KEY FINDINGS BRIEF

OREGON HIGHWAY PLAN MOBILITY POLICY WHITE PAPER

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | AUGUST 2020

1 OREGON'S MOBILITY POLICY

"It is the policy of the State of Oregon to maintain acceptable and reliable levels of mobility on the state highway system, consistent with the expectations for each facility type, location, and functional objectives. Highway mobility targets will be the initial tool to identify deficiencies and consider solutions for vehicular mobility on the state system." —1999 Oregon Highway Plan (OHP) mobility policy

The Oregon Mobility Policy is intended to maintain acceptable and reliable levels of mobility on the state highway system, as reliable and continuous mobility is a key engine of economic opportunity and connectivity throughout the state. However, throughout the history of the mobility policy and continuing today, there have been situations where the highway mobility targets within the mobility policy have unintended outcomes. The policy states that mobility is to be measured with a vehicular volume-to-capacity ratio. This has led to stakeholder frustrations that focusing on the mobility of trucks and cars, rather than people and other modes, does not adequately reflect the current and future needs of the transportation system and surrounding community.

Over time ODOT has adapted the policy to make it more accommodating. Changes have included clarifying that the measures are targets not standards, allowing for land use contexts where they do not apply, and providing a clearer path towards alternate targets when needed. However, it is likely that further clarity and flexibility will be needed in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the history and current use of the mobility policy and develop considerations, options, and potential approaches for updating the mobility policy as part of the next OHP and Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) updates. Such an update could define what "acceptable and reliable levels of mobility" entail and explore different measures that more holistically reflect that definition. This will help the new OHP better provide for outstanding mobility options for all people throughout the state.

2 | CONSIDERATIONS FOR UPDATING THE POLICY

- Stakeholder desire for a more multimodal, network-focused policy
- Best practices from other states
- ODOT's more current planning documents and other mode plans
- Comprehensive plan amendments and the TPR
- Land use context and functional classification

SATISFYING ALL APPLICATIONS

Oregon is unique in that the current OHP mobility targets are used in a variety of applications. These include Transportation Planning Rule (TPR) compliance, development review, long-range transportation planning, and project delivery. Some of these applications are direct outcomes of legal mandates, while others are more flexible. Any changes to the policy must be able to be similarly applied to these processes and to be effective in a variety of applications.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Local jurisdictions, stakeholders, and community members acknowledge that the OHP mobility targets are easy to use, measure, and understand. They have also expressed concern that interaction between the TPR and OHP highway mobility targets are having unintended and undesirable consequences in their communities, such as making it difficult to increase the planned land use densities in their comprehensive plans. They are concerned that the requirements to meet v/c standards give vehicle mobility precedence over other local objectives, such as active transportation operations and safety, compact land use planning, and economic development.

BEST PRACTICES FROM OTHER STATES AND OTHER ODOT DOCUMENTS

Many transportation agencies around the country are using performance measures to evaluate various dimensions of mobility, focusing less on eliminating peak-hour congestion and more on improving mobility as a whole. When mobility is defined as a more robust measure than simply the absence of congestion, the strategies employed to provide the best mobility possible to all users expand, and can better be tailored to roadway function and land use context.

The Oregon Transportation Commission's Strategic Investment Plan, *A Strategic Investment in Transportation*[1] (2017), also helps illustrate ODOT's current goals for state highway investment. Statewide mode and topic plans are adopted as a part of the OTP and include statewide policy, requirements, and guidance related to transportation system planning. These documents help clarify mobility goals for the various modes.

1 Oregon Transportation Commission. A Strategic Investment in Transportation. 2017.

3 | APPROACHES FOR UPDATING THE POLICY

There are a range of potential options to consider for updating, revising, or replacing the state mobility policy.

These include better reflecting multiple aspects of mobility (such as peak-hour performance, network reliability, accessibility, etc.), land use context, and a variety of modes. The descriptions below discuss benefits and drawbacks to various options but do not recommend any option over the others. For each mobility policy option shown below, the white paper includes potential approaches to updating the mobility performance measures.

POTENTIAL MOBILITY POLICY UPDATE OPTIONS

	Mobility Policy Option	Description
#1	No Change	Keep the mobility policy and v/c-based measures in place with no updates. ODOT could, however, recommend the targets for long-range planning only and make the process of adopting alternative mobility targets easier.
#2	Define Mobility in the OHP Mobility Policy	Better define mobility within the OHP mobility policy. This definition could be mode-neutral or include a separate definition for each mode. The definition could also describe the different mobility needs inherent to different land use contexts and/or highway classifications.
#3	Define Mobility in the OTP	Better define mobility within the OTP. This definition could be mode-neutral or include a separate definition for each mode. The definition could also describe the different mobility needs inherent to different land use contexts and/or highway classifications.
#4	Define Mobility Within Various Modal Plans	Better define mobility within the various modal plans. These definitions would be tailored to the individual modes described within each plan. The definitions could also describe the different mobility needs inherent to different land use contexts and/or highway classifications.
#5	Amend the TPR	Amend the TPR so that it no longer relies on the mobility policy to determine if a land use decision causes a significant transportation impact. Note that this would not be an ODOT action, but rather would be under Department of Land Conservation and Development purview.

4 NEXT STEPS

The current OHP mobility policy does not define what "acceptable and reliable levels of mobility" entails other than stating that it is to be measured through the mobility measures housed within the policy. Applications of these measures have led to the stakeholder frustrations described and difficulty balancing mobility with other needs and goals, such as economic development, housing, and urbanization. The flexibility that has been added to the policy over time remains largely vehicle centric, is time and cost intensive, and is focused on tolerating increased congestion rather than about defining desired mobility for the land use context and highway classification.

The OHP is scheduled to be updated in the next few years and the mobility policy will be one aspect of the plan that will be reviewed and considered for an update. An updated policy should address desired mobility outcomes and define acceptable and reliable levels of mobility for the Oregon highway system more robustly and explicitly. There are several potential directions ODOT could take to update the mobility policy. The options proposed are just some of the potential approaches to create a more broad-based mobility policy. These, in turn, can lead to reconsidering the way highway mobility is measured and the factors that are considered in setting the standards.

By considering the best practices described from other agencies and heeding Oregon's unique history, land use planning approach, and uses of mobility targets, a new policy can better balance multiple needs and goals while working towards improved mobility across the state. The following are a few key questions to consider during the OHP update.

QUESTIONS FOR THE OTP/OHP ADVISORY COMMITTEES

- How should mobility be defined for the Oregon highway system?
- What policy changes may be needed to achieve the desired mobility outcomes?
- Should additional land use context be considered in the mobility policy and if so, what are our expectations about mobility based on land use context?
- Should highway classification continue to be a factor in how we set mobility expectations for a facility and do the highway classifications need updating?
- What other factors should be considered in the mobility policy to better align the policy with our expectations about mobility?
- What mobility performance measures should be considered to better inform transportation decisions and investments from a mobility perspective?

For more information about the OHP and OTP update project, see https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Planning/Pages/Plan-Development.aspx.