

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION MINUTES



February 24, 2021

12:30pm

Virtual Meeting via Zoom, Medford, OR

Call to order: 12:38pm

10. Roll Call

Commissioners Present:

Al Densmore, Chair
Dennie Conrad
Mickey Harvey
Kim Parducci
Peggy Penland
Jared Pulver
Suzanne Schroeder
Paige West

Commissioners Absent:

None

Guests Present:

Virginia Elandt, ODOT

Staff Present:

Kelly Madding, Deputy City Manager & Interim Public Works Director
Karl MacNair, Public Works
Debra Royal, Public Works

Council Liaison Present:

Sarah Spansail, Councilmember

20. Citizen Communications

None.

30. Approval of Minutes from January 27, 2021

There being no additions or corrections, the minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

40. Action Items

None.

50. Discussion Items

50.1 ODOT Exit 30 IAMP Introduction (By Virginia Elandt)

Virginia Elandt, ODOT Sr. Planner Region 3, is leading the N Medford Interchange - Exit 30 Interchange Area Management Plan. Ms. Elandt provided an overview of the work done to-date.

Since the 1990's, ODOT, Jackson County, and the City have been working to find solutions to reduce congestion and increase safety along the OR62 corridor. This effort resulted in the creation of the OR62 I-5 to Dutton Road Final Environmental Impact Study (FEIS). The FEIS was approved in 2013.

The Jobs and Transportation Act (JTA) bypass, now named the Rogue Valley Expressway (RVE), has been implemented. Another change planned in the FEIS is a Split Diamond Interchange design at the North Medford Interchange that would connect I-5 directly to the RVE.

When it was decided to create the IAMP, as a supplement to the FEIS, the focus was on the existing design as it is today and the split diamond design that was identified in the EIS.

If we were to deviate from the FEIS, it would open up a reevaluation of the NEPA process and it would require coordination with the FHWA, which is a pretty big undertaking. We included intersections that would influence the interchange in the Study Area. The study area included the Big X, where 62, 238, and 99 come together, all the way thru the interchange to Delta Waters and Crater Lake Highway, just east of the current RVE interchange. Data was collected and operations and safety were analyzed throughout the study area. Traffic counts were collected after the RVE was opened to make sure we were reflecting those traffic changes.

Regarding future scenario definitions, the No Build scenario is the system that exists today until 2042. The Full Build scenario includes the Split Diamond interchange design. We used the Rogue Valley Travel Demand Model with the land use and population changes that are anticipated through 2042 to project future volumes.

We analyzed existing operations in the year 2020. There are already some issues in and around the interchange. Those are exaggerated with the 2042 projections including population growth within the area and increasing land use demands. These are the intersections that showed up as overcapacity.

In the No Build scenario, we see issues at the Fred Meyer parking lot entrance and the intersection of Poplar/Bullock at OR62. In the Full Build scenario, we are seeing issues at the ramp terminals and the issues at Poplar/Bullock and Fred Meyer parking lot are lessened. That is representative of the traffic change that would occur from the new interchange.

Commissioner Conrad asked if the No Build scenario would be better for congestion on surface streets at the I-5 ramps. Ms. Elandt expressed there are benefits and tradeoffs to moving forward with either scenario. Under a Full Build, there would be issues at the ramp terminals, but under the No Build we are still seeing those issues at the intersections along OR62 that are currently carrying a large volume of both regional and local traffic.

Commissioner Conrad restated his question saying, specifically, he is interested in the issues around the I-5 ramps because the ramps can cause a safety issue vs an inconvenience issue. Ms. Elandt said the ramp terminals don't have the length to serve the projected volume of vehicles.

Mr. MacNair offered that this is the beginning of the story. The purpose of this IAMP was to take the Full Build acknowledged in the FEIS and identify these types of issue, so adjustments, like adding more lanes to an off ramp, could be noted for the Full Build interchange. Ms. Elandt agreed. Part of the work is identifying some solutions that might alleviate the congestion and safety concerns that the data is showing and settling on a preferred alternative. Those alternatives will likely be either a No Build or a Full Build scenario with some improvements or mitigation.

