

Meeting Minutes

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation

COACT

May 14, 2009

Members:

Lynn Lundquist via telephone (Crook County), Dennis Luke (Deschutes County), John Hatfield (Jefferson County), Lonny Macy (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), Peggy Fisher (Deschutes National Forest), Dana Cork (BLM), Mike Morgan (City of Madras), Alan Unger (Deschutes County), George Endicott (City of Redmond), Eileen Stein (City of Sisters), Jack Seley (City of Prineville), Bob Bryant (ODOT), Gary Farnsworth (ODOT), Wayne Van Matre (City of Prineville), Gus Burrell (City of Madras), Lon Kellstrom (City of Sisters), Jeff Monson (Commute Options) and EV Smith (City of Culver).

Guests:

Scott Smith and Steve Forrester (City of Prineville), Tyler Deke (Bend MPO), Robert Maestre (ODOT Long Range Planning), Chris Doty (City of Redmond), Mike Lovely (Bend MPO CAC & SBNA), Tom Blust (Deschutes County), James Rejzek (BIAK Training Center), Jeanne Newton (US 97 North Corridor CAC, Mt. View Neighbor Assn), Dave Duncan (BIAK Training Center), Art Schlack via telephone (Association of Oregon Counties).

Staff:

Andrew Spreadborough and Kristi Dunlap (Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council).

Call to Order and Introductions

Vice Chair Dennis Luke called the meeting to order and introductions were made. Lynn Lundquist and Art Schlack (Association of Oregon Counties) joined the meeting by phone.

General Public Comment

Dennis Luke said that there is a bill going through the legislature that will require Lane County to form an Area Commission on Transportation, and the Lane County representatives contacted him for information on COACT's formation.

There were no general public comments.

Old Business

March 12, 2009 Minutes

Mike Morgan moved to approve the minutes of March 12, 2009. John Hatfield seconded. Minutes were approved by consensus.

Legislative Update

Art Schlack said that Representative Terry Beyer announced earlier this week that the group of nine legislators that has been meeting for the past few months have reached agreement on the funding package. The revenue committee will hold a public hearing and work session next week. The size of the package will not exceed \$300 million; the sources of funding are:

- 6 cent gas tax;

- \$32 increase in vehicle registration that would take the \$54 registration fee every two years to \$86;
- \$23 increase in title fees that would increase the title fee to \$78 and also an increase in license plate fees. \$17 replacement fee.

The gas tax would not go into effect until the state has experienced 2% employment growth for two consecutive quarters, or January 1, 2011, whichever comes first. In terms of distribution, it is estimated about \$137 million would go to the state; \$82 million would go to counties and \$54 million to cities. They are proposing to take \$27 million off the top to backfill some federal “flex” funds that are going to be used for non-highway purposes, and \$2-\$3 million for upgrades to highway rest stops. Non-highway uses include transit, air, and other non-highway transportation that the state highway fund cannot be used for.

Art Schlack said that the Connect Oregon III program would receive \$100 million dollars, with \$10 million going to each of the five regions and the other \$50 million to statewide competition. He said that a sizeable share of the highway fund will be bonded for projects – estimated to be \$800 million. The debt service is probably between \$60 and \$70 million of the state’s portion. Highway projects around the state will be identified in the bill to be constructed with the bonded funds. The measure would include a four year moratorium on local revenue options for a period of four years, which would preclude establishing new gas taxes or registration fees at the local level. HB 2001 is in the house revenue committee with a hearing and work session anticipated for next week. The bill has bipartisan support. Lynn Lundquist said that all of the Democrats need to support the bill or the Republicans will likely not vote to pass.

Art Schlack closed his presentation by stating that there is a push to do some additional land use and transportation planning at the MPOs, but the proposal would only apply to Metro, Salem-Keizer, and Eugene-Springfield. The focus is on reduction of greenhouse gases and carbon emissions. This shouldn’t have any effect on Central Oregon and the Bend area.

COACT Legislative Visit Summary

Lynn Lundquist said that he was accompanied by Lonny Macy, Alan Unger and Jerry Brummer in Salem to meet with Republican members of the Senate and House. The group talked to several state legislators, and they seemed to be open and receptive. He said that it was a worthwhile trip, though he was unsure how much of a difference it made. He said the key will be to keep the legislative package off the ballot, and to help keep the Republicans on board.

Dennis Luke said that projects are identified within the bill, including in Sisters and Redmond. Alan Unger said the projects include 6th Street in Redmond, Cascade Avenue in Sisters, Murphy Road in Bend, along with some ODOT projects. He said that they need to encourage Representative Huffman to support the bill. He said Representative Whisnant has an opportunity to get the La Pine signal included on the project list but chose not to. Lynn Lundquist said that Representative Huffman remains on the fence, though Representative Bentz will likely support the bill.

