



**Oregon**

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

**Department of Transportation**

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**US97: Bend North Corridor Steering Team Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
Deschutes County Service Center; Sawyer Room  
1300 NW Wall Street, Bend, Oregon, 97701  
January 27, 2009, 1:00 P.M.-3:00 P.M.**

**Steering Team Members in Attendance:** Bob Bryant, ODOT; Eric King, City of Bend, Dennis Luke, Deschutes County; and Mike Schmidt, Citizen Advisory Committee.

**Steering Team Leader; City, County and ODOT Staff:** Jon Heacock, ODOT; Rick Williams, ODOT; Gary Farnsworth, ODOT; Nick Arnis, City of Bend; Amy Pfeiffer, ODOT.

**Public/Audience:** Mike Lovely, Joel Gisler, George Kolb, Doug Johnson, Jim Prosser, Pete Christoff, Erin Golden, Wayne Schnur, Karl Conklin, Doug Koellermeier, Tom Fay, Liz Dickson, Steven Cook, Dave Kanner, Alan Unger, Shawn Nguy, Seth King, Jeremy Green, Michel Bayard, Mike Schmidt, Connie Kennard, Ned Austin, Rick Root, Rich Niederhof, Donna Rustand, Matthew Wurth, Suzanne Kelso, Ann Marie Colucci, Mark Rust, Tom Filcich, Peter Murphy, Brian Paslay, and Rochelle Farnsworth.

**Meeting Coordinator:** Julie Myers, ODOT

**Recorder:** Andrew Spreadborough, COIC

**The meeting began at 1:05 P.M.**

**Introductions/Agenda Review**

Gary Farnsworth opened the meeting. The steering team, staff and audience introduced themselves. Gary reviewed the meeting agenda, and referred to the project timeline which was displayed. He noted that we are nearing the end of the process for developing a range of alternatives, and are about to enter into technical studies and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) over the course of the next year. The goal for today is to get to a recommendation on which alternatives we will take into the DEIS process.

**ODOT Staff Recommendations on Advancing Alternatives**

Gary Farnsworth referred to the "Recommendations on Reasonable Range of Alternatives" document within the meeting packet. He said that staff received an assignment and guidance from the Steering Team at their last meeting in September. Since that time, staff has been working on responses to the Steering Team points. Gary asked the Steering Team to review the five recommendations, which were summarized within the recommendations document. Gary asked if there were questions or comments from the Steering Team based on the assignment.

In referring to the recommendations document, Gary Farnsworth said that we are ready to move forward with a recommendation on the reasonable range of alternatives. The reasonable

range of alternatives includes those that are practical or feasible from the technical and economic standpoint and using common sense.

Gary Farnsworth said that ODOT staff recommends East A and West E, including the 3 north interchange location options for each, as the EIS range of alternatives for further study. Gary referred to the displayed East A map. Dennis Luke said for clarification that this is the alternative that goes along the railroad tracks and has a Highway 20 interchange. Gary reviewed the map of East A, showing the location of major local roads, one of the northern interchange options, and the south interchange location. He reviewed other possible northern interchange locations, and said that north end interchange locations will be studied on the East A alternative through the DEIS process.

Gary Farnsworth said that the staff recommendation is to carry East A forward as the preferred alternative forwarded by ODOT. He noted that it is not without flaws, but referred to the bullets within the recommendations document that explained why it is favored – differentiators including traffic, socio-economics, functioning of Highway 97, and others. Gary also said that commercial businesses in the area have made comments that buildings along Robal and Cooley Roads are oriented toward the east. He noted that a side benefit associated with East A is that highway visibility remains to the east. Gary asked for any comments or questions from the Steering Team. No questions or comments were offered by the Steering Team.

Gary Farnsworth reviewed the West E alternative, and noted that it is a different West alternative than what was presented in September. He said that this alternative was developed in response to the September Steering Team comments, including the request to look at greater access on the West alternatives. He noted that this request came largely from the Citizen Advisory Committee's recommendation to look at improved access to the commercial area. Gary said that Nick Arnis of the City of Bend also talked about the importance of sorting out traffic at Empire Avenue and the functioning of the interchange long-term. So ODOT looked more closely at these issues, along with the City of Bend consultants and the ODOT Transportation Planning Unit. Gary said that this alternative provides the best highway performance of any of the West alternatives.