A benefit of choosing a No Build option is that we would keep the RVE interchange connection to which the community has grown accustomed. There would be some right-of-way acquisition and additional lanes needed at intersections currently having issues. Some access management strategies may need to be enforced along OR62 to alleviate congestion and increase safety.

Under the Full Build option, quicker travel time would be achieved because there would be less demand on OR62 itself. There is still some right-of-way acquisitions for those terminal changes. The FEIS showed that OR62 may operate better because 40% of regional through traffic would be using the expressway to bypass OR62.

Ms. Elandt's personal opinion is that issues contributing to the problems at the N Medford interchange are from land use and transportation issues. The study area at the N Medford Interchange serves a significant amount of local and regional traffic from S Medford to White City. When considering transportation travel demands, it is really about the land uses that are adjacent to the area and the attractors. People are passing from one side of the interstate to the other and they are either traveling east/west to get across or north/south, and I-5 and OR62 are that north/south connection and maybe there is a lack of local network connectivity that would provide an alternative route for faster or safer travel.

Transportation infrastructure cannot meet the local land use demands that Medford is experiencing. Continued congestion and queuing is expected. It's a tough area that is pretty well built out.

It is not possible to build our way out of these problems. Some of the solutions discussed early on that are low hanging fruit would be adding lanes to these intersections. However, these are already pretty large with pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns. Additional lanes will not help the situation, so other solutions or strategies need to be found.

The next steps are coordination with the advisory committee and the City to determine some projects to help improve the safety in operations within the interchange. Work toward a set of solutions whether that be No Build or Full Build and incorporating this work into a future OR62 Expressway Plan study. That study will reevaluate some of the assumptions under the FEIS and incorporate the work done for the Vilas Interchange. It will also study a different location for the northern terminus of the bypass. The recommendations from this IAMP and the Vilas IAMP will be incorporated into that plan, which will be adopted by Oregon Transportation Commission and participating agencies – Jackson County, City of Medford.

Chair Densmore asked what the timeline is for the OR62 Expressway Plan. Ms. Elandt offered ODOT will start the plan after the N Medford Interchange work is wrapped up. The plan should take 12-18 months. ODOT already has a significant amount of information to support it.

Chair Densmore asked what the last estimate was with regard to the improvements necessary in the last Build scenario for Exit 30. Ms. Elandt said a rough estimate for the Interchange is about \$50M.

Commissioner Schroeder asked if there is a plan to mitigate safety concerns and make it easier for cyclists and pedestrians to transition these routes. Ms. Elandt said ODOT is coordinating with those currently updating the Rouge Valley Active Transportation Plan. There is currently a project to improve the multiuse path on the north side of OR62.

Ms. Madding asked if the state's estimate of how much traffic would be taken off of OR62 when the RVE was built was accurate. Ms. Elandt said it was estimated that 40% of traffic on OR62 would use the Expressway and counts after the bypass was opened show that roughly 30-35% of that traffic is now using the Expressway. Ms. Madding asked if Ms. Elandt thought that this project would take any more traffic off of OR62. Ms. Elandt said that if the Split Diamond Interchange is built, the bypass would be used more and the intersection of Poplar/Bullock would see some decrease in through volumes on OR62.

Mr. MacNair added that it was noted that at Poplar/Bullock there was a lot of rerouting of the traffic. There is a decrease in southbound/northbound through traffic. There is currently a large

southbound left volume onto Poplar and a large right turn volume off of Poplar onto OR62 to head northbound to get to the bypass. In the Full Build scenario, it shifts, so there are a lot more left turns out of Poplar headed toward the bypass and a lot more right turns onto Poplar.

Ms. Elandt agreed. What we would see is a shift in the traffic from one direction to the other at those intersections because the travel pattern would be a different flow for motorists using the bypass.

Commissioner West served on the Phase II project development team years ago and became knowledgeable about the corridor. She also remembers some of the community feedback the team received about OR62.

