

May 2018

BENTON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM PLAN UPDATE REPORT ON PUBLIC OUTREACH AND INPUT: ROUND #1

SYNOPSIS

- Almost 60 County residents participated in March 2018 community workshops in Monroe, Philomath and North Albany.
- Over 100 on-line or workshop surveys were completed.
- Among workshop themes:
 - Monroe residents access services in both Corvallis and Junction City/Eugene. As the community grows, there will be more trips on Hwy 99.
 - Critical issues for Monroe workshop participants include pedestrian access, transit and safety. Participants cite very limited pedestrian access and hope that the TSP will identify opportunities to improve connectivity to residential areas.
 - At all workshops, concern was expressed that traffic is increasing on rural roads, especially Bellfountain Road, in order to avoid having to go through South Corvallis. Most noticeable is the increase in heavy truck traffic. A designated truck route that bypasses Philomath is suggested to diminish truck use of rural roads not designed for such.
 - A fundamental question posed by workshop participants was, as we look at future demands on the existing infrastructure, do we continue to try to tweak the overall transportation system or do we target resources to improvements where people live and work that take advantage of the existing system?
 - North Albany workshop participants cite Springhill Road safety concerns due to increasing truck traffic. A signal at Independence Hwy is suggested to help get the trucks off of Springhill Road.
 - It is noted that traffic backs up for hours along Hwy. 20 anytime there is an accident on the Albany bridges. It was recommended that methods for redirecting traffic to Hwy 34, e.g. a reader board at Conifer, be explored.
- Key survey findings:
 - Responses are evenly split between whether the current transportation system functions Well or Fine (combined 52%) and Poorly (48%) in unincorporated areas.
 - Among TSP goals, Safety (60%), Mobility and Circulation (59%), and Equity (48%) are ranked as the highest priorities.
 - Among the most heavily congested roads: Hwy 20 between North Albany bridges and Philomath city limits, Hwy 20 rail crossing in Philomath, Hwy 99 between Corvallis and Lewisburg, Hwy 99 through Monroe, Bellfountain Road.

- Most frequently mentioned congested intersections: Hwy 20 intersections: Granger, Independence Hwy, North Albany Road; Hwy 20/34 intersection in Philomath; Hwy 99/Orchard Street intersection in Monroe; Bellfountain Road intersections: Kings Valley Highway, Llewellyn; bridges in both Albany and Corvallis; Multiple intersections within the City of Corvallis
- Respondents generally feel safe on bicycles only on designated bike (multi-use) paths. Rural roads are considered unsafe for bicycling due to narrow shoulders and autos traveling at high speeds.
- As with bicycling, respondents feel safest walking where there are sidewalks and pedestrian cross-walks or on designated pedestrian paths. Street lighting and physical separation from traffic are key factors. Dangerous pedestrian locations cited are typically near busy roads with no sidewalks or designated multi-use paths.
- Only 10% of respondents currently ride the bus.
- To improve public transit, respondents strongly favor increasing bus frequency (72%) and increasing service hours (69%).
- Almost three-quarters of respondents heard about the community workshops through word-of-mouth, with slightly less than 20% via the project website or media.

A. INTRODUCTION

The first of two rounds of public outreach for the update of the County's Transportation System Plan (TSP) was conducted in March-April 2018. Public involvement for the TSP update is intended to support the County's 2040 Thriving Communities Initiative and stated community values to guide the County's future through the sharing of information and the gathering of public input on the current and future transportation system in the County. This first round of community outreach was intended to gather community input on existing and future transportation system needs in the County and potential solutions. A second round of outreach meetings will be conducted in July of 2018 to present and receive community feedback on proposed projects and priorities.

Community input was gathered through several venues and summarized in this report:

- Three community workshops
- Survey, both on-line and distributed at the workshops
- Comments submitted through the project website

Notification of the opportunity to comment on initial TSP elements and to participate in community workshops was provided through the project's website, media releases, flyers (also in Spanish) in local jurisdiction's utility bills, targeted notice to local organizations in rural areas of the County, and notice to Public Works' interested parties list. Additional notice was provided on the County's primary webpage.

B. COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The first of two series of community workshops for the TSP update was conducted in March 2018 to introduce the TSP project and solicit input regarding project goals and objectives, existing and future transportation needs. This first round was conducted at three separate locations

in the County. Attendance numbers are exclusive of staff and consultants.

