

## **Joint Interim Committee on Transportation**

### **Meeting Summary- Hermiston area site tour, stakeholder roundtable**

**Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

**Members Present: Sen. Gorsek, Co-Chair, Sen. Boquist, Co-Vice-Chair, Sen. Findley, Sen. Frederick; Rep. McLain, Co-Chair, Rep. Reschke**

**Visiting Legislators Present: Sen. Hansell; Rep. B. Levy, Rep. Tran,**

**Members Excused: Sen. Woods; Rep. Boshart-Davis, Rep. Evans, Rep. Mannix, Rep. Nathanson, Rep. Pham**

#### **Hermiston Site Tour**

The Committee assembled at Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center and boarded a Point Bus for a tour of transportation facilities and sites in and around Hermiston. Members were welcomed by ODOT Director Kris Strickler, ODOT Region 5 Manager Ken Patterson, Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Julie Brown, Oregon Transportation Commission Vice-Chair Lee Beyer, and Oregon Transportation Commissioner Jeff Baker, as well as Hermiston City Manager Mark Morgan and Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorran.

Director Strickler noted the similarity of this tour to that in Ontario the day before, in that both are in the remote rural areas of the state. Mr. Patterson spoke to the closure of Interstate 84 the day before due to fires and a truck crash, as well as other weather-related closures and the impact of climate change on such closures. He also noted that one of the roads on the tour was funded by House Bill 2017 (2017).

Mr. Morgan discussed the tremendous amount of industrial land development in the region and the corresponding transportation challenges, highlighting the Walmart distribution center as example. Mr. Patterson noted that the region is a road and manufacturing hub for the entire Pacific Northwest. Commissioner Doran added that a new 44-bay distribution center recently opened. Of the more than 1,700 county road miles in the region, there is only one four-way stop on the system. Current funding does not provide sufficient money to pay for safety features like fog lines, and weed control is problematic due to proximity to cultivated fields. He noted that Umatilla County has no capital road projects due to the need to focus on operations and maintenance, adding that the 50/30/20 revenue split is vital to county operations.

Committee questions and comments during this portion of the tour included: how many area residents are employed by Walmart; whether Walmart received property tax breaks; how emergency vehicles work around weight-limited bridges; whether roundabouts are intended to slow traffic; and where a planned roundabout will be placed relative to the interchange.

### *Echo/Umatilla River Bridge*

A recent 1,000-Year flood event in the region resulted in re-routing the Umatilla River, which had significant impacts on area transportation facilities. The county has roughly \$750,000/year for damage control, and receives no state reimbursement. Rep. Bobby Levy indicated that the flood response included six state and federal agencies to make repairs.

Committee questions and comments during this portion of the tour included: the need to be proactive in addressing weather effects, not just reactive; whether the flood was categorized as a federal emergency; impacts on rail crossings as well as road bridges; and the fact that the Joint Committee on Transportation does not have control over the ODOT budget.

### *Interstate 84 and Surrounding Roads/Transit*

The interstate plays a key role in transportation for the region. However, the surrounding roads often lack necessary safety features, and in many places are suffering deterioration, such as deteriorating shoulders. Patterson mentioned a recent bridge hit at Boardman that resulted in an immediate shutdown and inspection of the struck bridge.

Dani Schulte, representing Kayak Public Transit on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), provided an overview of public transportation options in the region. Kayak operates the largest service area of any transit provider in the state, covering 100 miles east-to-west and 70 miles north-to-south. The agency just received new buses two years after ordering them.

Mr. Morgan then provided an update on another project funded by House Bill 2017, the 1<sup>st</sup> Place Road project. Mr. Patterson noted that Hermiston has seen a dramatic growth in traffic, which has forced the city to be strategic in its investments.

Committee questions and comments during this portion of the tour included: what is the inspection process for local bridges; whether ODOT could charge more for over-weight permits; and whether transit is affected by weight-limited bridges in the area.

### *Hermiston DMV*

Dave McKay, ODOT DMV Field Services Manager, provided an overview of operations of Hermiston DMV office. The strong growth of the region has imposed a need for significant staffing and facilities, but the remoteness of the location creates constraints on the ability to hire and maintain sufficient staff. The region also has a significant population of Spanish-speaking Oregonians, which makes complex transactions even more problematic.