(Sidebar for clarification: Commissioner West distinguished between the roadways: what is now being called Crater Lake Highway (CLH) was once called Highway 62. The Expressway is now being called Highway 62).

Commissioner West continued: At that time, the citizen feedback was that they wanted CLH to work, appear, and feel like a boulevard in a city; a street with trees and planting strips and separated bike lanes, wider sidewalks, slower traffic. There was a study that identified those improvements before the project development team started working on this Expressway concept, and it seemed like it didn't really come up much. I've brought it up to Mr. MacNair and others that the concept of making CLH work more for the people who are using it within the corridor not as this thoroughfare. And now that the Expressway has been built, and that is performing more like a thoroughfare that we could make this corridor feel more like it is something that is localized. Commissioner West would like to see that vision manifest. It is not an attractive corridor and she does not believe that it is a good gateway for the City of Medford for people who are traveling to and around the northern part of the City. To exacerbate the problem, RVTD has limited their service on CLH. The speeds are too high and there is not enough access for cross traffic and people who need to walk or bike to get to the corridor. It is not an attractive place to be. There is a lot of activity – stopping, residential, businesses - that could support transit, it's just that it doesn't have the other elements needed to make it a supportive environment for transit.

Commissioner Schroeder agreed and thinks that would be excellent for businesses. Ms. Elandt also agreed. She believes it is the classic case of competing resources. The Expressway is still fairly new, so it is going to take time for people to get into the mindset of using CLH as more of a business road to those commercial and residential districts that exist. A lot can be done with design, buffering, and landscaping that would slow speeds or at least give a reason to slow down and be more aware of the surroundings. That would help businesses when people are able to see their signs and can walk safely to different destinations. That would take political will and public pressure. The good news is we are seeing a big push for alternative modes of transportation. There is a lot of funding coming for those projects. In the last cycle, a significant amount of funding went to multimodal

transportation and preservation, but not in building new infrastructure. From a state perspective, we will see more of those options becoming available.

Chairman Densmore observed that in 2017, when HB 2017 passed, there were significant earmarks in that legislation for projects like the improvement of Powel Boulevard in east Multnomah County, which is a state or US highway. Did the City actually assume jurisdiction of CLH?

Mr. MacNair confirmed that CLH is now a City road.

Chair Densmore continued: What we've got here is a situation where Planning has begun to follow what really is happening. The Commission needs to think about advising Council that this is really a focus area that needs to be elevated in our future plan for the reasons that we are talk about here. Mr. MacNair said that when the TSP was updated, it was a state highway, Highway OR62. We really didn't look at it too closely other than doing some level of service volume capacity analysis, throughput analysis.

Chair Densmore said he did not mean it as criticism, but a least it is something learned since the TSP. He then asked Councilmember Spansail if this was something Council would like to hear about.

Councilmember Spansail will update the other Council members of the Commission's discussion.

Commissioner Conrad asked about the importance of the N Medford Interchange and the bypass. He does not think it is as important as S Medford interchange, Exit 27, and S Stage overpass. He appreciates there are issues in this particular area, but the City has more serious matters to address in terms of the interstate, the interchanges, and the lack there of.

Chair Densmore offered that this is more or less an issue that has been set up by the situation that was created when the State did not build the entire bypass project. The Chair's take away is now that the City has taken over, it should be reemphasize that this segment of CLH should be elevated on our list of concerns. Chair Densmore also believes it is a lower Tier than the south interchange and S Stage Road. He also reminded the Commissioners that they haven't even discussed the viaduct itself as a significant issue.

Commissioner West offered that she does not disagree with the Chair's prioritization of needs. It is just that right now the City has some horsepower going through ODOT to do some planning work for this corridor, and the opportunity should not be missed to identify strategies and low hanging fruit that could be written into this document so we can leverage it in the future.

Chair Densmore added that the Commission should be positive participants in the process.

Ms. Elandt will attend a Commission meeting in the future to provide an update.

