



Oregon

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**US97: Bend North Corridor Steering Team Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Deschutes County Service Center; Barnes Room
1300 NW Wall Street, Bend, Oregon, 97701
February 24, 8:00 to 9:30 AM**

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

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

Public/Audience: See sign-in sheet.

Meeting Coordinator: Julie Myers, ODOT

Recorder: Andrew Spreadborough, COIC

The meeting began at 8:05 A.M.

Introductions/Agenda Review

Gary Farnsworth said that the meeting materials including the maps are posted to the project website. Introductions were made, and Gary Farnsworth reviewed the agenda. Dennis Luke asked what outcome ODOT wants to see from this meeting. Gary replied that ODOT staff is looking for a response from the Steering Team on the recommendations, and direction moving forward.

ODOT Staff Recommendations, Reasonable Range of Alternatives

Gary Farnsworth summarized the findings and recommendations document. ODOT has heard from a number of stakeholders that there is a need to lower the costs on alternatives. Work began in September to downscale the alternatives. A series of workshops were held in the fall, resulting in the identification of reasonable alternatives that are practical or feasible from the technical and from an economic standpoint and using common sense.

Gary Farnsworth said that at the November Steering Team work session we received input from this group to focus on the downsized alternatives. Today we are proposing to narrow the range to a single alternative. The full alternatives were re-evaluated to confirm that they should not be included in the reasonable range of alternatives; the downsized alternatives are reasonable at a lower cost. The conclusion is to not move forward on the full scale alternatives. Gary Farnsworth reviewed and summarized the downscaled alternatives:

Alternative West DS-1

- North interchange located south of cemetery
- Two parallel highway corridors
- Provides critical connections between US 20 and US 97

- Interchange to the north is directional, with access to/from 3rd Street
- Does not include improvements at the intersection of the existing Highway 97 and Cooley Road/rail crossing; improvements at this intersection would significantly increase costs
- No improvements north of the interchange location

Gary Farnsworth summarized several of the alternative analysis items:

1. Meets the project purpose and need, and provides two direct ramp connections between US 97 and US 20.
2. The cost range as shown is \$180-\$220 million, with additional costs as improvements are added in.
3. The alternative appears to be feasible, but phasing options are limited.
4. A couple features are not included. If they are included, the added costs would move this alternative into the unreasonable range.
5. The west alignment creates a new geographic barrier that doesn't exist today; does not provide opportunity for east-west connectivity.
6. Creates a large impact footprint with parallel US 97 and US 20 corridors on the south side of the commercial area.

Alternative Existing DS-1

- Tries to do as much as possible with the existing US 97 alignment
- Full interchange at US 97 and Cooley; designed as an urban single point interchange
- Cooley goes under the railroad and highway
- Robal Road goes over the highway, some limited access
- Showed the location of US 97 access closures

Gary Farnsworth summarized alternative analysis items:

1. Based on a preliminary level of traffic analysis, this alternative is very marginal in meeting the project Purpose and Need. It concentrates local and through traffic on a single US 97 corridor, and does not provide alternative routes or opportunities to manage traffic. The alternative adds capacity, but does not meet projected capacity needs.

Dennis Luke asked how emergency providers access the project area. Gary Farnsworth replied that either via Cooley Road or using the Empire interchange. The alignment of the south end of the corridor would be similar to the current alignment.

Gary Farnsworth said that this alternative is limited in its ability to meet the Purpose and Need. Additionally, businesses in the project area have said that the changes in access would create significant impacts. Dennis Luke asked about a Hunnell Road connection in the project area. Bob Bryant said that the City and County Transportation System Plans show Hunnell Road as an improved arterial.

8. Because this alternative is very marginal in meeting the Purpose and Need, it does not appear reliable in terms of protecting the ability for customers from around the area to safely and conveniently reach their business destinations. This alternative would change existing access without having confidence in the long term functionality of US 97.

Alternative East DS-1

- Previous East alternatives had full interchanges located at the south end; this alternative only has a directional interchange. Does not change the alignment on the south end or rebuild the Empire interchange.

