

Joint Interim Committee on Transportation

Meeting Summary- Bend area site tour, stakeholder roundtable

Thursday, September 12th, 2024

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

Visiting Legislators Present: Rep. Breese-Iverson, Rep. Kropf

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

Bend Site Tour

The Committee assembled at the OSU Cascades Campus and boarded a bus for a tour of transportation facilities and sites in and around Bend. Members were welcomed by ODOT Director Kris Strickler and ODOT Region 4 Manager Tiffany Johnson.

Bend is one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States. As a result, despite significant investments made, including those contained in House Bill 2017 (2017) and a decade of significant local investment via a \$190 million transportation bond, the city continues to “tread water” in terms of maintaining its road system. Cost drivers include inflation in labor and construction materials, specialized equipment, bicycle lanes, road striping, and an estimated 10 percent increase in lane miles within the city in just the last five years. Emphasis was placed on the importance of the 50/30/20 revenue sharing of the State Highway Fund, with acknowledgment that increased fleet fuel efficiency is eroding the efficacy of the Fund. The Bend City Council recently enacted a Transportation Utility Fee (TUF) of \$5.60/month on single family dwellings and \$4.15/month on multifamily units, but it is anticipated that even that revenue will only contribute to maintaining the status quo.

The City of Bend is bisected east-west by the Deschutes River and the BNSF Railway line, which is a challenge to moving people and goods. The city has also instituted a regimen of traffic calming “road diet” projects to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety. There is an ongoing program for installing ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps, as is the case throughout Oregon. Road maintenance is primarily via chip seal, though the city operates both a paving crew and a concrete crew. Safety features such as flashing beacons and pedestrian islands are important in high freight and traffic volume areas.

Jim Scholtes, ODOT District 9 Manager, discussed efforts to maintain pavement conditions. He indicated that rutting is a particular area of concern due to the prevalence of studded tires in winter months. Even frost can collect in ruts, resulting in a degradation of traction. The primary strategy is to fill the ruts, but the current STIP process does not keep up with the life cycle needs of highway maintenance, meaning that road managers must be judicious in use of resources.

Russ Grayson, Chief Operating Officer for City of Bend, indicated that the city needs to plan for an expected influx of 50,000 additional residents in the next 20 years. The city faces an estimated \$275 million funding gap, despite the passage of a handful of transportation funding measures in recent years. He noted that the recent failure of a school levy might indicate that voters have reached their tolerance level for local funding measures. He also spoke to the challenge that the river and rail lines create in building and connecting a multimodal transportation system, adding that ODOT is instrumental in funding needed overpasses.

Transit and Tourism

Tammy Baney, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), discussed transit in the Bend region. She noted that transit has deployed smaller vehicles for east-west travel within the city. She also emphasized the importance of city, county, and state partnerships for intercity connections for public transportation for employment, education, and health trips. The city sees approximately 20,000 visitors daily during peak periods. Rapid population growth has spiked property values to a median of \$748,000, while the median income in the area is \$63,000/year, meaning that a lot of people are income restrained and rely more on public transportation.

Like many transit providers, Cascades East Transit (CET) is dependent upon funding from the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF) and employee payroll tax instituted by House Bill 2017 (2017). The agency serves an area from Warm Springs to La Pine and from Sisters to Prineville, making it geographically wide. There are also shuttles to trails and major tourist areas such as the Butte. The agency operates dial-a-ride service and provides free service for veterans.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: whether CET operates on weekends.

U.S. 97, Active Transportation, and Winter Maintenance

The recent parkway project is one of the largest the city has undertaken since 1990. As population growth continues to exacerbate traffic, there is a greater need for road lanes and also shared use paths for active transportation. Several safety features embedded in U.S. 97 were noted, intended to deter crossover accidents and calm traffic.

Mr. Scholtes described interagency service to nearby Mt. Bachelor. He also spoke to efforts to address the unhoused population and unauthorized camping. Ms. Johnson also spoke to the importance of acknowledging the unhoused to help ensure that safety issues are addressed.

Chris Doty, Deschutes County Roads Manager, spoke to connections between the county and city road systems and U.S. 97. The first priority for county roads is maintenance, then operations, and finally capital projects, though he noted that there is little to no funding available for the latter.

On the subject of roundabouts, the City of Bend and Deschutes County have invested heavily in them, with nearly half of all the roundabouts on the state's road system in the Central Oregon region. Roundabouts are designed to provide a smoother flow of traffic and to eliminate side-on crashes. Statistics show that the roundabouts have eliminated nearly all fatal crashes and resulted in a 75 percent reduction in injuries.

Bend Maintenance Station

Tiffany Johnson made introductions at the Bend Maintenance Station, where the committee debarked from the bus for a tour. She commented on major winter storms in 2017 and 2019 in Central Oregon and the impact those storms had on road closures and the movement of goods and people through the region. The two events led to a restructuring of the snow removal strategies used in the region to prioritize keeping at least one route in and out of the region open, specifically U.S. 26. These efforts rely on an "all hands on deck" approach and long hours. The region utilizes three sizes of snowplow, from Bobcats with motorized broom drums to blowers to the large articulated snowplows.

