



OR 126: Veneta to Eugene NEPA Study

Open House #1 | September 8 – 25, 2020

SUMMARY October 2020



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PROJECT HISTORY

OR 126 BETWEEN VENETA AND EUGENE is a State Highway, a freight route, and an important connector for people and goods traveling between the Willamette Valley and the Oregon Coast. The seven-mile corridor is heavily traveled at commute times, has a posted speed of 55 miles per hour, and is intersected by numerous driveways and side streets. There are limited passing opportunities, inadequate bicycle and pedestrian-only facilities, narrow to no shoulders in many places, and passes through environmentally sensitive wetlands.



The **Fern Ridge Corridor Plan** evaluated a series of alternatives to address congestion and safety needs for this section of OR 126. Following an extensive stakeholder outreach effort, a recommendation was made in late 2012. The Oregon Transportation Commission formally adopted the plan in April 2013.

The Fern Ridge Corridor Plan recommended:

- Four-lane cross section.
- Multi-use path adjacent to the roadway or along a separate southern route.
- Short-term spot improvements.

Fig. A: Multiuse Section with Swale Separation

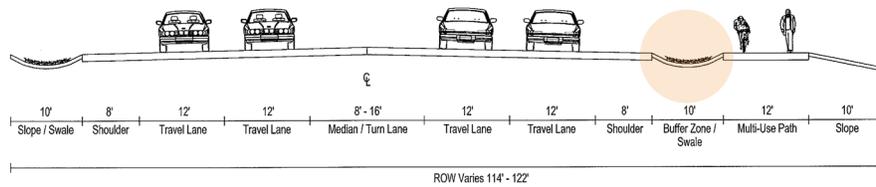
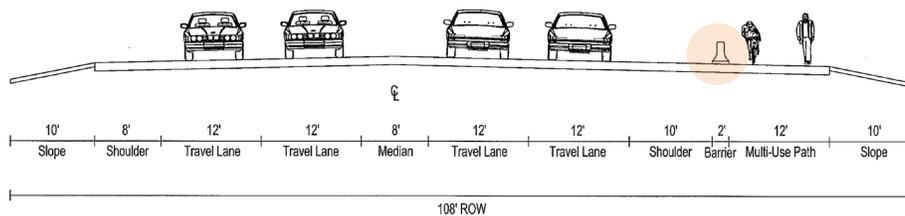


Fig. B: Multiuse Section with Barrier Separation



Since 2013, ODOT has elected to evaluate the multi-use path along OR 126. A southern route along Lane County roadways will be considered as part of the County's bicycle master plan. Providing a buffer zone between the roadway and the path is preferred, as shown in the top cross section, Fig. A. Where the roadway is directly adjacent to the reservoir and no turn lanes are needed, a narrower cross section will be used to reduce the impact to the environment, as shown in the bottom cross section, Fig. B. During this interim between Phase 1 and 2, described in the graphic below, we have repaved, striped, provided bus turn outs and built a right-turn lane at Ellmaker Road.

To move the project forward, the Oregon Legislature, through HB 2017, funded engineering refinements and completion of the necessary environmental documentation consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), referred to as Phase 2 in the graphic below.

Phase 1 Completed 2011-2013	Phase 2 Underway 2020 - 2022	Phase 3 Future*	Phase 4 Future*
The Fern Ridge Corridor Plan, adopted by the Oregon Transportation Commission, identified needs, showed a range of alternatives, and selected a preferred alternative.	Refine Conceptual Design and complete comprehensive environmental studies of the preferred alternative to meet National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements.	Preliminary and final design, and preparation of construction plans.	Construct preferred alternative.
Phase 2 establishes the project footprint and studies the project's impacts on the environment. The project's goals include balanced attainment of the widest range of benefits for the population and environmental resources. The study will also produce a cost estimate and a strategy for implementation, as funding becomes available.		<i>*Future phases depend on securing additional funding.</i>	

OUTREACH DURING PANDEMIC AND WILDFIRES

Thousands of people care about the safety and mobility of this stretch of highway, and we worked to make sure there was an opportunity for them to share their personal experiences and concerns. Outreach efforts kept public safety in the forefront by providing electronic and phone methods to gather public input. Garnering over 300 survey responses, we achieved our communications goals using multiple methods.



