

Minutes

Travel Lane Widths Work Group Session (SMPAC)

Meeting Date & Time: Wednesday, March 22, 2023
9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Attendees:

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| <p>Stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Steve Bates ✓ Marie Dodds ✓ Walt Gamble ✓ Mark Gibson | <p>ODOT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rich Crossler-Laird ✓ Bill Gross ✓ Erik Havig | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jessica Horning ✓ Christy Jordan ✓ Mike Kimlinger |
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Topic	Discussion Summary
Introduction	<p>Mike Kimlinger welcomed everyone to the work group meeting. Mike said he wanted to recognize that ODOT and stakeholders have been talking about the travel lane width issue for some time. He said it is not an easy discussion to have, and that this meeting is intended to “restart” the travel lane width conversation and determine what it is this group will accomplish. He said the work group so far has not established any deadlines for itself or a particular outcome. He said the group really has only had some conversations that haven’t progressed very far.</p>
Restart the Work Group Discussion	<p>Mike suggested that the work group determine what it can or should address, and also determine how often the work group should meet. He then offered others to comment on those points.</p> <p>Mark Gibson said he appreciates the points made by Mike and agrees that the work group hasn’t made much progress yet. He said OTA had submitted some ideas to explore, including some statutes and OARs relating to trucks crossing over lane striping. He said this work group could review those again and perhaps develop some action items.</p> <p>Walt Gamble said if they gained any “wins” at all so far as a result of these discussions, is that the Regions understand that 11-foot travel lanes are not popular. He said he is in favor of establishing some objectives over the next few meetings, and that OTA’s list of suggestions is a good starting point.</p>

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	<p>Mark Gibson said he wanted to make a point that the freight industry understands there are many facets to the conversation, including active transportation needs and funding availability.</p> <p>Steve Bates said he agrees that there are other users of the system that need to be considered, but that truckers are the only ones that have the liability for accidents. He said what he finds disturbing is that we're taking usable space away from trucks, and then holding truckers responsible for whatever mistakes happen. Mark Gibson added that there are many attorney firms that specialize in lawsuits against trucking companies.</p> <p>Mike Kimlinger said he does not intend to go back and adjust language in the Highway Design Manual based on this work group alone. He said that in his opinion, the work group would create a set of recommendations that would inform statewide policy planning efforts in terms of what the system looks like and who is it serving. He asked the work group members for their input on that suggestion.</p> <p>Mark said he understands that this work group wouldn't be making any direct changes to ODOT. He said his understanding of this work group's function is to develop ideas and recommendations, then take them to the SMPAC to then forward to the agency.</p> <p>Mike said one of the challenges he sees is making proposals for legislative changes. He said ODOT is restricted in its ability to propose legislative concepts, and that it would need to be a joint effort with OTA. Mark agreed that this would need to be a joint effort.</p> <p>Jessica Horning asked what is ODOT's process for making changes to OARs and ORS. Mike said ODOT has created legislative concepts in the past, but it is not common. Having a partner to help move concepts forward is helpful (similar to speed zone changes made in recent years). In terms of a statute or rule allowing trucks to go outside its lane, Mike said law enforcement should be part of the conversation since having drivers maintain their lane is one of their main tools for enforcing substance violations. Mike said he thinks a statutory change would more appropriate for creating an exception for trucks, as opposed to an administrative rule change.</p> <p>Walt Gamble asked if there could be a memorandum of understanding created amongst ODOT's designers or if it would be possible to modify the State Transportation Plan without a statute. Mike said the State Transportation Plan goes through an approval process with the Oregon Transportation Commission, rather than a statutory process. He said most of the concerns related to drivers would be in statute and not in rule. Mike said there are also many different parts of statutes that are inter-related, and we would need to make sure a statutory change doesn't conflict with any of the other laws. Mike also pointed out that there are a lot of administrative rules that have to do with different kinds of vehicles, including oversize and standard freight.</p>

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	<p>Walt Gamble said one component of the conversation centers on trucks being able to cross the travel lane line. He said another component is to consider some sort of policy where if it is necessary to have 11-foot lanes, there is an extra foot of buffer space available. He said the language in the Blueprint for Urban Design (BUD) manual should also be reversed so that designers don't start at 11 feet of width.</p> <p>Marie Dodds said that from a policy perspective at AAA, her organization takes policy positions on traffic issues when they have adequate and clear data and research that supports it. She asked what kind of information do we have about travel lane widths and impacts. Mike said Rich Crossler-Laird has compiled some information that goes back to the 1950s which can be provided to the work group members.</p> <p>Erik Havig said that is an important element to consider: what is the data that will help make a good, informed decision. Erik also clarified that ODOT's statewide policy documents will not get into design standards. He said the intent of the documents is to show how the system needs to work together, and to establish the overall outcomes and goals for the system. He said ODOT's design and project delivery processes then implement those policies into the actual decisions at the project level. Erik said a specific area we need to flag in the Highway Plan is our classification for state highways. He said we should look at them to determine if we have the right kind of classification and if we have too many roads classified in a certain level. He said long term, we'll need to use the classification system to decide how we make tradeoffs for different users of the system.</p> <p>Mike Kimlinger said he takes responsibility for the amount interpretation between what the policies say and how ODOT puts together its design guidance. He also said that the BUD has now been incorporated into the ODOT Highway Design Manual (HDM).</p> <p>Mike explained that ODOT has different kinds of approaches to designing for heavily urbanized areas, and they look at multiple factors such as lane width, turning radiuses, separation of different streams of traffic, parking, bikes, pedestrians, etc.</p> <p>Rich Crossler-Laird said that research points to 11 and 12 feet of width as a kind of "sweet spot" where we in terms of safety impacts. He said when you get below 11 feet on high-speed locations, you start to see crashes; and when you get above 12 feet you start to see other types of crashes. Rich said that in choosing to use 11 or 12-foot lanes, it comes down to the specific goals and outcomes on an individual project. Rich said that ODOT tried to incorporate into its guidance document that designers have to follow statutes in making those decisions as well (for example, a Reduction Review Route subject to ORS 366.215). Rich said ODOT's designers are still in the learning stages of implementing the urban design guidance, and they are in the process of putting together a "refresh training" since it has been several years since they had BUD training.</p>