- Thursday, March 8; Monroe Community Library – 18 persons
- Tuesday, March 13; Marys River Grange, Philomath – 14 persons
- Thursday, March 15: North Albany Middle School – 27 persons

The workshops were all held from 5:30-7:30 pm and conducted in an open house style, with multiple opportunities for community input. Spanish interpretation was provided at the March 8 workshop in Monroe. Refreshments and raffle prizes were also provided. Dial-a-Bus rides were made available to seniors and persons with disabilities.

Elements of the workshops included:

- Informational posters and maps providing information on the process, goals and objectives, current transportation conditions, and future transportation needs.
- Presentation on project scope, process and schedule; Goals and Objectives, existing conditions and future transportation needs.
- Facilitated question/answer and comment session.
- Survey to be completed at the workshop or returned to Public Works.

While all three meetings sought input on County-wide transportation needs and solutions, community-specific input was solicited at the Monroe meeting to help inform the development of the City's TSP element.

C. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT

1. Comments on informational posters and maps

- The only comment on Draft Goals and Objectives was specific support for the Equity, Health and Environment goals.
- For existing bicycle system conditions, the request was made to distinguish between roads that have a bike lane with less traffic from roads without bike lanes
- Several comments were submitted on slowing traffic and improving safety on Bellfountain Road.

2. Community Workshop Question/Answer Sessions and Comments

Representative comments and responses are provided for each workshop. A complete transcript is available at Benton County Public Works.

Monroe Workshop

- Monroe residents can be considered cosmopolitan in the sense that they access services in both Corvallis and Junction City/Eugene. The community commutes to employment and services in both directions. As the community grows, there will be more trips on Hwy 99.
- There is more and more traffic on rural roads, especially Bellfountain Road, in order to avoid having to go through South Corvallis. Most noticeable is the increase in heavy truck traffic.

- How is safety being addressed on Bellfountain Road? Will wider shoulders be put in? The County put in wider shoulders from Llewelyn to Decker as part of a safety project several years ago. Bellfountain is a tough situation, as we can't put an overlay on in some areas because of the floodplain. There are icing problems, and tight corners. Many of the improvements identified in the Bellfountain Refinement Plan prepared back in the 1990's have been implemented.
- On many roads, including Hwy 99, fog and center lines are faded, creating difficult driving conditions, especially in the winter.
- As an unwritten policy, the County has chosen to not install speed bumps on County roads. There are numerous considerations in doing so, such as accidents from vehicles going out of control, water freezing alongside the bumps, maintenance, etc.
- Pedestrian access, transit and safety are three big critical issues for Monroe. There is really no pedestrian access – sidewalks are very limited. For transit to be successful, safe pedestrian access is needed.
- Connectivity to residential areas needs to be a priority. The TSP needs to take an in-depth look at opportunities to improve connectivity.
- At Orchard Tract Road, there is a need to slow vehicles down as they approach the stop sign. A more formal crosswalk is needed at Orchard and 6th Streets to accommodate pedestrians. Could raised crosswalks be installed in Monroe?
Yes, it is certainly an option that can be considered; the County is looking at installing one in Philomath. It can be part of the toolbox of measures, e.g. narrowing, delineators, that are included in the TSP to control speeds on rural roads.
- Where does community need fit into making the ODOT bridge in Monroe pedestrian/bicycle friendly?
Replacements/improvements to this truss bridge are not an ODOT priority, as the agency is focusing on I-5 bridges. Including in the TSP is an important first step.
- Will the TSP be looking at interchange improvements to enable drivers coming north on Hwy. 99 to go west on Hwy. 34, instead of cutting through neighborhoods or Avery Park?
Being addressed in Corvallis TSP; a project is being proposed to complete ramp improvements; connections to Hwy. 34 going west will be difficult due to geography and the constraints of existing infrastructure.

Philomath Workshop

- What are the general findings in the "evaluate funding for transportation improvements" section?
We will bring this back to you. The goal is to set a realistic budget. There will be a long list of needs and only a small portion will be able to be completed. The projects deemed most important will get done first.
- What is the status of Hwy 20/34 connection improvements and the split into Corvallis?
If you live along that Hwy just trying to make a left hand turn is impossible and now they have the concrete divider.

Three issues have been identified regarding the bottleneck where the bypass comes into and around Corvallis including: replacing the Van Bureau Bridge (funded project), building a fly over ramp vs. turning left at the light to get to the bypass when driving towards Corvallis and third is the need for an extension that would connect US 20 and 99W. Along that corridor there were a lot of crossover accidents, which is why the barrier was installed. While it's inconvenient, it is safer.