Dennis Luke asked if Cooley Road goes under 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and railroad tracks on both alternatives. Gary Farnsworth replied affirmatively that both alternatives require grade separation. Mike Schmidt asked if the Cooley Road grade separation will be the first element for either alternative. Gary replied that it would be a first phase. Dennis Luke said that we need to be sure there is access to Highway 97 from Cooley Road in the interim. Gary said that both alternatives would do so.

Gary Farnsworth said that of the West alternatives, West E showed best overall performance for Highways 97 and 20 for meeting the Purpose and Need. He said that it provides the best operation for the local system, and takes pressure off Cooley Road. He said that this alternative provides additional access to local business, though they were not able to find a way to provide the direct highway access at Cooley Road. Gary demonstrated on the map the "split diamond" interchange concept on West E. The interchange separates traffic between Empire and 3<sup>rd</sup> street, and provides a separate frontage connections between Empire and 3<sup>rd</sup>, helping to separate the traffic between the highway and local system. He said that this interchange design solves the problem of interchanges being too closely placed.

Gary Farnsworth demonstrated on the map the north end interchange options. He said that what we don't show is an option for an interchange further to the south on the western alternatives. He said ODOT found that the spacing is too tight for safe highway operations with

a southern interchange due to proximity to the Highway 97 and 20 interchange. He said that they are not recommending this option with the west alternative.

Dennis Luke asked about the proximity to the cemetery, and if the places the interchange touches the cemetery are unused. Gary Farnsworth said that they are looking at design options that avoid the cemetery entirely. Gary said that the cemetery area displayed on the map is not currently used, and he noted that they are working closely with the cemetery to minimize impacts. Gary said that this alternative meets the project Purpose and Need and Goals and Objectives, and works best for the City's goals for connectivity to the local system. It also allows for the full connection of Highways 97 and 20.

Gary Farnsworth said that West E can be designed and constructed. However, the issues that were identified regarding the West alternatives in September haven't gone away. This alternative costs more – the highest for the west alignments, and substantially more than East A. This compounds problems with phasing. Any West alternative phasing options do not get at solving or helping to take pressure off of Highway 97 – except for grade separating at Cooley Road. No other phasing improves the highway system. He said that another challenge is that there will be no access through Highway 97 within the new west alignment, except at the interchange. All other local streets would need to go over or under the highway. This creates a barrier for local traffic. And for emergency access, said Dennis Luke. Gary said that the west alternative concerns are summarized on page 3 of the recommendations document; the West E alternative does not resolve these concerns. He added that another challenge for West E is the proximity to the Old Bend Redmond Highway intersection. Gary also pointed out the width of the Highway where 20 and 97 would come together; there would be a big impact footprint.

Gary closed his presentation on West E by saying that the problems with this alternative have been clearly stated, so the question is why are we still looking at this alternative? He noted that ODOT has heard the message from the CAC and from public meetings participants that they do not yet want to see the West alignment removed from consideration.

Gary Farnsworth continued his review of the recommendations document. He referred again to the September Steering Team guidance supporting the CAC interest in the West A alternative if it could be modified to provide direct access to mall area from the Highway 20/97 interchange. So ODOT staff went back and took a close look at options for access. They found that direct highway access at Cooley Road would not work when considering the project Purpose and Need, Goals and Objectives. An interchange in this area with direct access to the local system provides safety and operations challenges. There are two reasons for this: first, the proximity of interchange ramps creates problems with traffic merging and weaving between access points. The problem here is that two state highways would come together in the area. Second, there would be short connections between points, which would draw local traffic onto the highway (going between interchanges to avoid the surface streets). This compounds the merge/weave problems. Dennis Luke said that to keep local traffic from using the highway system to move around, there needs to be reasonable alternatives on local street network. He pointed out that there is no current local street access to the mall area.

Eric King said that the City of Bend is working hard through the NE Transportation Study to make sure there are tighter connections with state highway system, to provide attractive alternatives to the highway system. Gary Farnsworth said that even with the extension of 3<sup>rd</sup> street and the corridor barrier, it becomes difficult to find alternatives to build out the local system to draw away traffic. The East alternative provides more options for connecting the city street system on the west side. The West alternatives restrict the local system by cutting off

local roads, while the East alternative retains the ability to connect local roads on the west side of the mall.