Topic	Discussion Summary
	<p>Mike added that while designers might start at a certain width, they need to make sure they consider all kinds of other factors before settling on a decision.</p> <p>Mark commented that he would like to see certain safeguards for designated freight routes. He said the BUD references AASHTO standards which recommends 12-foot lanes where there is more than 10% truck traffic.</p> <p>Mike said in urbanized areas, the approach of starting at 11-foot lanes was purposeful. He said we need to make transformational change in the way we approach design in urbanized areas. He said the area that they didn't emphasize enough in training with the BUD, is just because you start at 11 doesn't mean that is where you end. Erik Havig added that urban design standards are really starting to change nationwide. He said in states that have even higher volumes of freight are probably going to a similar process of starting with 11-foot lanes; and even some starting with 10-foot lanes.</p> <p>Jessica Horning said there is a similar body of research around bike lane widths where 5-6 feet is the minimum needed for bikes to operate safely. She said a lot of locations have a 1-2 foot gutter pan and drainage grates that aren't usable space for bikes or any users. She said we need to provide these facilities to meet our other statutory requirements for other users. She said that when she works with project teams that are considering 11-foot lanes, the first question they discuss is what do the truck volumes look like; what's the role of the route in the freight network.</p> <p>Mark commented that we have designated certain routes as appropriate for freight. He said from a trucking industry perspective, if they didn't have to take some of those routes through downtown areas, they would rather not. He said he also thinks that the truck volumes on the freight routes haven't been considered closely enough and should have higher value when considering travel lane widths.</p> <p>Christy Jordan said that in many cases, a certain route is the prescribed route for oversized freight, and they can't use any other routes.</p> <p>Walt Gamble asked if an additional item could be added to the Mobility Considerations Checklist (MCC) that indicates that truck volumes were considered when deciding on lane widths. Christy said the MCC is geared towards temporary conditions due to construction and would probably be too late for using in the design process.</p> <p>Mike said he thinks the challenge is did the designer consider the truck volumes at the right level, do they have the right emphasis in the way they're applying that consideration; and is the outcome something that changes the existing operations and safety in a balanced way.</p>

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	<p>In the meeting chat, Jessica suggested that project teams could we share the Design Concurrence Form for a couple of projects that are going to the Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC) over the next couple months (e.g. include the form in the committee meeting materials) and see if that addresses some of the comments concerns. Then the work group could get together and discuss if this meets the need.</p> <p>Mark commented that the truck volumes should be an actual discussion point and not just a check mark. He said he would also like to see if the process of negotiating for lane widths during MAC meetings could be streamlined so they don't have to spend as much time on them.</p> <p>Jessica pointed out that the Design Concurrence form includes narratives for each mode showing the trade-offs that were made behind the design decisions. Walt said if a project team is pressing 11-foot lanes and the design concurrence form was available, it might provide a better understanding of the decision.</p> <p>Mike said that they are pressing for the Region Mobility Liaisons to be part of that early discussion to make sure that the emphasis on truck volumes and the types of freight loads doesn't get lost in the process. He said the work group should also have some discussion around what is accommodated mean versus designing for; and how does that work in the way that we traditionally approach design. Erik Havig added that we don't have 20 years of experience with this new process of urban design, so it will continue to evolve.</p> <p>Rich said ODOT's urban design process is not new; it's the direction many other states in the country are headed. He said Oregon just happens to be in the forefront with about four or five other states. He said the key piece to the process is documentation, which is why they created the design concurrence form.</p> <p>Mike said this adjustment to the way ODOT looks at urban design is consistent with the flexibility of system design that's been in the AASHTO "Green Book" for decades. He said there has been some "growing pains" in ODOT's adjustment and training for this process. Erik Havig added that with transportation planning, he believes we will start seeing local system plans identify the urban contexts on state highways. He said this planning will give us an idea what the vision will be for the transportation network, which will set expectations that will lead into the design. He said in larger urban "climate friendly" areas, there will be an even higher emphasis for active transportation and public transportation.</p> <p>Steve Bates commented that we live in a unique area that few people get to enjoy. He said when we talk about national standards and guidance, that places like Kansas and Nebraska don't have the same issues like we do (such as mountains and coastlines, etc.). He also emphasized that the specific route and time of year are important factors to consider when looking at the needs of freight versus active transportation.</p>

Topic	Discussion Summary
Identify Next Steps	<p>Mike Kimlinger suggested that there are two areas where the work group should be focusing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design guidance wording in the BUD (e.g. guidance that starts with 12-foot lanes); 2. Possible statutory changes to accommodate locations where oversized loads or other trucks aren't able to maintain their travel lane for operational/safety reasons. <p>Mike the following next steps for the working group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Gibson and industry review the OTA problem statement paper (related to travel lane widths) that was shared with SMPAC last year, and verify that is what industry would like to have on the table. • Mike Kimlinger, Rich Crossler-Laird and Jessica Horning get together and determine what should be the approach from an active transportation angle as to how recommendations should go forward. • All work group members to provide comments (1-2 sentences) to Bill Gross for each of the two discussion areas described above. <p>The work group members agreed that they should meet again in 2-3 weeks.</p>