The Committee was also briefed on the region's electrical crew, which is responsible for maintaining all of the state's signals and traffic devices on the highway system in Central Oregon from the Washington border to the California border. The crew includes five persons, which has been the same size since 1993, despite major population and traffic growth within the region.

Committee questions and comments for this portion of the tour included: how ODOT receives notification of signals that are not operating; and what level of staffing would be considered 'fully staffed.'

Roundtable Discussion with South 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 Vice-Chair Lee Beyer, Oregon Transportation Commissioner Jeff Baker, and Kelly Brooks, Office of the Governor.

Other participants at the roundtable included: Tammy Baney, Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council; Scott Beard, Kittelson & Associates; Anthony Broadman, Bend City Councilor; David Burger, Oregon State Building Trades Council; Barb Campbell, Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization; Elisa Cheng, BendBikes; Kim Curley, Commute Options; Tony DeBone, Deschutes County Commissioner; Chris Doan, Knife River Construction; Chris Doty, Deschutes County Road Manager; Matt Ellsworth, Oregon Trucking Associations; Wade Flegel, Oregon Farm Bureau; Wayne Fording, Jefferson County Commissioner; James Lewis, Sunriver Owners Association; Jamie McCright, Milann Farms/Oregon Trucking Associations; Jeremy Morris, Kalamath County Public Works; Brian Potwin, Commute Options; Matt Powlison, Jefferson

County Public Works; Michael Preedin, Sisters Mayor; Barry Shullanberger, Lake County Commissioner; Kelly Simmelink, Jefferson County Commissioner; David Thomson, Deschutes County Bike/Ped Committee; and Cat Zwicker Redmond City Council.

In addition to participants, others present at the roundtable included: David Abbas, City of Bend; Kirsten Adams, Associated General Contractors; Omar Ahmed, ODOT; Steve Curley, Economic Development of Central Oregon; Kacey Davey, ODOT; Kathy DeBone, Newberry Regional Partnership; Tyler Deke, Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization; Mike Eliason, Association of Oregon Counties; Marilyn Fleener, staff for Rep. Emerson Levy; Mark Gibson, Oregon Trucking Associations; Russell Grayson, City of Bend; Rob Garrott, citizen; Drew Hagedorn, Tonkon Torp; Brad Haynes, Crook County; Tiffany Johnson, ODOT; Trevor Johnson Cascades East Transit; Eileen Kiely, RDTAC Sunriver; Sam Lowry, citizen; Tim Martinez, GeoToll; Jim McCauley, League of Oregon Cities; Ariel Mendez, City of Bend; Andrea Napoli, Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization; Amy Ramsdell, ODOT; Kristen Reidelberger, Central Oregon Landwatch; Doug Riggs, Central Oregon Cities Association/Deschutes County; Karen Rippberger, LaPine Chamber of Commerce; Randy Schneider, Sunriver Owners Association; Jim Scholtes, ODOT; Patrick Sieng, Oregon Transit Association; Joshua Smith, City of Prineville; Kali Sullivan, ODOT; Jill Vaughan, Sundt Construction; Keith Widnosky, City of Redmond; and Luke Williams, Central Oregon Truck.

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 to provide resilience of road system to respond to natural disasters;
- Develop and maintain a complete and connected bicycle/pedestrian network;
- Importance of keeping commerce and goods moving;
- Winter maintenance to keep roads open;
- Primary emphasis on traffic safety for all road users;
- Regional equity for all areas of the state;
- Wildlife crossings are important for road safety and protecting wildlife;
- Transportation projects should be built by labor that lives in the region;
- Need to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- Inject additional revenues into system to forestall funding crisis;
- Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions;

- Emphasis on the importance of revenue sharing of State Highway Fund (50-30-20);
- Increase transit options for people who don't or can't drive;
- Need to increase road capacity to accommodate growth and prevent congestion;
- Manage bridge maintenance to avoid weight limitations and closures;
- Need for additional safe and convenient truck parking;
- Greater enforcement and education to prevent adverse/dangerous driver behavior;
- All users of road system should pay to use, including electric vehicles and bicycles ;
- Add left-turn lanes to intersections where applicable for safety;
- Better management of population growth through land use;
- Trucks diverting through towns on roads that cannot accommodate the larger vehicles;
- Aging infrastructure will be more expensive to replace than to perform upkeep;
- Adjust regulations on freight trucks (hours of service, for example);
- Index gasoline tax to inflation to account for price increases;
- Consider instituting delivery fees;
- Find ways for people who do not drive can contribute to road maintenance;
- Weight mile tax is too high and too complicated;
- Ensure that road funding goes to maintenance, where it is needed;
- Increase the gas tax to increase revenue;
- Consider road usage charge for miles traveled for cars, and flat fee alternative;
- Allow smaller cities to impose vehicle registration fees;
- Find ways to reduce ODOT staff to put more revenues into roads;
- Integrate bicycle/pedestrian safety topics into driver education programs;
- Consider transportation utility fee to treat roads like other utilities;
- Increase DMV fees to pay for full cost of providing services; and;
- Need to better educate Oregonians on how transportation is funded.