

Joint Interim Committee on Transportation

Meeting Summary- Medford area site tour, stakeholder roundtable

Thursday, August 8th, 2024

Members Present: Sen. Gorsek, Co-Chair, Sen. Frederick, Sen. Findley; Rep. McLain, Co-Chair, Rep. Nathanson, Rep. Pham, Rep. Reschke

Visiting Legislators Present: Sen. Golden, Sen. Linthicum; Rep. Marsh, Rep. McIntire, Rep. Tran, Rep. Wallan

Members Excused: Sen. Boquist, Sen. Woods; Rep. Boshart-Davis, Rep. Evans, Rep. Mannix

Medford Site Tour

The Committee assembled at the Jackson County Expo Center and received a short slide presentation prior to boarding a Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVTD) bus for a tour of transportation facilities and sites in and around Medford. Members were welcomed by ODOT Assistant Director Lindsay Baker, ODOT Region 3 Manager Darrin Neavoll, and ODOT District Manager Jeremiah Griffin. The video highlighted snow management and road maintenance in the region during winter months, as well as the method by which heavy trucks unable to gain traction are assisted in getting underway by a “push truck.” Highway closures happen occasionally during winter months; closure of Interstate 5 at the Siskiyou Pass comes at a cost of about \$1 million per day, and the pass can receive up to 150 inches of snow per year. Mr. Griffin noted that keeping the road open, and assisting vehicles experiencing difficulty, is a joint effort between Oregon and California. When the road is closed, traffic is often diverted at larger areas like Medford and Redding, as smaller towns closer to the summit, such as Ashland, do not have the capacity to house large numbers of stranded travelers. He also discussed the impacts on secondary routes affected by diversion.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: impact of adverse weather in other areas on the southern I-5 corridor; the number and age of push trucks in the region; and the differences in weather impacts on the north and south side of the Siskiyou summit.

Travel to Table Rock Weigh Station

The Committee received briefings from Steve Lambert, Jackson County Roads and Parks Manager; John Vial, Medford Public Works; and Amy Ramsdell, ODOT’s Commerce and Compliance Division Administrator. Mr. Lambert discussed the efforts to maintain the county’s 900 road miles, of which 200 miles is unpaved, and 330 bridges. The county has 86 transportation employees, 55 of which work in maintenance. Table Rock Road is a particularly high-travel corridor, with 21,000 daily trips. He noted the role that Senate Bill 1566 (2024) played in helping recoup costs of utility work on highway corridors.

Ms. Ramsdell provided an overview of the role that the Commerce and Compliance Division plays in intrastate and interstate trucking. The state operates a number of weigh stations and scales, many of which were built in 1950s and 1960s, while others are nearly 100 years old and are nearing the end of their operating life; meanwhile, the system is on a 50-year replacement cycle. Staffing reductions have resulted in not every weigh station being operated every day. There are six ports of entry throughout Oregon that weigh trucks by axle and group of axles.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: whether Jackson County has approved a utility fee; whether road striping is an issue in Jackson County; when trucks are required to use the weigh station; whether the weigh stations are shared facilities with other uses; whether technology allows for weighmasters to utilize telework; the average compliance rate for weight-mile reporting; the most common types of violations; the average and maximum fines levied by weighmasters; and how fine revenue affects ODOT's budget.

Travel to Foothills Road via Coker Butte Road

Mr. Neavoll explained that ODOT assumed responsibility from Jackson County for some corridors years ago, adding that there are a number of low-volume roads for which it is a challenge to find money for improvements. The problem is exacerbated by the high differential in temperatures during the year, which is very hard on pavement. Mr. Griffin pointed out that workers take pavement conditions very seriously, as they and their families also use the same roads. Road maintenance is often a multi-jurisdictional effort, as only ODOT operates the largest snowplows, while the county operates chip seal spreaders that the city does not have access to.

Many county roads are “unforgiving” in that they have tight turns and minimal road shoulders. Increasing road width for safety purposes is particularly costly and thus very challenging. As an example, the Foothills Road project has already cost \$75 million, with an estimated \$10-\$15 million more to go.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: whether the various levels of government use subcontracting to the other governments; the connection between safety concerns and housing development; and how decisions are made where to commit money to projects.

Crater Lake Highway/Transit System

Julie Brown, Chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission, outlined a recent grant from the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund to build out service on the RVTD system, including matching funds for grants used to buy six new hybrid natural gas buses. She noted that it took three years to finalize the bus contract. She also commented on the problems that RVTD has been having related to driver shortages. Mr. Vial emphasized the importance of multi-jurisdictional solutions on agency projects.

Illegal camping and litter/graffiti removal is also challenging, and often results in damage to infrastructure, such as cut fences and stolen copper wiring from signals. A recent propane fire caused approximately \$100,000 damage to the Medford Viaduct.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: whether RVTD operates both fixed routes and dial-a-ride services; and strategies for deterring graffiti.

Phoenix/Almedia Fire Response and Recovery

The bus stopped in Phoenix, south of Medford, and debarked at the Harley Davidson dealership that was rebuilt following the 2020 fire that destroyed a major portion of the City of Phoenix. That conflagration consumed over 2,600 homes, of which about half have since been rebuilt. The presenters and legislators shared memories of the events of the September 2020 fire and subsequent recovery efforts.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: response by ODOT, city and county personnel during the fires were amazing and heroic; many workers and their families lost their homes in the event; Oregon National Guard response during the fire; and the fact that only three people died in such a rapid and destructive fire.