Gary Farnsworth reviewed the WS West alternatives, which was developed by Wilbur Smith consultants hired by SIMA and representing the Cascade Village Mall. He demonstrated on the map the proposed ramp connection to Highways 20 and 97. He noted the proximity of the Highway 20/97 interchange and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street interchange - 3,100 feet distance. He said that with the high volume of traffic in this area, for this interchange proximity to work you would need multiple auxiliary lanes because the amount of merge. This can be dangerous, confusing and frustrating for drivers. As an example of concerns related to this alternative, traffic heading west from the Parkway onto Highway 20 would need to leave the highway through the interchange and travel through a number of traffic signals. He said that this alternative is good at directing traffic into the shopping area from all directions, but that this can create problems all over the system.

Gary moved onto the West D alternative, which is another way to provide more local access. He said that this alternative trades off highway-to-highway connection for more localized access for Cooley Road. The result is that it compromises the traffic flow benefits on Highways 97 and 20 for additional local access.

Gary Farnsworth asked if the Steering Team had questions or comments on this information. Bob Bryant said that the West E alternative appears to be a culmination of the best of all West alternatives, and that it also achieves better access to retail area. Gary replied that it not only is consistent with the project Purpose and Need, but considering the Goals and Objectives – connectivity, access, freight mobility, economic development – this was the best we could come up with to maximize the Goals and Objectives. This performs the best of the western alternatives. He said that the tradeoff is that it creates a big footprint, and that other problems associated with the West alternatives remain.

Eric King said that an advantage to the West alternatives compared to East A is in regard to operations at Empire Avenue. He asked if Gary could address how East A performs at Empire. Gary replied that East A does not perform nearly as well as West E – that it puts a lot of pressure on the Empire interchange. He said this illustrates the tradeoff. A West E benefit is that it brings a lot of relief to the Empire interchange area. On the other hand, the East A alternative shows a good function for Highway 97 and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.

Bob Bryant said that we will need to continue to look at 3<sup>rd</sup> Street as we refine the alternatives, including at the Empire Avenue area. He said that we'll continue to see volumes on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street higher than we want to see. He pointed out that given the nature of that route as a commercial corridor, we will see it continue to have high volumes with some level of congestion that is difficult to mitigate.

Dennis Luke said that the WS West alternative funnels traffic toward businesses at the mall area. This is not the purpose of the highway, and that it doesn't solve any of the problems. He asked if ODOT has numbers for how many people traveling on Highway 20 don't stop in Bend? Jon Heacock replied that less than 10% of the Highway 20 traffic going east doesn't stop, and that 25% of the traffic going south doesn't stop. The rest are local destinations.

Mike Schmidt said that we need to keep in mind that the project area is a regional draw, and is not just for local traffic. As Juniper Ridge moves toward becoming a regional commercial mixed use area, the pressure for regional access will be even greater. The West alternative helps address a long term reality that this is a regional draw as the largest commercial area in the

region. Dennis Luke agreed that we can't downplay the importance of business access. However, if we don't find a way to get traffic through this area, we haven't accomplished our goal for the project. We need to find an alternative that moves traffic through, but we need to provide access to those businesses since they are very important.

Gary Farnsworth said that we have tried to take all those points into consideration. The tradeoff is that we still want to provide and facilitate that access, but if too much access is provided, then there are unintended consequences. The local traffic that could find other routes is drawn onto the highway system.

Gary said that the West C alternative is a variation of West A that attempts to provide access while maintaining the Highway 20/97 connection, but again there is a range of benefits and tradeoffs. This alternative moves the interchange from Empire up to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Dennis Luke asked if the Parkway access at Empire Avenue would be removed. Gary answered affirmatively.

Gary said that the range of north end interchange options will be forwarded into the DEIS. The reason why we are taking a range of north end options into the DEIS is because there are a lot of tradeoffs between the options, including varying impacts to the "Environmental Justice" neighborhoods (mobile home parks), emergency services needs, the cemetery, and existing businesses, and how to extend 3<sup>rd</sup> Street east of the railroad tracks.

Gary wrapped up by reviewing the tables within the recommendations document that shows the comparison between alternatives.

### **Opportunity for Input from Citizen Advisory Committee Members, Focus Group Representatives, Other Public**

Mike Schmidt said that the 13-member CAC has been meeting for some time, working to represent citizen input. Mike acknowledged that the ODOT staff has done a great job working with the CAC through the complex transportation issues associated with this project. He said that earlier the CAC has heard data pointing to the East as the best alternative moving forward. However, after deliberation the CAC decided that it is best to continue to consider West alternative as well. The concerns is that we may get further into the DEIS process and find that we have mitigation needs that are complicated and interest groups that are entrenched, which could end up stalling the process. The CAC recommendation is to continue to consider the West and East alignments.