- What would it take to concentrate traffic heading from 99W towards the coast into one corridor rather than having it spread out onto numerous county roads on the south part of town? They are all so congested and dangerous and have such diverse traffic with bicycles, pedestrians, commuters, farm trucks, semi-trucks etc. Bellfountain used to be the focus of that but now it's on Airport and Fern roads. It's only spreading out more and more.

The Bellfountain Corridor study looked at people cutting around Bellfountain and other places. Apparently truck traffic is doing it as well. Part of the issue has been that the interchange at 99W and Hwy 34 does not have all the ramp connections. Fastest route is usually what people will take. The Bellfountain Corridor study determined that a new road corridor wasn't worth it and that it's best to improve existing infrastructure.

- How much is this planning effort taking into account the uses of technology in regards to safety i.e. photo radar? Technology can be our friend.

The County is not a jurisdiction authorized to use photo radar. These technology conversations are very much on the table but may require significant policy / law changes. We want to encourage ideas outside the box. ODOT is looking at intelligent transportation systems so that signals are coordinated with freight movement through the Hwy 20/34 corridor. The idea is to give freight preference to get through the signals.

- As we work through this TSP, we are investing in infrastructure that exists today but as we look at future demands with more folks that we have to share the infrastructure, do we tweak what we have or is it better to manage where people live and work and how we build out our community, houses, businesses and take advantage of the existing system?
- To accommodate truck traffic, you have a couple of alternatives, i.e. widening Hwy 20 outside of Philomath but you will always face the couplet issue with a community trying to do a streetscaping upgrade to make it more of a community feel. The need is to have an alternative truck route to bypass Philomath and then you ban them from the other roads via weight limit or other measures. You have to designate a truck route. It isn't easy but it's better than allowing truck traffic going willy-nilly on all county roads.

North Albany Workshop

- Is the concept still being pursued to identify the connection of Hwy 99 to Hwy 20 as a lifeline route, and moving the connection to the north so that it would serve better as an evacuation route?

Not familiar with that concept, but it's a great comment.

- How is traffic associated with new development being taken into account, e.g. at Crocker?
Future travel demand is modeled by ODOT in consultation with local jurisdictions and PSU populations projections. This modeling has proven to be fairly accurate. For Crocker and Gibson Hill, the County is consulting with Albany on when improvements will be needed.
- What are examples of how the \$28 million for safety improvements on US 20 will be spent?
At Independence Highway and at Granger road, protected left turn lanes; a continuous left turn lane between Conifer and Farm Home Roads. Scoping safety improvements between Conifer and North Albany Road. A safety study done 7 years ago proposed closing the Independence Hwy. connection with US 20 and redirecting traffic to Granger in conjunction with a new intersection with a roundabout.
- Getting trucks off Springhill would improve safety. Wouldn't putting a light in at Independence Hwy, help get the trucks off of Springhill?
There are lots of reasons trucks use Springhill, including the lack of storage room at Independence Highway due to the railroad tracks. ODOT generally opposes traffic signals on such rural highways as they tend to cause more accidents. But we can still put it into the TSP to advise ODOT that this is what we want and get the dialogue going.
- Traffic backs up for hours anytime there is an accident on the Albany bridges. Methods for redirecting traffic to Hwy 34, e.g. a reader board at Conifer, should be explored. The City of Albany sends out text alerts; you can also sign up for ODOT notices; flash alerts; pulse point and Waze apps.
- The County installed a roundabout at 53rd in Corvallis as a more efficient and safe means to move traffic through that intersection. Why is it considering a signal versus roundabout at Crocker and Gibson Hill?
With the intent to transfer jurisdiction of Crocker to the City in the next several years, the County gave permit authority to the City. Because of the cost of right-of-way for a roundabout, the City Council decided on a signal instead.
- With all the transportation planning underway, now is the time to keep the pressure on ODOT for a third bridge. These TSPs can at least identify the need and potential conflicts related to an additional I-5 connection.
The last study on this issue indicated that the benefit of building a third bridge was so small as to not justify any further consideration. Need to reduce VMTs rather than increase capacity. The last proposal to build a route through Millersburg across Concert, intersecting with Springhill drive would just exasperate the problems at Springhill that we were talking about. Another bridge funneling traffic into North Albany would just make the traffic problems worse.
- Is it the intent to note the need for improvements to both Willamette River bridges, even though one is not in Benton County? *Answer:* Yes, improvements to the Hwy 20 corridor and overall regional connectivity will be identified.

c. Summary of Survey Responses

A survey was available at the community workshops to be completed there or returned to Public Works. An identical online survey provided an online open house experience to engage individuals who may not have been able to attend the community workshops. The online survey was hosted on the project website. It included project information and provided the same opportunities for comment as the community workshops. A link to the online survey was included in community workshop announcements.

