



Columbia County Transportation System Plan Update

Transportation Road Advisory Committee (TRAC) Meeting #2

Summary

MEETING DATE:	February 12, 2015
MEETING TIME:	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
MEETING LOCATION:	Columbia County Road Department, 1054 Oregon Street, St. Helens.
MEETING PURPOSE:	The purpose of this meeting is to review the findings from Technical Memoranda #6 through #8 regarding existing and future baseline transportation conditions. These memos describe what current transportation conditions are like and what they will be like 20 years from now if no substantial improvements are made. An overview of key findings will be provided and the consultant will lead a discussion of potential transportation solution focus areas.

TOPICS

I. Sign-in, Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Project staff and TRAC members in attendance introduced themselves. The following were in attendance:

- Dave Hill- Columbia County
- Lonny Welter- Columbia County
- Tristan Wood- Columbia County
- Julia Wheeler- Columbia County
- John Bosket- DKS
- Kevin Chewuk- DKS
- Rick Shankle- ODOT Rail
- Nita Greene- TRAC Member
- Rosemary Lohrke- TRAC Member
- Pat LaPointe- TRAC Member
- Sabrina Moore- TRAC Member
- Scott Jensen- TRAC Member

John Bosket provided an overview of the transportation system plan process to date. Last time the TRAC met the project was just kicking off. We discussed what a TSP was, and why we're updating it. We also discussed goals and objectives and the things TRAC members wanted to accomplish with the TSP update, with members weighting different transportation priorities.

Since then, we've been doing an assessment of the state of the transportation system. The drafts of Technical Memorandum #6: Existing Conditions, Technical Memorandums #7: Future Traffic

Forecast and Technical Memorandum #7: Future Transportation Conditions and Needs have been completed and delivered to the TRAC. These memo's discussed what the transportation system looks like and how it functions today, and forecasted traffic volumes through 2035 to help identify what needs should be addressed.

2. Overview of Existing and Future Transportation Conditions

Project staff presented the following to the TRAC through a PowerPoint presentation:

Who is traveling in Columbia County?

- Columbia County's population is aging, with residents over the age of 65 expected to increase nearly 10 percent through 2035.
- Population and employment are expected to increase 30 percent through 2035, with over 70 percent of residents who reside in the county working in other counties.
- Most Columbia County residents commute to work via single occupant motor vehicles (about 79 percent). A notable number of residents carpooled (about 12 percent) to work. Approximately two percent walked, one percent biked, and one percent used public transit.

Driving Conditions

- Highway traffic volumes generally increase 20 percent during the summer.
- There is very little traffic congestion outside of the urban areas today, with only minor congestion on US 30 between Clatskanie and Rainier. By 2035, congestion is expected to worsen, but still generally good. Turning out of Berg Road, Heath Road, and Old Rainier Road onto US 30 will get harder during the evening peak period, resulting in long delays.
- There were 26 fatal, and 64 serious injury collisions in the county over the previous five years. Nearly half of these involved drivers colliding with fixed objects (e.g., trees, ditches, signs, etc.).

A TRAC member questioned what could be done about the fixed object collisions. The project team suggested a few potential solutions, including better signing or striping, tree removal, or weather responsive feedback information during fog or icy weather.

- High crash intersections included US 30/Tide Creek Road, US 30/Neer City Road, and US 30/Gable Road.
- High crash roadway segments included US 30 east of Clatskanie, US 30 east of Rainier, and OR 47 north of Vernonia.

A TRAC member questioned how the local high collision locations correlate to the ODOT SPIS sections. The project team explained that they somewhat align. Another TRAC member asked what a SPIS segment is. The project team explained that a SPIS (Safety Priority Index System) segment is one way ODOT identifies high collision locations and priority locations for improvements.

- 8 bridges in the county are in need of repair/replacement (5 are currently weight restricted).
- 38 percent of county roadways are in poor/very poor condition, and 31 percent are gravel.

A TRAC member asked what could be causing the congestion between Rainier and Clatskanie. The project team noted that it could be people traveling to the coast and this is the area that starts getting hilly with large recreational vehicles and trucks traveling at slower speeds.

Walking and Biking

- Pedestrian activity outside of cities is low.
- Not a lot of facilities outside of urban areas. US 30 is the only viable biking corridor.
- Trails are available, but the gap east of Vernonia needs to be connected.

A TRAC member questioned if we identified shared roadways. The project team mentioned that shared roadways are typically low-volume, low speed roadways. Speeds are often too high for most county roads to make this a safe and comfortable option. However, we have seen key bike routes identified along rural segments, with signage identifying it as such a route.

Public Transit

- 87,500 passengers annually, with 48,000 passengers on PDX route.
- Dial-a-Ride for riders with disabilities.
- TriMet provides regional services in the Portland Metropolitan Area, and connects to CC Rider in Portland and Beaverton.
- No weekend service.

Freight and Rail Facilities

- US 30 is a key route for freight movement and provides access to intermodal facilities (connections between truck, ship, and rail transport).
- Rail crossings can cause delay and limited access for emergency services.

A TRAC member noted that log truck traffic traveling from Clatsop and Tillamook Counties to Longview and Rainier impact the county roadway system.

A TRAC member questioned the rail delay, and noted that it typically takes less than 10 minutes for trains to cross in the county. It occasionally takes up to 20 minutes when the trains are switching.

