

# Public Works wants to hear from you!

The Benton County Public Works Department has made a shift in its focus when it comes to reaching the public.

When I came aboard in 2014, I was asked to proceed with the approval of a process begun years ago to build a multi-use path connecting North Albany and North Corvallis. In the end, this approach came up short. Recognizing that we could do better, I recommended to staff and the Commissioners that a different approach was necessary to connect with the residents of Benton County.

I am happy to announce the rollout of our public outreach program, called TRIP (Tool for Reaching Individuals in the Public). This is our Public Outreach tool to reach as many in the public that we can in as many ways as we can.

In 2015, we sent out postcards to those directly affected by any major work we were completing whether it was our chip seal program or projects as big as the roundabout. We heard from the public that our mailings were successful, so we will continue those in 2016. Some mailings will provide information on long-term projects and others will discuss upcoming construction work.

Our next step for 2016 is to take the public on the journey (or TRIP) with us as we move forward. Projects such as the Corvallis to Albany multi-use path and the 53rd Street railroad overcrossing take many years to design, fund and construct, quickly falling off the public's radar. Behind the scenes, Public Works continues to work on these projects but the public is unaware.

That is changing. We are setting up project websites to help you follow these long-term projects. We also will be notifying those properties directly impacted by the projects by mail on a semi-regular basis. If you are not

directly impacted by the projects but wish to be notified, you can request to be placed on the mailing list. Updates will occur up to four times per year.

Updates for all county projects also will be given on a weekly Facebook post. Public Works has created its own individual Facebook page for 2016, and we need you to "like" our page to get updates. We are creating a document that provides an overview of the condition of our road and bridge system, which we will be publishing in the summer of 2016. This document will show the history and future of our infrastructure. In 2016 we also are planning five open houses throughout the county in Corvallis (includes the Philomath area), Albany (includes the Adair Village area), Monroe, Kings Valley and Alsea to spread the word about our long-term projects and describe our 5-year maintenance plan, as well as our 5-year capital plan.

The other way we will be taking the public with us is by asking the public to join us hand-in-hand collaborating on possible solutions to needs within the County Transportation System rather than telling you to follow us. If we go forward with the Corvallis to Albany path, we will be asking the public to brainstorm options with us to connect the two cities rather than tell you what location we have selected without input. Our first step in this process was to determine the need through surveys taken in November and December 2015.

With projects like the 53rd Street overpass, we have done the work to determine the best solution for the safety issues that exist. Widening the opening and going under is actually more costly than going over the railroad. The State will not allow any "at grade" crossings, which makes that option not possible. We hope to also have an open house about this

important project in 2016 to discuss all of the options and potential projects in the 53rd Street corridor, as well as the overpass project.

We are looking for stakeholders in many areas, as well as new members for our Roads Advisory Committee. This is a great way to help staff determine the best way to proceed on many different topics concerning infrastructure within our county. We are looking for stakeholders to join a group that is discussing safety on Highway 20 between Corvallis and Albany with Oregon Department of Transportation. Lastly, we are updating our Transportation System Plan (TSP) and we are looking for stakeholders to assist with the updating of that 20-year planning document.

Finally, it is our duty to keep our roads and bridges in the best condition possible with the funding available. Working with our legislators, we will continue looking for grants to fund our infrastructure, create plans that make us project ready (or "shovel ready") when the state and federal governments create stimulus programs. We will continue to grade our gravel roads, fill and pave potholes, clean our bridges and design myriad projects to improve the travelled way.

To become a part of any of our committees, receive in any of our mailings or to make your comments known, please contact me, Public Works Director Josh Wheeler, at 541-766-6010, by email at [Joshua.wheeler@co.benton.or.us](mailto:Joshua.wheeler@co.benton.or.us) or by mail at 360 SW Avery, Corvallis, OR 97333. Feel free to write me or call for an appointment to discuss your concerns in person. We want to be here for you, At Your Service, and ensuring that the public is informed and part of the process in moving our department forward.



*Public Works Director Josh Wheeler*

## Regional collaboration works for Public Works

In November, the county met with representatives from Albany, Corvallis, Oregon Department of Transportation and Philomath to strategize on winter storm efforts.

This was the second annual meeting where staff discussed ways to work together by sharing equipment, increasing communication and finding ways to assist each other to maximize efforts and increase public safety.

The county is hosting a Roadway Surfacing Alternatives workshop, bringing in various suppliers and contractors to educate our region on alternatives to Chip Seals and basic resurfacing. The goal is to look at cost-effective maintenance alternatives that would work both in the county and in the cities.

The County Shop continues to assist our neighbors, including government entities as far away as Sweet Home, with their fleet repair needs. This regional program is self-funded and has been active for more than 20 years.