Dennis Luke asked about access closures in the Empire Avenue area. Jon Heacock summarized access improvements in the Empire Road area. Michel Bayard asked about changes to access from Empire Avenue to US 97. Gary Farnsworth said that all existing connections are maintained. He then demonstrated on the alternative map the proposed changes that would connect Highway 97 to the new East alignment.

Gary Farnsworth said that the north end of the project area is similar to alternatives reviewed last summer; he demonstrated the north end interchange location, frontage roads, and 3rd Street arterial location.

Alternative East DS-2

- Stakeholder feedback showed that another east downsized alternative is necessary
- Most flexibility in terms of phasing
- Ability to phase at intersection of Cooley Road and US 97
- Consolidates corridors – rail and highway located together within the same corridor
- Impact to the Nels Anderson Road area built environment is clear and manageable from a NEPA perspective.

Dennis Luke observed that this alternative and the previous downsized alternatives provide no direct access to Cooley Road from US 97. Gary Farnsworth said this is one of several benefits/impacts that must be considered, and there are many trade-offs. Dennis Luke said that there is a signal light at the intersection of Cooley Road and US 20, and that north-south travel could be accommodated via OB Riley Road and the Old Bend-Redmond Highway.

Michel Bayard asked if there is a difference between the East alternatives in the Empire Avenue area. Gary Farnsworth replied that the East alternatives are the same south of Cooley Road.

Bob Bryant asked for a summary of prominent differences from the traffic analysis; what did we lose shifting to the downsized alternatives? Do any of these preclude adding components of the full scale alternatives at some point in the future? Jon Heacock said that analysis showed that over the long term, any improvements to Empire Avenue interchange would draw traffic and that congestion would be maintained. So this improvement was scaled back in all alternatives. He said that it would be hard to add Empire improvements in the future, because there would not be enough value for the investment.

Jon Heacock said that 3rd Street was another area analyzed; it does not operate as well in the downsized alternatives compared to the full alternatives. He said that the functioning of 3rd Street cannot be improved by improvements – there are capacity constraints. Travel measures can improve the local system, and may be more effective than improvements on the state system. Jon said that Highway 97-20 connectivity was reduced on all of the downsized alternatives. Connections could be added later, but at significant cost.

Gary Farnsworth said that on any alternatives, the answer depends on the timing of the new facility construction. The short answer is that the downscaled alternatives will not preclude future improvements. Eric King agreed on the importance of not precluding a US 20-US 97 connection in the future; the lack of a direct connection is contributing to congestion at Empire Avenue. He noted the importance of this question: if we want to develop a highway-to-highway connection in the future, what improvements would be needed/how would it affect the downscaled alternatives?

Dennis Luke said that governing bodies need to know what is going on with this project, since this project impacts other projects. As an example, there have been discussions of creating a

6-lane corridor on Highway 97. Gary Farnsworth said that he has heard the need to focus on context. In terms of the issue of creating a 6-lane corridor on Highway 97, the ODOT vision for Highway 97 is a 4-lane divided facility.

Gary Farnsworth summarized the recommendations regarding the Reasonable Range of Alternatives:

1. Alternatives West DS-1 and Existing DS-2 are not practical or feasible from the technical and economic standpoint, and it does not make sense for them to be further considered among the reasonable range of alternatives.
2. Alternatives East DS-1 and East DS-2 should be carried forward for additional detailed environmental analysis, representing the reasonable range of alternatives.
3. As the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is being prepared, each alternative in the reasonable range should be further developed to maximize investments in:
 - a. Travel demand management and traffic management technologies;
 - b. Opportunities to support and accommodate alternative modes (e.g. transit, bicycles, pedestrians); and
 - c. Design features which will best support emergency services and other public safety needs.

Gary Farnsworth noted the need to work with Commute Options and measures such as the adapted signal timing project to develop alternative ways to travel through the project area.

