

Minutes

SMPAC Travel Lane Widths Work Group Session

Meeting Date & Time: Thursday, June 1, 2023
10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Stakeholders

- ✓ Marie Dodds
- ✓ Jana Jarvis
- ✓ Walt Gamble
- ✓ Mark Gibson
- ✓ Cord Wood

ODOT

- ✓ Rich Crossler-Laird
- ✓ Bill Gross
- ✓ Jessica Horning
- ✓ Christy Jordan
- ✓ Mike Kimlinger

Discussion Summary

Introduction and Approval of Draft Minutes from 5/1/2023:

Mike Kimlinger convened the meeting and walked through the agenda items.

Bill Gross asked the group to approve the draft minutes from the last work group meeting held on 5/1/2023. The group approved the minutes.

Jana Jarvis said she reviewed the statutory revisions document. She said that given the work group discussions as to whether or not ODOT's design guidance should start with a 12-foot or 11-foot travel lane, she said we need to have a policy that underlies the statutory changes. She said we need to recognize there is disagreement over this issue. She said if we want to make an exception in statute where 11-foot lanes are not avoidable, that's a different conversation than if we are going to regularly reduce lane widths from 12 to 11 feet.

Mark Gibson added that they recognize there's some training that takes place in terms of how designers should look at lane widths initially. However, he said they've seen multiple times in Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC) meetings that designers press for 11-foot lanes based on how the Blueprint for Urban Design (BUD) guidance is written.

Marie Dodds said she echoes Jana and Mark's comments, and said it doesn't make sense to have designers start with 11-foot lanes on every roadway.

Mike Kimlinger said that per the BUD guidance for urbanized areas, the preference is to start at 11-foot lanes, but only if it fits and balances the needs of the facility. Mike suggested starting Rich Crossler-Laird's presentation to help explain the design process.

Explanation of the design process from the Blueprint for Urban Design (BUD) Manual

Rich Crossler-Laird began the presentation and explained that the BUD has since been integrated into the [Highway Design Manual \(HDM\)](#). Rich walked through how the BUD and ODOT's URBAN Design Concurrence Document, which is key to the design decision process, was developed using national research and guidance from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP), including:

- NCHRP Report 855: Land Use and Context
- NCHRP 785: Performance Based Design
- "Green Book" Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets

From this national research, Rich said that ODOT established its own list of urban contexts to include in the BUD manual:

- Rural Community
- Suburban Fringe
- Residential Corridor
- Urban Mix
- Downtown, Core Business District (CBD)

Rich said that in looking at national research and guidance on performance-based design, there are key questions in relation to context:

- Operations and Safety Questions:
 - How has the roadway been performing?
 - How do we expect the roadway to perform?
 - What are the modal needs?
- Planning and Project Questions:
 - What are the planning goals and aspirations?
 - What are the goals and outcomes of the project?

Rich then shared a table from the original BUD (Table 2-6: Designing based on urban context, considering roadway designations and activity of different modes), which has been revised in the 2023 HDM (Table 200-6) to include the following changes:

- A footnote is missing in the Travel Lanes column in the HDM version which will need to be put back in (Footnote #1: Design decisions should consider the presence and volumes of freight and transit activity. The typical review process should be followed along reduction review routes.)
- In the Travel Lanes column in the original BUD version where the guidance said: "Start with minimum widths...", the HDM version was revised to add in the word "Evaluate" to remind people to make sure they're evaluating what the lane widths are in relation to everything else in the context.

Rich said that we really don't have a specific number as a standard for travel lane widths. He said we have a range of 11 to 12 feet, as with other elements across the roadway cross section.

Rich said there are two parts to the Urban Design Concurrence Document:

1. Context and Modal Integration
2. Design Decision Documentation

Rich said ideally this document is started at the planning stages at a Transportation System Plan (TSP) level, when planners are discussing long term goals with local communities. Rich then showed the Highway 43 Corridor in West Linn as a case study example of how the concurrence document is used, and we walked through the steps that were used for this corridor. This effort included developing roadway characteristics and identifying the urban context, determining modal expectations, identifying project goals and performance measures for the corridor, and describing community outreach (e.g. summarizing commitments and expectations).

Rich also said in considering different design pieces there are different cross section realms to consider, including: land use realm, pedestrian realm, transition realm and travelway realm. He said these realms are defined explicitly, but they have to work with each other, as some realms (such as the pedestrian and transition realm) often overlap.

