

If We Build It, Will They Come?

When ODOT adds highway capacity, does it “cause” the growth patterns in the area to change? What are the indirect impacts of adding lanes?

These are some of the questions being evaluated by the Oregon Department of Transportation’s research on “Indirect Land Use and Growth Impacts of Highway Improvements.” The findings are intended to help in completing environmental analysis for highway construction projects. To aid planners and decision makers as they evaluate proposed improvements, the project team is developing a guidebook on indirect land use changes that could occur with increased highway capacity.

Methodology

This project started with an urban growth trend analysis. Using a geographic information system (GIS), Portland State University researchers mapped land use changes in 20 cities over 20 years. Then they evaluated spatial variables that may relate to land use change. Their aim was to identify factors associated with highway improvements.

Next, four case-study corridors were evaluated in terms of land use conditions before and after the

highway improvement, focusing on projects that crossed an Urban Growth Boundary. To provide insights about growth, a team from ECONorthwest collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data on transportation improvements, land development, public

facilities, and market conditions. The case studies focused on projects in Albany, Grants Pass, Bend and McMinnville.

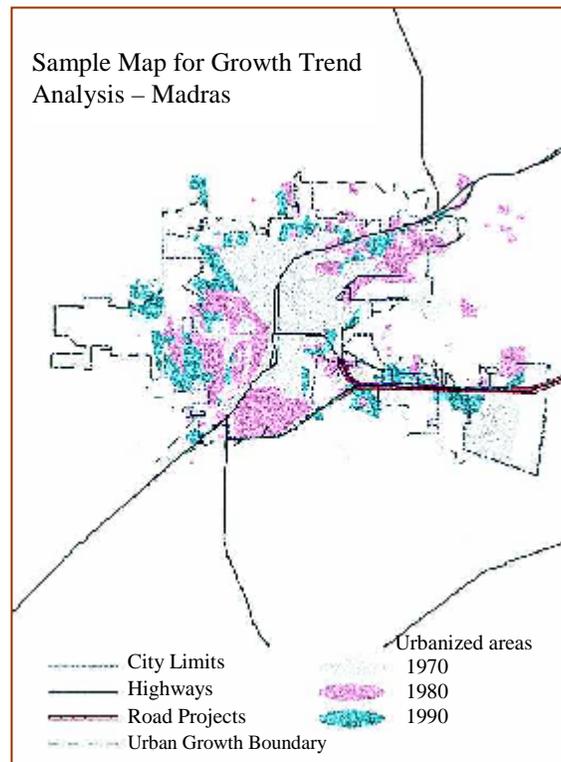
Findings

The growth trend analysis and four case studies support the conclusion that highway capacity increases, by themselves, do not cause development to be dramatically different from what local plans envision, or from what would have occurred in the absence of those improvements.

The case studies suggest that capacity increases are likely to facilitate whatever

development comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances already allow.

An interim report on the project is available on the Research Group web page, at www.odot.state.or.us/tddresearch/reports.htm. The draft case study reports are also available on the web page.



Next Steps

Researchers from ECONorthwest and PSU are conducting two additional case studies, currently underway in La Grande and Corvallis.

The final product will be a methodology that can be applied by ODOT to assess the indirect land use impacts of highway projects. The methodology will include data collection and analysis procedures for general land use forecasts, and will be incorporated into a guidebook based on lessons learned from the research.

This guidebook will assist those responsible for assessing and documenting potential land use impacts of highway projects. Examples will be

provided, along with data requirements. The guidebook will list the data types and possible sources that are needed, and will describe how to incorporate GIS tools for comparing alternative scenarios.

The guidebook will help analysts assess indirect land use changes based on the location and environment (infrastructure, social and economic factors). It is not intended for usage as a predictive tool.

The guidebook and final project reports are scheduled to be available in the fall of 2000. To receive copies, contact the ODOT Research Group (see information below) and request to be placed on the report distribution list for this project.

*For more information about this project, contact the
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***For more information on ODOT's Research Program and Projects,
check the website at***

<http://www.odot.state.or.us/tddresearch/>