Mike Schmidt said that the CAC recognizes that the alignments have been considered against a "no build" option. The CAC would like to now see the alignments compared to each other, and we believe that the data will show which is the best option. We don't want to get down the road and find that we wished we kept the other alternative on the table.

Mike Schmidt said that the public has commented on the high cost of this project. He said he asked Heather Ornelas, the Bend Area Transit manager, how would \$3 to \$5 million per year over 20 years improve transit options. Her reply was that it would allow service to the entire community, with 10 minute waits in many areas. He suggested looking at expanding transit as a means to address the project over the next 20 years. He then discussed an article from Scientific America on the "Braess Paradox", which suggests that adding capacity can reduce a network's overall effectiveness, and cautioned that there could be unintended consequences to this project. He summarized his comments by reaffirming that the CAC believes that the West E and East A alternatives should be carried forward into the DEIS, though the data shows that East works best. He also stated support for the City's effort to develop the local road network as a means to remove traffic from the state highway system.

Dennis Luke said that his understanding was that the CAC is requesting that the same amount of study go into East alternative as has gone into the West alignments. Mike Schmidt agreed that this was correct.

Members of the audience were provided opportunity to make comments. Michel Bayard introduced himself as a representative of the HUNS and a CAC member. He said that his understanding is that the project goal is to create a Highway 97 corridor with restricted access, so that the highway provides the best traffic flow north to south. That type of corridor already exists in the railroad corridor. It makes sense to put both of these restricted corridors together. He said that the HUNS favor East A alternative, Option 4. He said in regard to the West alternatives, they have no problem with the WS West alternative, and West E Option 1 would be OK, except they object to an extension of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street through the HUNS neighborhood. All other options are unacceptable.

Seth King of Perkins Coie spoke on behalf of Lowes and the Newman Development Group LLC, which are property owners of southwest corner of Cooley Road and Highway 97. He stated support for the Steering Team's recommendation to advance the East alternative. He is not supporting any of the West alternatives. None of ODOT's West alternatives achieve an outcome that meets the goals established for access to the commercial area while maintaining traffic flow, and they don't compare well to the East alternative. The West alternatives create a new transportation barrier on the west side of the project area, require additional statewide planning goal exceptions, impact local road connections/emergency access, and cannot be phased easily. He requested that only the East alternative be carried forward.

Dennis Luke suggested considering that 3<sup>rd</sup> Street could be extended to the west of the Cascade Village Mall, while Highway 97 could be aligned along the railroad. With 3<sup>rd</sup> Street taken to the west, the existing highway 97 corridor could serve as local access to the mall area, and looped back to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street toward the north. He said that this could be built quicker and would remove pressure from Highway 97. He said that this needs analysis.

Mike Lovely introduced himself as a member of CAC, the Bend MPO CAC, and the SW Bend Neighborhood Association. He requested that a map of owners of vacant property be generated to ensure we hear from everyone.

Wayne Schnur, Nels Anderson Road area business owner, stated preference for the West alignment. He then said that the Wilbur Smith proposal to realign the railroad at Cooley Road to the west provides the ability to maintain access to neighborhoods north and south of Cooley road, and provides better emergency access. He said that no matter which alignment is chosen, working with BNSF to provide better access makes sense. He also said that there are projections of 40,000 people in the Juniper Ridge area, 40,000 in the "gopher gulch" area, and another 20,000 in the Miller area and other properties to the west, and questioned if we are thinking sufficiently long-term regarding capacity. Buying property now may avoid problems down the road.

Referring to the Wilbur Smith proposal for the Cooley Road area, Dennis Luke said that adding a curve in a railroad is not easy. He pointed out that the railroad line will be double tracking in the future.

Liz Dickson of Hurley Ray spoke as a representative of Bend Associates, which includes Target, Home Depot, Staples and other businesses. She said that the letter submitted by Seth King was signed by Bend Associates as well. She said that a significant amount of time has been

spent studying alternatives, and that the City, County, ODOT and engineers agree that the East A is best addresses the Purpose and Need and can be built in phases. She said that they are concerned that two alternatives are being considered when one is clearly a better solution.