In considering bicycle facility selection, Rich said the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) is coming out with new design guidance. He said the Highway 43 Case Study looked at posted speed and traffic volumes, and the role of the highway in the bikeway network to determine an appropriate bike facility.

In showing the case study example, Rich emphasized that ODOT wants to make sure it documents the decisions that took place from the project team, and that no one person makes the decision. He said the project team makes decisions based on the evidence given, what the project goals are, and what we can and cannot do (due to fiscal constraints or physical constraints, right of way constraints, etc.). At the conclusion of the process, Rich said that if the project stays within the approved dimensional ranges, then the project does not need any design exception. If for some reason the project could not stay in the ranges, they would need a design exception to be approved.

Mark Gibson asked if it is correct that the Design Concurrence Document does not ask if the route is a designated freight route. Rich said that is correct. He said the form does ask if the route is a Reduction Review Route. Mark asked if all designated freight routes are considered Reduction Review Routes as per the Oregon Highway Plan. Mike Kimlinger said most are, but not all of them. Mike said it's a good point, and that ODOT should consider adding extra language to the form regarding freight routes to provide more context.

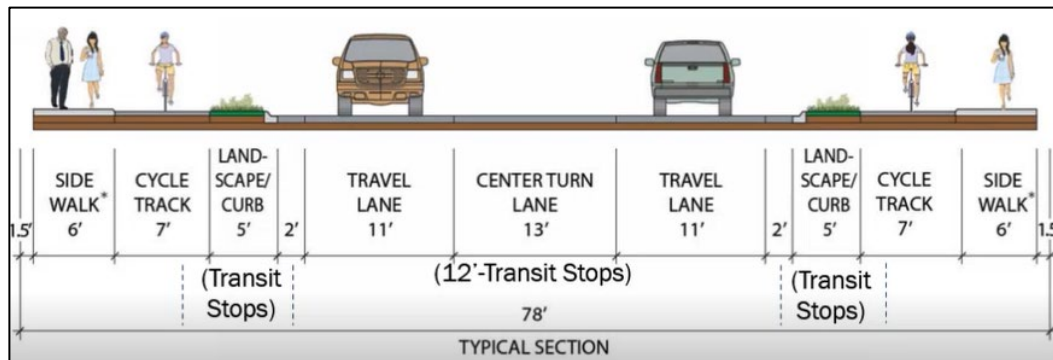
Walt Gamble commented that the Travelway Realm text box on the Concurrence Document does not mention that we need to assume a 11-foot lane will help the project reach its target speed. Rich said that is part of the general discussion, and that this slide just shows an example of how the design decisions are documented.

Regarding Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) projects that are reducing lane widths and adding bike lanes, Jana Jarvis asked how ODOT calculates the allocation for heavy trucks and light vehicles when they are taking away space from those vehicles and dedicating it to bikes. Rich said it depends on looking at the performance of the existing highway and what we intend it to be in the future. He said not only do we need to take into consideration the existing contexts, but also the future context based on the goals and aspirations of the communities and the highway system. Rich added that the percentage of trucks is not a really good metric as it doesn't give a full picture. He said a better metric is the peak hour volumes, and he said a larger number of trucks isn't always a good metric to justify a wider travel lane.

Jana said that reducing lane widths under the guise of “traffic calming” doesn’t calm a CDL driver who has to navigate a narrow lane. Jana also asked if the cost for building bike lanes and pedestrian facilities are coming out of highway trust fund dollars that cars and trucks are paying for, or are they coming from other sources of revenue.

Mike Kimlinger said the funding allocation is a policy-level discussion that has already been completed before design decisions have been made on the sizes of facilities or specific elements. He said the designers are not involved in that part of the discussion, which he said is further up the ladder from them. Jessica Horning added that there is nothing beyond ODOT’s minimum standard required PED/Bike facilities that we add on to projects. She said there is a minimum amount of the State Highway Fund that ODOT is required to spend on providing PED/Bike accommodations per statute since 1971.

Mark Gibson commented that he still believes the percentage of trucks is pertinent when you’re looking at reducing the amount of usable space for a truck. He said it could be helpful to know whether it’s a freight route or not in terms of starting with 11-feet or 12-feet for travel lane widths. Rich pointed out in an example cross-section, that there may be 11-feet for a travel lane, but there’s a 2 foot buffer resulting in 13-feet instead of 12-feet.