Federal Stimulus Update

Gary Farnsworth said that bids opened today on the Lava Butte-South Century Drive project, and that they came in 30% under projections. This is a trend on other projects around the state. The 5th street project bidding is set for mid-June. An adaptive signal project in Redmond will go about the same

time frame. A paving project in Prineville will go to bid in July, and a transit project in Bend will go to bid in late June. ODOT will be paving south of La Pine this summer.

Bob Bryant said that a challenge associated with the first phase of the Lava Butte project was dealing with the timber cut as a result of the route clearing for the new alignment. The local timber market became a driving factor for the project schedule because there was no place to take the logs; mills weren't open or prepared to take them so that became a determining factor when the forest service let that timber clearing project. John Day or Roseburg were the only operating mills at the time.

Gary Farnsworth said that since bids for the Recovery Act projects are low, there may be dollars available for additional projects. Tom Blust said Deschutes County is getting just over a million dollars in stimulus money. He said the ODOT local agency sections is not getting the funds out for bid, and are telling us that they will not be ready to go out to bid until next winter. Gary said that there are capacity issues, though they are not confined only to the ODOT pipeline. Tom said his concern is that if projects are not bid until next year, the advantages of the 30% cost savings will be missed.

New Business

Tolling Presentation

Robert Maestre of the ODOT Long Range Planning Unit provided an overview of the ODOT Tolling study. The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) has been granted the authority by the Oregon legislature over construction of tollways and the application of tolls on existing or new state facilities. The OTC is in the process of reviewing and assessing potential implications of highway tolling and pricing. ODOT hired a consultant (Cambridge Systematics) to complete a framework of potential tolling objectives and applications. ODOT is requesting feedback and comment from ACTs, and other entities on the framework report findings. A series of seven tolling policy white papers were produced:

1. Air quality and greenhouse gas emissions
2. Geographic and situational limits
3. Demand projection sufficiency
4. Economic evaluation of improved reliability
5. Assessing the economic effects of congestion pricing
6. Economic comparison alternatives
7. Truck-only toll lanes

Robert Maestre summarized each paper, including key findings:

- Paper #1 – Can tolling reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Answer: Not enough for significant impact. There are other more effective methods to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Paper #2 – When does tolling make sense, and under what conditions? Answer: If there is a lot of traffic on a facility, then it might make sense. However, if there is a viable “free” alternate route, then less so. An average of 60,000 trips per day is the threshold for viability.
- Paper #3 – Can we predict how many will use a tolled facility, and will behaviors change? Answer: Not quite. The best traffic models used in Oregon are not designed with tolling behaviors considered. The models will need to be modified.
- Paper #4 – If congestion relief is the goal, can we set a price to dictate the use until “freeflow” conditions are achieved (i.e. “congestion pricing”)? Answer: Yes. Predictability

on a system is valuable (i.e. to truckers with schedules), so paying for freeflow conditions is viable for some. However, other facilities will likely be congested as a result.

- Paper #5 – If there is systemwide congestion pricing, what is the economic effect? Answer: There is a negative economic outcome. Taxes are paid, then tolls would be added. Cash out is a negative until the use of those funds is known. Social justice and equity is also an important consideration.
- Paper #6 – How can tolling proposals be compared? Answer: Cost-benefit analysis, including factors such as travel time, reduced wear and tear on vehicles.
- Paper #7 – Would truck-only lanes work? Answer: Not likely. A lot of truck/freight traffic as a percentage of the congestion would be needed. Would also need space to build or allocate to a new truck lane.

Robert Maestre said that COACT members can comment on each paper via the ODOT web site, and there will be public meetings in June and July on each white paper.

George Endicott asked if the regressiveness of tolls was analyzed, including the effects on low income populations. Robert said that the state of Washington study and others have looked at this and found tolls to be regressive. Eileen Stein asked how tolling works elsewhere, and what is the key problem to be addressed. Robert said that the biggest issue identified is the need to define the objectives of any toll, and then determine how it would be supported by the public. Mike Lovely asked how tolls would be collected from out-of-state drivers. Robert answered that their license plate would likely be photographed and they would receive a bill.

Immediate Opportunity Fund Guideline Revisions

Gary Farnsworth said that the statewide Immediate Opportunity Fund grant program guidelines are going through a revision process. The Oregon Transportation Commission is in the process of taking comments on the proposed changes. He reviewed the revisions, including the clarification of roles. He said the nature of the program and funding categories are unchanged. Bob Bryant noted that the type C category has been strengthened. Eileen Stein asked if category C is for projects located at a state of Oregon certified industrial area. Gary said that category C projects need to be located at certified sites, though categories A and B do not have this requirement.

Dennis Luke asked if the La Pine signal project would be eligible, since their industrial park was one of the first “shovel ready” sites in the state. Gary said it could be, but we first need to determine what the specific improvement will be, how much it costs and other design detail.

