from the Citizen Advisory Committee, the public and the consultant and the Oregon Department of Transportation. The PDT will make all decisions relating to the project

10-minute break

After the break, Guarino told the team that the project binders they received were intended for them to use for all project information. She asked that team members keep materials in the binders and bring the binders to team meetings for their reference.

6. Introduction to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley referred to PowerPoint presentation of the federal law that guides this planning project. She said the law comes into play in any major federal action, and this is a federal action because it uses federal money. Among the requirements is that the public participate in the planning. Fulfilling the process requirements make the project eligible for federal funds. She described the planning steps including: purpose and need statement; goals and objectives; and development of alternatives to eventually come up with a recommended alternative. Findley said the project will consider a range of environmental impacts including land use law, noise, social and economic impacts.

Findley took the committee through the steps in a NEPA flow chart, which also is in project binders. McCartin said that basically the process is an alternatives assessment- a process of developing alternatives and then looking at the range of impacts of each of the alternatives. Jerry Marmon said there are several similar projects going on in the region. Art Anderson said this is a widely recognized process that stands up to legal challenges. For example, Anderson said, the South Medford Interchange project went through this process and it has survived challenges and has been approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Dorothy Upton said FHWA wouldn't reject a project if they found problems because they review the project and make recommendations to resolve issues conditions so the project can move successfully through the NEPA process.

Responding to Tracy Rico, Findley said the project will consider local land use regulations and plans. Marmon said the project won't study 12-15 alternatives in detail but will rely on this committee to evaluate and select a final 2 or 3 alternatives that will be studied in greater detail. Jon Jordan asked what would happen if the committee selected a \$20 million project, considering only about \$10 million is available total. McCartin said work may be phased, or it may be possible to obtain additional funding once a project has been clearly identified and strongly supported. Anderson underscored that, saying that funding doesn't drive the NEPA process and additional funding could be available. The project can't force a solution that fits a certain amount of money, Anderson said, but funding something to consider. Dorothy Upton noted that the project should be designed to serve a 20 year period.

7. Project Purpose and Need

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley gave an introduction to a purpose and need statement for Highway 199 Expressway Upgrade, which is the foundation for the project. She referred to PowerPoint, and said the statement should focus on positive outcomes. She also provided examples from other project. The needs portion of the statement should flesh out concepts of what is contributing to the safety problems on the highway.

She noted binder homework assignment. The project boundaries have been described, and the committee should describe needs within that area. Marmon said this statement acts as the filter for all alternatives and carries a lot of weight in comparing alternatives. Federal laws say no project can be considered that does not satisfy the purpose and need statement.

Team members were asked to return their ideas on purpose and need to Vicki Guarino by March 3.

8. Next Steps

Angela Findley, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Findley noted the schedule for the next six months, include in project binders, and the homework assignments from several meetings. The idea is to telescope work of 10 meetings into about six meetings.

9. PDT Comments & Questions and Public Comments

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

In response to a question from Tracy Rico, Art Anderson said about \$5.7 million is expected to be approved for Hwy. 199, and does not appear to be threatened in any way. John Vial added that the Rogue Valley's Area Commission on Transportation, the local advisory board to the Oregon Transportation Commission, strongly supports this Hwy. 199 project, which helps to assure its funding.

10. Wrap Up/Adjourn

Vicki Guarino, RVCOG

The next Highway 199 Project Development Team meeting will be 9-11:30 a.m., March 11, in the Rogue Community College board room.