Jana pointed out that they don’t have 13-feet, unless a change in statute is passed that allows them to use the buffer space. Mark said the statute change will help in places where they need to use buffer spaces, but he feels they are still reducing the available width.

Rich said that researchers have shown for 30 years that there’s no discernable difference in safety between 11-foot lanes and 12-foot lanes. He said that is the compromise and trade-off they are trying to balance as they create these performance-based designs. Jana added that if you’re a 10 ½-foot wide truck, there’s a substantial difference between an 11-foot lane and a 12-foot lane.

Walt Gamble commented that if the example cross section was shown in a MAC meeting, most of the members would be pleased to see bikes and pedestrians separated from traffic. However, he said someone will likely ask what will be the consequence of going back to 12-foot lanes and having a one-foot buffer at the fog line? Rich said that it doesn’t change the overall 13-feet available, whether its an 11-foot lane and a 2-foot buffer, or a 12-foot lane and a one-foot buffer. He said they sometimes have issues where their paint trucks can’t stripe something that close to a curb and they might need a minimum 2-foot distance

available. He also said that in some cases there may be drainage issues where they don't want vehicles driving over drainage grates.

Rich showed another case study, which was a Region 3 paving project on US101 in Reedsport. He said the project not only aimed to improve the bicycle facility, but also to improve access to properties as there was no left-turn lane at that section of highway. Rich proceeded to explain the different factors that were considered for the Urban Design Concurrence Document for that project.

At the conclusion of Rich's presentation, Mike Kimlinger said the intent of the presentation was to provide a higher level of understanding of the design decision process. Mike said he fully acknowledges that they don't do a very good job of explaining during MAC presentations how much work goes into trying to balance all the needs for the roadway, and it can be disappointing when the response provided to the committee is "that's what the BUD said to do..." Mike said the intent of the urban design guidance is to try and to take all of the different considerations for the different road users, and balance those needs as best you can.

Mark Gibson commented that he doesn't want anyone to think that they believe the design process is a very simple pick-and-choose method of making decisions. He said he still feels like there could be more clarifications in terms of when a 12-foot travel lane would not be appropriate. He said he still thinks there's a fair amount of stock in considering truck percentages, and if the route is a freight route that allows oversize loads to operate on an annual permit up to 12 feet wide.

Rich said part of that goes back to the previous discussion on usable width. He said their intent on creating the width ranges in the design guidance was providing more space than what existed before, by having 13 feet of total space available as opposed to 12 feet.

Christy Jordan commented that this underscores why it is important to have these conversations with the MAC early. She said there are several routes that allow loads up to 14 feet wide, and that a lot more oversize loads move than people think.

Mike Kimlinger wrapped up the discussion by saying we are entering a "new era" of designing in an urban space, where the desire is to tray and fit more users into the space and to reduce speeds. In that spirit, Mike said ODOT is trying something different in terms of its approach to design and evaluating the route for all the needs. Mike then asked the group if they thought this presentation was helpful.

Mark said he appreciates what he heard, and hopes that we're both hearing each other. He said he thinks industry is pretty clear in terms of what they really need. He said he understands there are compromises, but thinks there are specific situations and thresholds (such as designated freight routes and truck traffic percentages) that could be more clearly incorporated into the guidance.

Jana said there needs to be a recognition on the part of ODOT that freight isn't just a user of the system, but a driver of Oregon's economy. She said there are some real economic factors that result from putting constraints on these freight routes that will have negative impacts for the state.

Walt said he thought the presentation was very valuable. He also added that if the MAC were to be able to see the different design options considered (as shown in the case studies in Rich's presentation), he thinks it would be very constructive to be able to see that information.

In terms of setting specific design parameters, Mike said that discussion is more appropriate at the policy level, such as the Oregon Highway Plan. Mike said that is the level that informed the agency as it developed the urban design concepts over the past 5 years.

Action Items:

- Bill Gross to try and schedule the next meeting sometime in the next 4-6 weeks.
- Mike and Rich to review the comments from this meeting to see if their team can consider additional guidance that would be useful to include in the HDM.
- Mike to send the proposed statute changes to the Department of Justice within the next few weeks.