Opportunity for Public Input

CAC chair Michel Bayard read from a prepared statement: "Combined Comments of ODOT's Region 4 Citizen Advisory Committee."¹

"The CAC is a group made up of concerned citizens and the businesses where Central Oregonians work and shop. We have participated in this process in good faith from the beginning, for about 5 years. We have been asked to comment on ODOT staff's proposal to move one or two downscaled east versions forward for analysis of environmental impacts. We appreciate the opportunity to do so.

"In the hours our group has spent reviewing ODOT's latest proposals, we have reached impasse many times because of a lack of information. Without adequate technical analysis and details, we find ourselves unable to properly understand and consider the options before us. We recently learned that an extensive technical analysis has been prepared and released by ODOT staff, but not to the CAC. Since learning of the document we have asked ODOT for this information, last on Thursday, February 18. We still have not received it. Without it, we are not properly versed to give you our best comments. We do not have all the information.

"We object strongly to ODOT's uncooperative treatment of our group as a matter of fairness. We also object to it as citizens of the State, entitled to be involved in such public processes. ODOT's failure to give us the same information as other parties in this process violates Statewide Planning Goal 1: Citizen Involvement. This failure to disclose all necessary information puts us at a significant disadvantage in our efforts to effectively represent the general public. We have been asked to weigh in on the

¹ Note: Although Michel Bayard indicated during the meeting that the following comments were from the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), during discussions with ODOT staff following the meeting he clarified (along with other CAC members) that these comments were not endorsed or supported by all of the CAC membership. Therefore, these notes will not be identified in the project records as actual CAC input, rather as public input from Michel Bayard.

appropriateness of the alternatives and the alternative down-selection process. We believe that this technical analysis is critical to those judgements.

"The CAC has proven to be a worthy partner in the US 97 Bend North Corridor Solutions process, having consistently devoted large amounts of time, energy, analytical skills, and funds to finding a mutually beneficial solution. If ODOT were to share all of the information it has prepared with the Committee, the agency would also be sharing it with the general public. We ask ODOT, again, to include us as full partners in this process.

"In the Study's final Purpose and Need, Goals and Objectives statement (June 2008), Goal 1 asserts an Open Review Process, with Goal 1A specifying "Ensure all stakeholder groups and the public have access to project information..." Without access to the detailed technical reports, we cannot play a meaningful role in the process.

"We request that ODOT share this report with the CAC, and allow the Committee 30 days to review, process, and provide meaningful input on the information in the report.

"Though we do not feel qualified to address issues of a technical nature without all the information, we do have other concerns. ODOT has stated that alternatives East DS-1 and East DS-2 should be carried forward for additional detailed environmental analysis, representing the reasonable range of alternatives. We want to understand what is truly achieved by these two alternatives over the status quo, and for how many millions of public dollars. This comparative process is the same that we have seen employed at the Oregon Transportation Commission. We believe it is likely that the OTC will compare our final project to others in the state, in an effort to decide where Oregon can get the most "bang" for its "buck." The CAC wants to be sure we are putting forward the plan most likely to win OTC support. Without it, the project will never be built.

"It is likely that through-traffic flow and safety would be improved on US 97 with either of the alternatives proposed by ODOT staff. However, we question whether traffic flow and safety would be improved in the region overall. We suspect that the current problems on US 97 would simply be shifted to US 20, Business 97, and the region's city streets and county roads, including Deschutes Junction and the Empire Interchange, as current and future flows are constricted into even narrower and more distant points of access to the highway system

"We believe that ODOT has the responsibility to ensure that driver safety is also preserved on its other regional highways and the future extension of Third Street, which will also be classified as Business 97 due to its connectivity function between US 97 and US 20, the facilities on which trip traffic from US 97 would be diverted.

"We, too, are committed to improve traffic safety for all existing and new facilities in the region, not merely US 97. The CAC hopes that our governments in this room share that commitment, and will reflect that commitment in the decisions we make on this matter. I want to stress: it is likely that ODOT's traffic analysis report contains information relevant to the CAC's concerns, and may also provide answers to the questions I will now address:"

Specific Questions and Concerns:

- Commercial Trucking Input:

(1) Freight traffic going to any business between Cooley Road and Butler Market Road would be slowed and blocked from efficient operations in both East DS-1 and East DS-2 alternatives. This would result in increased delivery delays, time pressures, and costs on commercial carriers, who pay penalties for later deliveries. We are concerned that this would create new safety risks for both truckers and the non-commercial drivers sharing these facilities. Scientific studies have shown that delay-driven frustration leads to unsafe driving behavior.