Getting ready for Meals on Wheels with hardcopies included in 60 boxes



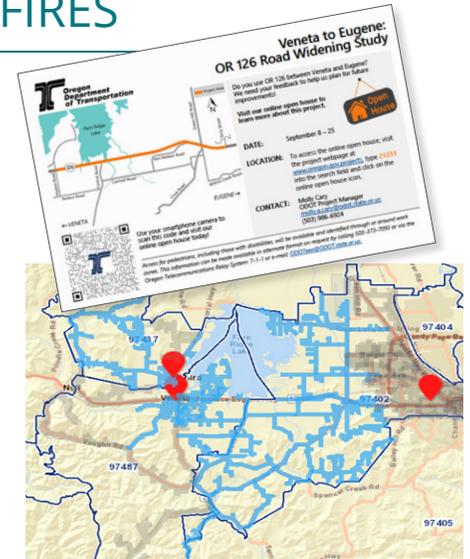
“Do you travel between Veneta and Eugene on OR 126? The Oregon Department of Transportation is conducting a study about widening the road.

If you want to learn more about the study and give ODOT your opinions and experiences, they are hosting an online open house that will be open through Sept. 25th. To find it you can type OR 126 Veneta in the search bar of your browser.

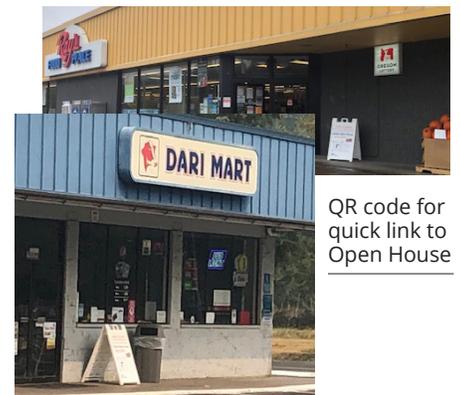
They would appreciate any and all feedback.”

Phone message to Fern Ridge School District families

- **Website** with live link to Open House.
- **Email** with link sent to 1,663 Interested Parties.
- **Postcard mailed** to 4,828 households.
- **Postcard placed** on store and organization customer counters and in food pantry boxes.
- **Media Release** to selected outlets.
- **Facebook** Open House promo for nine agencies and organizations.
- **A-Frames** placed at key intersections.
- **A-Frames with QR** code placed at local store entrances.
- **Phone calls** to 36 adjacent businesses.
- **Phone announcement** via Fern Ridge School District to 1,500 households in Veneta, Elmira, Walton and Noti reaching 3,000–5,000 people.
- **Reader Boards** with Open House information at two prominent locations.
- **Hard copies** in food pantry boxes, at Veneta’s Farmers’ Market, Meals on Wheels deliveries, Café 60 (senior and disabled, services), Dixie’s Café.



Postcards delivered along seven postal routes to 4,828 houses



QR code for quick link to Open House



With the pandemic, the Love Project food pantry is drive-thru. Hard copies of the Open House and postcards for online access were placed in 200 boxes.



Signs at busy intersections



Postcards on counters of local businesses

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

After a brief project background that proposes widening to two lanes each direction, adding shoulders, and a protected multi-use path, we asked:

- 1. Do you have any congestion-related concerns that you would like us to be aware of? If yes, please tell us where on the corridor.**
- 2. Within this section of OR 126, are there any additional changes you would like for us to consider? If yes, please tell us where on the corridor.**

We received a total of 324 responses, with 294 online submissions and 30 by phone, email and hard copy. Two-thirds of the respondents live on the west side of the project area, with more than half from the City of Veneta.

The results are summarized on the following pages.

ROAD WIDENING

Hundreds stated enthusiastic support for additional lanes, shoulders, safer turning, and safe access for boaters, including adequate parking. Of the 324 respondents, 11 are opposed to widening OR 126 due to concerns about Veneta's growth and impacts on the environment.

Representative Comments

"I use 126 at different times of the day and it's always congested. There needs to be a second lane added in each direction. Or at the very least, a dedicated passing lane for safety."

"I would like to see a central divider that prevents the possibility of head-on collisions, at least in the areas where a turn lane is not required. Head on collisions at 55mph+ speeds must be a high fatality type situation."

"All along the corridor there is no shoulder for a vehicle having issues i.e. flat tire or emergency to safely pull over."

"When there is a crash, emergency vehicles cannot get through quickly."

"This is a waste of taxpayer money. The only elements you should address are safety. This stretch of road is one of the most dangerous in Oregon. Adding more lanes will increase dangerous driving behavior and increase speeds. Those will lead to more serious crashes and injuries. This will not be positive for climate change in any way."

"I would like you to fully consider the No-Build Option. Two lanes are enough now that more people are working from home."

"The entire length of the project plan is a concern regarding congestion. It is difficult in the narrow section without any median, if there is a car breakdown. Also ensure that striping and reflectors are current and strong due to fog conditions and visibility issues."

"The entire two-lane portion of the corridor is dangerous. Especially at night and/or in poor driving/visibility conditions. There need to be streetlights along this route."