Roundtable Discussion with Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation, Jurisdictional Leaders, Business Representatives, and Topic Area Experts

Committee members and visiting legislators were joined by a number of participants and observers for a roundtable discussion of goals, possible funding strategies, and challenges moving forwards. Welcoming remarks were provided by ODOT Assistant Director Lindsay Baker and Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Julie Brown.

Other participants at the roundtable included: Linda Adams, Ashland Transportation Committee; Rob Brandes, Josephine County Public Works; Mike Card, Combined Transport; Nick Card, City of Medford; Scott Chancey, Josephine County Transit; Cheryl Cheas, Umpqua Public Transportation District; Jocksana Corona, Coalicion Fortaleza; Brad Earl, Medford School District; Joel Fraseur, Knife River Materials; Jay Harland, CSA Planning, Ltd.; Ryan Hutchens, FV Martin Trucking; Alan Journet, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now; Steve Lambert, Jackson County Roads and Parks; Juliet Long, Rogue Community College; Jenna Marmon, RVTD; Mike Montero, Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation; Tonia Moro, RVTD Board; Eleanor Ponomareff, Talent City Council; Colleen Roberts, Jackson County; Cassie Rose, Community Volunteer Network; Randy Sparacino, Mayor of Medford; Dan Thorndike, United Way of Jackson County; John Vial, City of Medford; and Chad Woodward, City of Ashland.

In addition to participants, others present at the roundtable included: Kirsten Adams, Associated General Contractors; Lucas Bezerra, Speaker's Office; Chris Clayton, City of Central Point; Emma Coke, Ashland News; Julie Denney, ODOT; Tim Fountain, RVTD; Derek Hofbauer, Oregon Transit Association; Mark Gibson, Oregon Trucking Associations; Christine Gleason,

Upper Rogue Transportation Project; Edem Gomez, RVTD; Jeremiah Griffin, ODOT; Tom Gustafson, GeoToll; Denise Krause, RVTD; Diane Linthicum, staff for Sen. Linthicum; Tanner Lloyd, Associated General Contractors; Mac Lynde, ODOT; Kelly Madding, City of Medford; Jerry Marmon, ODOT; Tim Martinez, GeoToll; Jim McCauley, League of Oregon Cities; Brett Morgan, Climate Solutions; Darrin Neavoll, ODOT; Richard Owens, Jackson County Democrats; Dale Penn, Oregon Transit Association; Carla Phelps, ODOT; Miles Pengilly, Oregon Transit Association; Paige Prewett, staff for Rep. Marsh; Amy Ramsdell, ODOT; Cindy Robert, City of Medford/Jackson County; Sarah Settimo, staff for Sen. Golden; Patrick Sieng, Oregon Transit Association; Kali Sullivan, ODOT; and Tracy Young, Beaver Pumice, LLC.

Topics of Discussion

- Stakeholders invited to share “top of mind” issue for transportation work/package;
- Stakeholders invited to share one item that is a regional challenge;
- Stakeholders invited to share examples of factors that cannot be controlled that affect transportation in their area, and;
- Stakeholders invited to share ideas for diverse, stable and sufficient transportation funding sources.

Major themes that were raised during the roundtable include:

- Need for funding to complete jurisdictional transfers;
- Need for funding for maintenance and operations;
- Need for funding for infrastructure improvements;
- Improve safety for bicycle and pedestrian system users;
- Funding needs to be both raised and spent in an equitable manner;
- Falling further behind on pavement upkeep will cost more in the long run;
- Maintain the 50-30-20 split for State Highway Fund revenues;
- Need stable and growing funding for public transportation;
- Funding sources must be long-term, as short-term funding is only a “band-aid”;
- Need to decrease dependence on single-occupancy vehicle trips;
- Address traffic congestion, particularly in Interstate 5;
- Address the high cost of trucking in Oregon;
- Reestablish trust in ODOT by completing the House Bill 2017 projects;
- Consider indexing fuel taxes to inflation;
- Help local governments to provide matching funds for federal grants;
- Recognition that all residents benefit from transportation even if they do not drive;
- Tailor solutions to the geographic needs of the region;
- Importance of enforcing traffic laws;
- Growing impact of wildfires and summer heat waves;
- Expand metropolitan planning organization model in lieu of area commissions;
- Impact of no increases in federal fuel tax since 1993;
- Drastic increase in construction costs in the last five years;
- Aging population will soon need additional assistance getting around;

- Land use laws can affect traffic patterns;
- Consider a serial five-year levy to fund transportation;
- Make it easier for local governments to enact local fuel taxes;
- Consider creation of a statewide infrastructure bank;
- Consider tolling for certain specified projects;
- Consider delivery fees for goods delivered to private residences;
- Consider eliminating the constitutional restrictions on transportation spending;
- Consider sales tax to fund transportation;
- Ensure that all vehicles pay to use the road, including electric vehicles;
- Funding for Safe Routes to Schools program.