- Shopping mall input:

- (1) Customers of the shopping malls coming from Redmond who miss the exit to Business 3rd a mile north of Cooley Road will be forced to go all the way to the Butler Market exit before they can turn around. On the other hand, the East DS-2 alternative doesn't really have this problem. It provides a more natural way of getting onto Business 3rd and is closer to Cooley Road. That makes it more intuitive and more closely duplicates what they were used to.
- (2) There needs to be a right in-right out (RIRO) ramp on Robal Road for those heading south and turning south. This would also require an auxiliary lane for public safety requirements and there is adequate room to provide such a lane. It would take pressure off of Empire and Butler Market Road and also help access to US 20.
- (3) There needs to be an off-exit at Cooley Road from new NB US 97. This would probably require moving the new structures approximately 50 feet to the west and the construction of a large retaining wall along the BNSF railroad. We believe such an extra cost is outweighed by the advantage of not forcing drivers north to turn around at Deschutes Market Junction, which is approximately 4.5 miles away, to return to the shopping area. It would also help improve access to local neighborhoods.
- (4) The shopping malls need to have an answer to how the new Business 97/Third Street is going to cross Cooley Road. Is it going to be at grade? Will it impact land owned by Lowe's? Overall, we need more details to properly evaluate these proposals and provide the feedback you have asked us to provide.
- (5) The shopping malls do not have a good feel for the public safety component of either the East DS-1 or East DS-2. They are concerned that police, ambulance, and fire vehicles may not be able to reach areas to the north, south and east of US 20 as quickly as they do now, under these proposals.

- Hunnell United Neighbors Input:

"The HUNS support East DS-2, as it is currently represented by ODOT, but strongly oppose East DS-1 for the following reasons:

- (1) It would reroute a local business road through a rural residential area outside of the Bend UGB. This commercial-purpose road would route southbound traffic to all businesses between Deschutes Memorial Garden and Butler Market Road including heavy truck delivery traffic. Both Lowe's and Home Depot receive freight deliveries up until midnight every night. If Wal Mart is built, deliveries will occur all night long.
- (2) This is unnecessary and uneconomic urbanization of an area zoned MUA-10, in violation of state land use planning laws. The construction of a commercially oriented principal arterial would not promote the orderly and efficient provision of urban services, as there is no commercial development in this area to take advantage of the State's investment – the area can be expected to remain residential for a number of years in the future.
- (3) There is insufficient detail in the alternatives to ascertain the access that HUNS residents would have to US 97 or Business 3rd. This is also true for emergency service providers.

- General concerns and input:

“Several concerns expressed by the CAC since the beginning of the study have not been specifically addressed as of yet. These include emergency services access, allowance for future transit options in the Bend-Redmond transportation corridor, and restoration of affected business access. While it may be possible to include these in any of the alternatives, which ODOT has stated, the CAC needs to see how the design has been adapted to accommodate these features. Unless these are specifically designed for, and included, in the project configuration, it is impossible to know whether the ultimate project plan will be able to accommodate them and whether the ultimate financial expenditures are justified by the benefits such a plan would provide.

“It is a commonly accepted principle (as expressed in Goal 12 and the Transportation Planning Rule) that new road projects should result in decreased Vehicle Miles Travelled and favor the development of additional modes of transportation. From the limited amount of information that the CAC has, it is not clear that either East DS-1 or East DS-2 reduces VMT and/or enables alternative modes of transportation. We request that ODOT share cross sections of the new roadways to see how these plans accommodate bike lanes, pedestrian walkways and public transit rights-of-way. The need for a neighborhood scale, pedestrian-friendly, solution has long been a concern of the Boyd Acres residents, who have been active participants in this process from its inception.