"I've been a career firefighter here 22 years and the majority of my serious or fatal wrecks involving both autos and pedestrians have been in this corridor. 126 is long overdue for an expansion to improve safety."

TURN SAFETY

Many said they cannot safely turn on and off OR 126, and repeatedly expressed desire for intersection improvements. Those few opposed to road widening do support safety improvements, including widening for turn pockets. Difficulty turning was frequently mentioned at:

- Huston Rd.
- Ellmaker Rd.
- Central Rd.
- Perkins Peninsula Park
- Fisher Rd
- KR Nielsen Rd.
- Greenhill Rd.
- Diess Feed and Seed

Representative Comments

"Our company is finding it more difficult at times to even pull out of our parking lot. The traffic has increased so significantly over the past two years. Our trips towards Eugene during business hours take longer, due to the frequent long lines of traffic."

"Central Road and Fisher Road can get sketchy when cars are slowing down to turn or if cars pull out in front of moving cars."

"I believe that widening the road is the right step to ensure the safety of motorists, bicyclist, and pedestrians. Areas of concern are autos forcing into traffic and causing accidents at Central, Ellmaker, and Huston."

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Hundreds enthusiastically supported a multi-use path. Some preferred concrete barrier separation over bioswales, due to adjacent vehicle speeds. Several suggested a thoughtful east-end connection into the Eugene path system. Of the 324 total responses, five are against a multi-use path because they do not want gas tax dollars to fund bicycle and pedestrian improvements or expressed concern about people camping along paths.

Representative Comments

"I'm 100% for this project. The bike/multiuse access is a huge plus. I would love to bike commute, if there is a safe way to do so."

"I am glad there will be one or more protected lanes for bicycle traffic. I need to commute between Veneta and Eugene and do not own a car."

"The stretch over the wetlands is extremely dangerous, with people on bicycles trying to ride with no shoulder."

"The expansion to five lanes makes a lot of sense and a separated bike lane would be an asset used by many cyclists. This separation should be a hard barrier vs. a swale."

"I've never been a big fan of highway dollars going to bike paths. I'm not sure how much gets diverted but I don't want my money being spent that way. If bikes want a path, have them register and pay a fee for improvements."

"I support this project. Is there a way to also include a bike lane or wide shoulder connecting 126 and Greenhill Road to the Fern Ridge Path trailhead on Greenhill? Many cyclists ride this coming off or going to Crow Road. It's less than a mile but is mostly shoulderless. Thanks."

ACCESS TO NATURE AND RECREATION

The Fern Ridge Corridor provides valued access to nature and recreation. This area is used for boating, fishing, and hunting. It also provides an important outdoor laboratory for environmental education and conservation organizations.



Representative Comments

“A replacement for the informal parking and boat entry area at Coyote Creek is important. While the area to the east (where a drainage ditch is located) has been suggested, that is often seasonally dry. It would make more sense, I believe, to expand the area outside of the entry to Perkins Peninsula Park to accommodate boaters.”

“The wetlands, lakeside, and Coyote Creek are popular recreation areas and have their parking and traffic issues. It would be best to consider these as you plan.”

“The kayak put-in near the railroad bridge can get congested and dangerous.”

PROJECT AREA

Many requested the project boundary be amended to go to Territorial Highway, rather than stop at Huston Rd.

Representative Comment

“Ending the project at Huston will bring significant congestion from that area to the intersection of Territorial Hwy. There are many roadside businesses in that section with direct access to OR 126. Plus, the City recently has added new

businesses in that area. (Grocery Outlet and Dollar General). With the project being a few years out, serious consideration should be given to extend the project to Territorial Hwy.”

URGENCY

Respondents expressed gratitude for the recent spot improvements. Paving, striping, rumble strips, bus pullouts and the right-turn lane at Ellmaker Road are well-appreciated, but many requested moving faster with implementation of the Fern Ridge Corridor Plan.

Representative Comments

“Biggest concern for me is to actually get the funding for the project and implementation.”

“Safety is the priority. Sooner the better.”

“Veneta is an important part of the economy of West Lane County and the traffic problems have intensified in recent years. This stretch of road is the gateway to the coast and carries many recreational vehicles that are hard to get around with no passing lanes. It is a very dangerous highway and needs to be widened. West Lane citizens deserve to have safe highways.”

“I have had several near miss head-on crashes and most of my friends have, too. Anything that can speed up this process will save lives.”

“I know every person in this community that I've spoken to very badly wishes this project to proceed. I believe a project like this would be not only welcomed but celebrated.”

NEXT STEPS

Conceptual design will continue, with more information to share in spring 2021, including including how we propose moving forward in stages as funding is available. The next Open House is planned for late spring or early summer 2021.