Committee questions and comments during this portion of the tour included: whether Zoom or other remote work options can help provide Spanish language assistance; whether there are suggestions for reducing complexity of DMV transactions; the causes of hiring and retention problems; the length of time needed to become trained at a sufficient level to work a DMV counter; whether DMV staff are provided with communication and behavioral health support

training; whether the facility is owned or leased by ODOT; whether this DMV is involved in commercial driver license operations; whether there is a local driver education program; and whether customers are triaged when they come into the Hermiston DMV.

#### Roundtable Discussion with North East 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 Director Kris Strickler, Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Julie Brown, Oregon Transportation Commission Vice-Chair Lee Beyer, and Oregon Transportation Commissioner Jeff Baker.

Other participants at the roundtable included: Steven Burkett, WalMart; Alana Carollo, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association; Dan Dorran, Umatilla County Commissioner; Dave Drotzmann, Hermiston Mayor; Jeff Gritz, LIUNA; David Hanson, Umatilla County Fire District #1; Amanda Hoey, Oregon Wheat Growers League; Staci Kunz, SK Consulting; Kelly Nobles, Umatilla River Trail; Andy Perry, Anderson Perry Engineering; Lloyd Piercy, agriculture/trails advocate; Susan Roberts, Wallowa County Commissioner; Dani Schulte, Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation/Kayak Public Transit; John Shafer, Umatilla County Commissioner; David Slaght, Echo City Administrator; Byron Smith, Hermiston City Administrator; Scott Stanton, Umatilla County Fire District #1; J.D. Tovey, CTUIR/Kayak Public Transit; John Turner, Mayor of Pendleton; Jeff Wenholz, Morrow County; Larry Wightman, Wallowa County Road Supervisor; Tammie Williams, Echo City Council; and Doug Wright, Union County Public Works.

In addition to participants, others present at the roundtable included: Lindsay Baker, ODOT; Kari Christiansen, Hermiston resident; Kim Curley, Commute Options; Mark Gibson, Oregon Trucking Associations; Derek Hofbauer, Oregon Transit Association; Rich Lani, ODOT District 12; Tim Martinez, GeoToll; Jim McCauley, League of Oregon Cities; Todd Nash, Wallowa County Commissioner; Gina Nikkel, Association of Oregon Counties; Stephanie Noll, Oregon Trails Coalition; Ken Patterson, ODOT Region 5 Manager; Dawson Quinton, staff for Rep. Greg Smith; Amy Ramsdell, ODOT; Les Ruark, Hermiston resident; Patrick Sieng, Oregon Transit Association; Cindy Timmons, Umatilla County; Dave Webb, WalMart; and Brian Worley, Association of Oregon Counties.

#### *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:*

- The importance of giving producers confidence in getting product to market;
- Need for sustainable funding to prevent need for another transportation package;
- Maintain 50/30/20 revenue sharing of State Highway Fund;
- Help people get to their jobs;
- Maintain the existing transportation system;
- Ensure sufficient funding for public transportation;
- Local governments need support from ODOT for incident response;
- Seek first to meet the needs of the most vulnerable road users, non-drivers;
- Importance of providing for offroad trails;
- Need to fund both maintenance of current system AND enhancement projects;
- Allow counties to use their general fund moneys to pay for transportation;
- Increase overall transportation funding;
- Impact of weather on road maintenance and operations;
- Better messaging to the driving public about highway closures;
- Transportation impacts of inflation and cost escalation;
- Staffing reductions due to declining revenues;
- Impact of driver behavior on highway safety;
- Ensuring that kids can get to school and activities;
- Consider vehicle-miles-traveled tax;
- Use multi-pronged approach to increase overall transportation funding;
- Find ways to reduce costs and expenditures to stretch existing funding;
- Importance of solutions that can get bipartisan support;
- Ensure that rural areas of the state get their fair share of transportation funding;
- Find ways to capture revenues from out-of-state drivers;
- Need to ensure that all vehicles, including electric vehicles, pay their fair share;
- Don't take moneys from existing programs to pay for transportation;
- Find alternative funding methods for public transportation;
- Reduce the cost of bureaucracy and regulatory processes;
- Vehicle-miles-traveled tax would be regressive;
- Consider bonding transportation revenues;
- Use a surcharge on public electric vehicle charging stations;
- Index transportation revenues to inflation;
- Leave all options on the table, do not fear fundamental system changes;
- Do not consider new taxes until cost savings are analyzed;
- Cannot continue the status quo of deferred maintenance;
- Consider using out-of-state contractors to lower construction costs; and;
- Tolls are a hardship that violate tribal treaties.