“Conclusion: In conclusion, we appreciate ODOT’s invitation to have the CAC participate in this process. As noted above, our participation is hampered by ODOT’s lack of full disclosure. We are ready and willing to provide those comments, based on all the information available. Without it, please consider our limited comments as just that, the best we can do under the circumstances. We remain supportive of formulation of a long range plan for the corridor. And the time to plan for the future vision of the corridor is now.”

Opportunity for Input from Agency Coordinating Committee and Focus Group Members

No comments provided.

Other Public Input, Questions and Answers

Mike May, citizen: I appreciate the downscaled alternatives. My concern is that not every alternative has been considered. He proposed locating Highway 97 east of the railroad track. The point is that it saves two bridges, and \$10 million. The potential is a very direct route.

Wayne Schnur, CAC member: Asked for clarification that the recommendation is for the two East DS alternatives to be forwarded for further study, while eliminating the West and Existing alternatives. Gary Farnsworth replied affirmatively.

Dennis Luke asked if the CAC is OK with the West Alternative not being included in the range of reasonable alternatives. Michel Bayard replied affirmatively.

Steering Team Deliberation/Response/Guidance on Staff Recommendations

Gary Farnsworth noted feedback on the recommendation is requested, with written comments due on Friday. He said that ODOT will also need to check in with the Federal Highway Administration on the progress. Gary referred the Steering Team to the project timeline on the last page of the recommendation document.

Dennis Luke said that the Deschutes County Board of Commissioners has not discussed this issue, so he speaking for himself. He said that he finds it hard to support the West alternative, and would not have a problem if it was no longer considered. Clearly the CAC wants more information on the East alternatives, and he supports them getting the information.

Eric King agreed with Dennis Luke, and said that he has no problem with the West alternative being eliminated. Due to phasing limitations and land use challenges, the West does not make sense. He said that he understands that more information is needed on the East alternatives, but that he is comfortable moving them forward. He said that he is comfortable eliminating the Existing alternative. He wants to keep the process moving, so favors moving forward with the East DS-1 and East DS-2 alternatives. He noted that he is not yet fully comfortable with all aspects of these concepts, and supports the CAC and others having access to information.

Bob Bryant agreed. He said that it is not intended at this stage in the process to have all of the design detail answers. The goal has been to get to the point where we can get to the next level of detail. The ability to focus on the two alternatives being carried forward will benefit all of us. ODOT has not had the ability to dig into alternatives at the level that some think we have.

Michel Bayard said he agreed with the recommendation, as long as the CAC has access to the information that we think is available. He asked about the differences in cost estimate between the East alternatives and the Existing alternative. If funding becomes tight, could the Existing alternative be the best solution? Gary Farnsworth summarized costs identified within the recommendations document. He noted that all of the alternatives are within a comparable range. He said that value and the ability to be flexible are important considerations. The Existing alternative may be a lower cost, but it is limiting and does not accomplish as much.

Dennis Luke said that he wants a project that can do the fix as far into the future as we can. He said that we need to find the alternative that best provides benefit in the future.

Eric King suggested that it would be helpful to quantify criteria to help this discussion. He suggested balancing cost versus connectivity/benefits. Gary Farnsworth said that this type of scoring has been part of the analysis, and that the comments in the recommendation document reflect that level of scoring and review. He noted that ODOT received and incorporated input from City and County staff. Eric King said that he appreciates the staff input, but would like some of that information to reach the Steering Team. Gary Farnsworth said that this level and type of detail will be contained within the Draft EIS. The emphasis today has been on corridor selection.

Bob Bryant proposed that the Steering Team recommend moving forward an East Downscaled alternative. Use the process and detailed analysis to determine how to re-connect 3rd Street to US 97 on the north end, and other design points that stakeholders have brought forward. Michel Bayard seconded. Dennis Luke and Eric King supported.

Next Steps/Action Items, Other Guidance, Meeting Critique

Gary Farnsworth said that the Steering Team may reconvene if something new comes from written comments and/or consultation with the Federal partners. Otherwise, the intent is to reconvene in spring.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:30 AM.