50.2 Federal Transportation Efforts

Mr. MacNair updated what has happened since the Commissioners discussed this topic during the last meeting. After the meeting, Chair Densmore notified Mr. MacNair about a potential opportunity passed along by US Senators Wyden and Merkley's staff. Deputy City Manager Kelly Madding and Mr. MacNair spoke with Senator Wyden's staff. They discussed the four projects that came out of the Six-Year Plan list that were underfunded in that list as well as the S Stage overcrossing. It sounds like they are working on a few things: 1) reauthorization that is coming later this year and that would be more at a programmatic level setting budgets for program funding. They didn't have any specific earmark opportunities from what they shared with us, and 2) they are working on some sort of stimulus that would set up some competitive process for funding. They appreciated hearing what kind of programs would be helpful for Oregon communities.

Ms. Madding offered that since that meeting with congressional staff, she, the City Manager, the Mayor, and the City's DC lobbyist have met. It appears that earmarks may be coming back into favor. If there are earmarks, the City may ask for the projects that Mr. MacNair talked about and also the S Stage overcrossing or interchange. We need to speak with ODOT if there are going to be earmarks. ODOT will ask for some state-wide earmarks and we want to talk to them about what their priorities are. Is there priority for the viaduct which is about \$85 million? How can we work with them and not at cross purposes? There is a lot of dialog still to come. We are continuing to put forward the projects the City feels are important and that are in our plans. We'll keep the Commission posted.

Chair Densmore was pleased with the lines of communication as they begin to seriously consider adding funds into infrastructure. The committee meeting he attended for the United Way was to try to make the point that there are a number of projects that have been more or less in the queue for communities around the region for a very long time and they never quite reach the level of serious attention. They are very important for community livability, but it seem we get stuck spending all of our money on huge mega projects and forgetting these projects. There needs to be a balance in the way we approach things. He was happy that Ms. Madding is having good conversations and hopes the relationships bear fruit.

60. Planning and Public Works Department Update

Mr. MacNair updated the Commission regarding the continuing LED Streetlight upgrade project. A significant number of lights have been installed. Basically all the residential street lights on the west side of I-5 have been installed. Nothing on higher order streets yet. They are going to move over to the east side of I-5 and start installing the residential street lights there before coming back through to do some of the larger streets where traffic controls will be needed.

Springbrook is still under construction. Some complaints from the residents on Tahitian are still being received. Public Works is working with Medford Police to do as much enforcement as they

can. The feedback from MPD is they don't get a lot of enforcement opportunities, but the complaints continue. We trying to work the best we can with the neighborhood thru this process. In Phase II, the Springbrook traffic that is headed north won't be able to turn right onto Cedar Links and take that shortcut any longer.

The design process continues for Foothill. We are targeting this fall for design completion. Operations has a contractor building ADA ramps prior to upcoming paving this summer. Columbus Avenue from Prune Street to Jackson Street is the largest segment of road that to be paved this summer. The road will be restripe from four lanes to three at the same time, which will be a major change.

The rapid flashing beacon at Prune Street and Columbus Avenue is under contract. Apparently the rapid flashing beacon is coming from Texas, so delivery has been delayed, but we are still expecting the contract completion date will be the end of May.

We have a small safety project at Court and McAndrews that will be going out to bid soon.

We are continuing to work with Econolite, our new traffic signal controller vendor, on the Barnett corridor.

On a lighter note, we had a very nice parade for Cory Crebbin's retirement. He was surprised when all the large PW equipment rolled down 8th Street in front of City Hall for a COVID-friendly send off. It turned out really nice.

Commissioner Parducci asked if Public Works would be doing manual counts in April or is there changes because of COVID. Mr. MacNair said the count would go forward and believes it is helpful to have the historic data. Last year, the counting was delayed a bit, but as many tube counts as were possible were completed in a shorter timeframe.