A TRAC member asked if the crash potential would increase if the railroad tracks are improved to allow higher train speeds. Rick Shankle, from ODOT Rail, noted that the rail tracks have consistently been improved over the years by the Portland & Western Railroad (PNWR) and they have not indicated an intention to increase speeds beyond 25 mph. He noted that for trains traveling between 10 and 25 mph, there really is not much difference from a safety perspective. There are sections in Columbia County at 25 mph now. PNWR is required to have more

inspectors out on the tracks, more often, with higher speeds. Overall, Rick noted that the rail improvements have increased the efficiency of rail operations. ODOT has no control over how fast the trains go. The railroad chooses what class of track they operate at, where Class 1 has a maximum authorized speed of 10 mph, while Class 2 has a maximum speed of 25 mph. The federal government checks to make sure they are maintaining it to the chosen standard.

A TRAC member asked how much rail traffic is currently traveling through the county and has it generally been increasing? Rick indicated that on average, there are around 16 trains per month, however, it has been lower during the beginning of this year. He noted that the products shipped and length of the trains are generally based on the economy.

Rick noted that PNWR is working on improving A Street in Rainier. They are separating the railroad from the road with curbs, to improve safety. The concept is to remove the asphalt 8 feet from the center of the track, and put in curb. At crossings it will be set-up with typical flashing lights. Some diagonal parking will be replaced with parallel parking. An example of the concept is 6th Street in downtown Corvallis.

A TRAC member questioned who owns the rail and what type of trains come through. Rick noted that the railroad is owned, operated, maintained and inspected PNWR. However, ODOT owns the ROW that the rail is on. ODOT Rail has a partnership program with the Federal Rail Administration, with certified inspectors to make sure PNWR is meeting the federal rail requirements. ODOT Rail inspects for many aspects of the trains, and also authorizes the public rail crossings. Rick noted that there are short spur tracks, and industrial spurs in the county that are owned by the Ports. PNWR inspects these as well, and ODOT Rail inspects the crossings. ODOT Rail has authority to inspect all crossings.

The TRAC noted that the most recent rail study in the county doesn't address the current concern, which is increased oil trains. Rick noted that as a Common Carrier Railroad, PNWR can not refuse service to trains carrying oil. However, in the interest of safety, they do send out inspectors in advance of all oil trains.

Rick noted that train lengths are limited by the ability of the rear of the train to communicate with the front, and that the tunnels and mountainous topography in Oregon impacts the length of the train. In Columbia County, trains generally are no longer than 99-100 cars (about 1 mile in length).

The TRAC member questioned why sidewalk typically isn't located adjacent to rail. Rick noted a concern with inviting people to walk on the tracks. He noted that it is not impossible to put a trail within the rail ROW. The national standard for a shared-use path adjacent to rail includes a barrier between the path and the tracks to make it more difficult to walk out onto the railroad. A TRAC member asked if the rail likes to keep a clear zone around the tracks. Rick noted that the rail likes to keep the visibility with buildings or vegetation back to keep a clear line of sight to signals and signs. They also need to keep it clear for maintenance, since equipment can stick out from the track.

3. Discuss Potential Improvement Focus Areas

This part of the meeting focused on potential improvement focus areas. The TRAC noted that the focus on the TSP appears to be on the state system as opposed to the County system. The project team noted that it may appear that way because the usage of US 30 is so much higher than other routes and, therefore, many of the issues show up on that corridor. Needs and solutions for both the County and State systems will be included in the TSP.

The TRAC is interested in solutions that focus on the impacts of turning out of side streets onto US 30, especially with the expected increase in traffic through 2035. They noted that it is sometimes difficult to determine how quickly the cars are approaching with the high travel speeds on the highway. The project team noted that signal warrants were assessed at many of these approaches, and that there wasn't enough side street traffic to warrant a traffic signal. You have to make sure you have enough use on the side street to justify the additional delay on the main street. The side street traffic wasn't high enough to meet those warrants. TRAC members noted that if a signal were put in, traffic would divert away from many nearby unsignalized intersections to use it, creating the demand needed to justify installation.

The project team noted that a future signal is planned for US 30/Millard Road. A TRAC member thinks Bennett Road is a better option for a traffic signal. Another TRAC member thinks the project team should consider a median U-turn or J-Turn at the Bennett Road intersection. Bill, from ODOT, agreed to send an example of a J-Turn to TRAC members. A TRAC member noted that Bennett Road is difficult for drivers to turn onto US 30, and thinks left turns should be restricted. They noted that it has grade issues on the highway. Another TRAC member thinks a traffic signal at Johnson's Landing Road should be considered. The project team noted that we will be looking into solutions for the side streets.

The TRAC questioned if population growth would create enough demand to justify new signals on US 30. The project team noted that the problematic locations being considered for the TSP are outside of the urban areas where growth will not be high. Growth will happen in St Helens and Scappoose, so creating secondary road access to get to traffic signals on US 30 should be a priority.

The TRAC thinks that there is a need for left-turn lanes at several intersections along US 30. There is poor visibility with the hills and curves, and drivers don't expect people to be stopping to turn left from the through lane of US 30. The TRAC think the US 30/ Nicolai Road intersection would be the easiest to add a left-turn lane, since there may be some ROW between the highway and rail. There is also poor visibility at the Tide Creek Road and Neer City Road intersections, however the Tide Creek and Goble Creek bridges would have to be replaced to add left-turn lanes at these locations. The project team noted that there has been impact on the guardrail at these locations, and black rubber marks on the highway indicate close calls.

4. Questions/Comments from Public Attendees

There were no public attendees at the meeting.

5. Next Steps

- The TRAC has two weeks to provide comments on the draft Memo's. Comments should be returned to Lonny Welter by Thursday, February 26th.
- The project team will meet with the County BOC on Wednesday, February, 18th, and is planning on holding the first public open house meeting series in April. The open houses will be held at two locations, one in the north part and one in the south part of the county.