Project Updates

Rail Planning Update

Gary Farnsworth distributed a draft rail report, which included an inventory of all the rail crossings in the region; ODOT has looked at each crossing and identified potential grade separations or closures, and are determining traffic volumes and types of facilities. The crossings will be rated and a regional ranking produced.

Gary reviewed the report economic analysis findings on possible freight depot site locations. The rail team is reviewing the report produced by Tangent Services, and will be making recommendations on priorities for the connection between industrial sites and the BNSF line. He said that the at-grade

crossing study and the economic opportunity analysis overlap and affect each other. The report is under development, and recommendations will be presented to COACT at a future meeting.

Roundtable

Peggy Fisher said that the USFS has a streamlined contract process under development. She discussed a grant application that the Forest Service submitted that would, if funded, study the feasibility of how the forests are connected to transportation network. A transportation assistance group will be visiting the region to talk to stakeholders, look at the corridors, and to develop a report that would guide the grant project. A focus of the project will be to develop and enhance forest access via alternate modes of transportation. Bob Bryant asked if the grant would be for the study. Peggy said that it will be for the study phase, though a follow-up application to the FTA would be the next step.

Dana Cork reported that the BLM has received federal stimulus funding. Dennis Luke said that there is a meeting next week with ODOT and Senator Wyden on Road 41 and the development of a hard-surface bike lane between the Inn of the 7th Mountain and Sunriver.

Jeff Monson said Commute Options will be honoring businesses and individuals through the Deschutes County Bike Committee on June 29th. He said there are currently six “safe routes to school” programs under way in Bend. He said that the schools will be working with cities on developing bike lanes, sidewalks and trails. They will be developing “safe route” plans as well. There are two components of these projects – educational and engineering.

E. V. Smith said the City of Culver is working on highway improvements, hoping to break ground by the first of next year. Parking issues, storm drain problems and rail crossing issues remain to be worked out.

Mike Morgan said that Madras is going through its “second generation” of safe routes to school projects, after completing the previous project about five years ago. He discussed the master plan for the city trail system under development, and plans for a trail loop system allowing for walking routes throughout the city. The Connect Oregon II hangar project is also under way.

Lonny Macy said that the Sidwalter bus route paving project will start in June, as well as rocking projects on Charlie Canyon Road near the Kahneeta resort, with improvements to the campground planned.

Jack Seley said that Prineville partnered with Redmond on the administration and inspection process for the stimulus dollars. He said that one of the rail buildings funded by ConnectOregon is complete and the second building is under way. He introduced Steve Forrester, the new city manager for Prineville.

Tom Blust said the South Century Drive Forest Highway project is in the works. He said the traffic signal at Burgess and Huntington Road is also under development. He reported on the Deschutes Junction project, and said that road overlay work is under way northwest of Redmond.

Eileen Stein said that work is under way on the Sisters TSP, with a community workshop scheduled for June 2. She said that the City will be submitting a small city stimulus application for Larch Street, which will connect the downtown area to the emerging industrial and commercial area in the north section of Sisters.

George Endicott said that 6th Street downtown revitalization project is under way in Redmond. He noted his interest in an automated signal system which will be developed through the project. Chris Doty said the concrete that they tore out on 6th Street was originally installed in 1935. He noted his appreciation to ODOT for the 5th Street project ARRA funds. He said project bids will be open on June 16. He said that Black Butte Boulevard reconstruction will go to bid in a few months. The Dry Canyon trail project, funded by the Transportation Enhancement program, is wrapping up, with the last portion from Highland to Quartz completed. He said that a transit master plan project is under way as well.

Tyler Deke said that the City of Bend stimulus projects are moving forward. The City received a ConnectOregon I grant for a transit facility project which should be completed in June. He said that ODOT projects moving forward, and work on the Murphy Road/Highway 97 management plan and NEPA work is set to begin.

Andrew Spreadborough said that COIC's Cascades East Transit program received stimulus dollars for the purchase of buses. COIC also received 120 day stimulus dollars to build transit shelters around the region; COIC is working with a cities and counties to develop nine shelter areas at various transfer points around the region. He said that COIC is partnering with the City of Bend to take on their ConnectOregon II grant to own and operate the intermodal transit center in that will be developed in Bend. Dennis Luke noted that the Board of Commissioners approved the county public transportation plan prepared by COIC.

Gary Farnsworth provided an overview of the Lava Butte South Century Drive project. He discussed the undercrossing that will connect the Lava Lands and Lava Butte visitor center, and will accommodate deer migration. Another structure on the southern portion of the project will be dedicated to wildlife crossings. Knife River was the low bidder with a bid just over \$16 million; the cost was estimated to be in the low \$20 million range.

Dennis Luke asked if the OTC has provided feedback on the proposed funding package. Bob Bryant said that the Commission had not commented; up until a couple weeks ago it was unclear what would be included in the legislative package.

Meeting adjourned at 5:00.