In total, 102 surveys were completed:

- 9 completed at Community Workshops or received by Benton County Public Works
- 93 online surveys completed.

Survey responses are summarized below. Complete survey results are available upon request.

Functioning of Transportation System

How well does the current transportation system work in unincorporated areas?

- Responses are evenly split between Well or Fine (combined 52%) and Poorly (48%).

TSP Goals and Priorities

Among the TSP goals, which are the highest priority?

- Safety (60%), Mobility and Circulation (59%), and Equity (48%) are ranked as the highest priorities.

Are there missing goals or priorities?

A variety of additional goals or priorities are identified for consideration, the most frequently mentioned being:

- Interconnected regional transportation system
- Access for special needs populations
- Affordable public transportation for rural areas

Traffic Congestion/Safety

What are the most heavily congested roads or intersections?

Most frequently mentioned congested roads:

- Hwy 20 between North Albany bridges and Philomath city limits
- Hwy 20 rail crossing in Philomath
- Hwy 99 between Corvallis and Lewisburg
- Hwy 99 through Monroe
- Bellfountain Road
- Springfield Road
- Marys River Road
- Reservoir Road/West Hills Road
- Peoria Road during commute hours

Most frequently mentioned congested intersections:

- Hwy 20 intersections: Granger, Independence Hwy, North Albany Road
- Hwy 20/34 intersection in Philomath
- Hwy 99/Orchard Street intersection in Monroe
- Bellfountain Road intersections: Kings Valley Highway, Llewellyn
- Bridges in both Albany and Corvallis
- Multiple intersections within the City of Corvallis

Bicycling

Where do you feel safe/unsafe riding your bike; why?

Respondents generally feel safe on bicycles only on designated bike (multi-use) paths. Rural roads are considered unsafe for bicycling due to narrow shoulders and autos traveling at high speeds. "I feel unsafe on any road that I share with a car." Comments related to bicycling in Monroe note a lack of bicycling options.

What roads would you like to be able to ride your bike on?

Connections between communities, especially Hwy. 20 between Corvallis and Albany, and connections to parks are frequently mentioned as desirable bicycling opportunities. Hwy. 99, Hwy. 223, and Bellfountain Road are also mentioned.

Walking

Where do you feel safe/unsafe walking; why?

As with bicycling, respondents feel safest walking where there are sidewalks and pedestrian cross-walks or on designated pedestrian paths. Street lighting and physical separation from traffic are key factors.

What roads do you wish were more comfortable to walk along?

Most frequently mentioned are Hwy. 99 in Monroe and in south Corvallis, Hwy. 223, and Hwy. 20 in Philomath.

What are dangerous pedestrian locations?

Dangerous locations cited are typically near busy roads with no sidewalks or designated multi-use paths. Specifically cited: Highway 99 both south and north of downtown Corvallis, as well as key Hwy. 99 intersections (Territorial, Orchard, Ash, etc.); Philomath Boulevard; along Hwy. 20; Hwy. 20/99; and most areas along Hwy. 223.

Transit

Do you ride the bus now? If not, what would it take to get you to start riding the bus?

Only 10% of respondents currently ride the bus.

How could public transit be improved? Other comments?

To improve public transit, respondents strongly favor increasing bus frequency (72%) and increasing service hours (69%). Additional comments included:

- More promotion to create broader public awareness
- Improve safety at bus stops and on buses
- Target service to high use areas
- Collaborate with providers in neighboring counties to connect to nearby services
- Recognize that transit is not really suited to rural areas

Miscellaneous Comments

Among other comments about improving the transportation system:

- Take ownership of Marys River Estate Road
- Put Philomath back the way it was
- Seniors, disabled in rural areas need more transportation options
- Spend the funds wisely -- pave the roads
- A multi-faced approach is needed to meet demand

Awareness of Workshops

Almost three-quarters of respondents heard about the community workshops through word-of-mouth, with slightly less than 20% via the project website or media.