Deputy Madding informed the Commission she would be the interim Public Works Director during the search to replace Cory Crebbin. Her goal is to keep things moving forward and not lose any time. Our great staff will keep things moving forward. The hiring process is estimated to take 60-90 days, so hopefully the City will have someone onboard no later than July 1. However, as the City Manager said, we are going to take whatever time is needed to find the right person. Hiring is challenging in this COVID environment. It seems people are nervous about making a move at this time. Deputy Madding also invited the Commissioners to contact her with any issues they would normally contact Cory about.

Commissioner Conrad offered reassurance that his company, Asante, has had 33 new hires in their most recent orientation class. They have hired close to 1,000 new employees in the last year. It is not easy, but not impossible.

Deputy Madding is confident the City will find someone very good, it is just going to take a while.

Mr. MacNair asked the Commissioners to remember to turn in their residency forms.

70. Comments from Commissioners and Other Committees

Elections were held for Commission officers.

Chair Densmore was nominated for another term.

Vice Chair Conrad was nominated for another term.

Motion: Al Densmore and Dennie Conrad should be elected to continue in the positions of Chair and Vice Chair, respectively.

Moved by: Commissioner Paige West

Seconded by: Commissioner Mickey Harvey

Roll Call: The Motion was agreed to unanimously.

Motion carried and so ordered.

Within the context of the Six-Year Plan, Commissioner Harvey advocates for the Commission to seek alternate funding sources other than federal and state grants. He stressed that the uncomfortable discussions must be undertaken as the City is no longer a small town, but is growing and is facing larger challenges.

Chair Densmore agreed the Commission should have the conversation so recommendations can be made to Council.

Commissioner Conrad asked if this topic was the same SDC fees and gas tax conversation the Commission had a few years ago. Chair Densmore said that conversation was related to the S Stage project. What Commissioner Harvey is pointing out is the City needs to find sustainable funds to implement the TSP.

Chair Densmore asked Mr. MacNair to look at potential needs vs potential revenue sources. Mr. MacNair offered that staff has already taken to Council the Commission's previous ideas regarding gas taxes, SDC fees, and utility fee, but that those recommendations had stalled. Mr. MacNair will investigate and update the Commission. What he finds will be used as a starting point to determine what happened and decide on the logical next steps to continue the discussion.

Commissioner Conrad reminded the Commissioners that not all current Commissioners were on the Commission when the study that Mr. MacNair is referencing was undertaken. The Commission has looked at the three levers that can be pulled to fund projects based on transportation needs.

Regarding increasing SDCs fees for new building, there was a comparative analytics done with various communities across the state. The Commission discussed these three levers and different combinations of the three. The Commission developed recommendations for funding the Mega Corridor, but they disappeared. That is a subset of what Commissioner Harvey refers. We were touching on things we felt the Transportation Commission could actually influence.

Commissioner Harvey believes that the three levers need to be looked at again. He reiterated that the City needs to think like a big city and start having the difficult conversations.

Commissioner Schroeder announced that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee has two new members, Kathleen Blackshear and Evan Schmidtke. She also shared several positive items: the Columbus Avenue restriping added bike lanes, the Parks Department's 50 acre park and Aquatic Center will be opening summer 2023, Midway Park will be a bike skills park, and Cedar Links Park has some new improvements. Commissioner Schroeder informed the Commissioners that BPAC will be looking at Way Finding to link City parks to each other for ease of access for biking and walking.

Commissioner Conrad asked Chair Densmore if the Commission should be involved in the Medford Community Vision 2040 effort. Chairman Densmore agreed that would be helpful. Commissioner Conrad and Chair Densmore are members of a group doing outreach, presentations, and focus groups. Commissioner Densmore would like to take 15 minutes during the next Commission meeting to walk the Commissioners through what is happening with that group.

Councilmember Spansail responded to Commissioner Harvey's earlier comment regarding creating revenue streams. She will present what the Commission discussed to her fellow Council members.

80. Agenda Build

Medford Community Vision 2040 presentation

90. Next Meeting – March 24, 2021

100. Adjournment 1:57pm

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Royal
Public Works, Engineering