Joel Gisler, Nels Anderson area property owner, stated support for the West alternatives. He said that ODOT needs to look closely at access into the triangle north of Empire; abandoning that area makes no sense.

Ann Marie Colucci of Patrick Real Property Services said that she works with property owners located south of cemetery along Clausen Road. She said they are not in favor of West alignment because it segments their property parcels. It creates a significant barrier to development and local road access. She said that this is land under consideration for UGB expansion, and has been looked at for commercial zoning. This is a regional area, which equates to regional development dollars for our community. She stated favor for the East alternative as opposed to West. They would support local road development within the area.

### **Steering Team Deliberation/Response/Guidance on Staff Recommendations**

Gary Farnsworth returned to the ODOT staff recommendation:

**ODOT Staff recommends East A and West E, including 3 north interchange location options for each, as the EIS range of alternatives for detailed technical study.**

Gary said that they are looking for a Steering Team response and follow-up to that recommendation. He said that the West E and East A would move forward for further study, and stressed that East A would be identified as the ODOT preferred alternative.

Dennis Luke said that we have done a lot of analysis on the West alternatives, looking at access and other issues. He thought we had an intent to study the East alternative at this level of detail. He asked if ODOT is looking for a recommendation to spend more time on the West alternative, or is the recommendation to study the East. Mike Schmidt said we don't want to throw the West out yet, but we do want to focus on the East. Keeping the West on the table will provide opportunity for side-by-side comparison.

Eric King asked if there was a significant cost difference in taking one or two alternatives into the DEIS. Gary Farnsworth replied that they are relatively comparable, and that there would not be a lot of additional costs in taking two alternatives into the DEIS. He reiterated that the East A alternative would be the preferred alternative, and the analysis focus would be there. The West E alternative would be included as a counterpoint. He said the reason we spent so much time with the West alternatives was because of the issues identified by the Steering Team. We did not focus as much time on the East alternative because it does not have the same issues as the West.

Bob Bryant clarified that Gary was saying that West E will be kept on the table, though not a lot of time will be spent on the analysis of West. The focus will be on the East alternative. Dennis Luke asked Mike Schmidt if this was acceptable to the CAC. Mike replied affirmatively.

Bob Bryant noted that staff has done a lot of work on analyzing the West alternatives, and that while preferred, the East alternative needs more analysis work. He said that he is hearing the recommendation that we keep West E on the table so we will have an opportunity to compare to the East A alternative once the analysis is complete. Dennis Luke said that he understands

that ODOT is recommending that East A be designated as the preferred alternative, and that West E be kept on the table.

Dennis Luke asked for more information on the timeline for having additional detail on the East. Gary Farnsworth said that it will take a couple of months to get the land area established and technical reports completed. The Steering Team would meet again in a couple months. Dennis Luke said he appreciates the process, but that as soon as we can give the public an answer on where the highway will be located, they can plan for the future.

Gary Farnsworth said that in making this recommendation, he wants to be sure that the Steering Team understands and is clear on the information presented today and next steps. He asked if there were other questions regarding this recommendation.

***Dennis Luke made a motion to support the ODOT staff recommendation. Eric King seconded the motion. The Steering Team unanimously approved the motion.***

Bob Bryant clarified that the Steering Team recommended that the East A alternative be designated as the agency preferred alternative.

Gary Farnsworth recognized ODOT staff for their work on the project.

Eric King said that we need to look at the performance of Highway 20 and Empire Avenue, and make sure we are not shifting problems. He said we need to continue to look at access for emergency vehicles in the project area. Gary Farnsworth said that there are emergency access questions in the Cooley/Robal Road and Empire Avenue areas, and that we will be looking for options to make the area functional for the emergency providers.

In response to Mike Schmidt's earlier comments about the travel demand study, Gary Farnsworth said that ODOT has done significant traffic analysis, and that will be included. He added that the "no-build" alternative will remain on the table as well.

#### **Next Steps/Action Items, Other Guidance, Meeting Critique**

Dennis Luke said that there are a number of road and highway projects under way. The Highway 97 at Lava Butte project goes to bid in May, and the Terrebonne to the railroad bridge goes to contract in May. ODOT will be resurfacing a lot of Highway 97, and work will continue on the south end of the Redmond re-route.

**Meeting Adjourned at 2:52 PM.**