

Office of Governor Kate Brown

Governor's Transportation Vision Panel

January 25, 2016 – Northeast & Southeast Oregon Regional Forum Summary

Project Overview

The Governor's Transportation Vision Panel is a yearlong effort to develop a series of recommendations for the Governor that address transportation issues across all modes and regions of the state. Members of the Vision Panel include legislative representatives, business owners, and civic leaders from across Oregon. Under the leadership of Governor Kate Brown, members of the Vision Panel have been charged with the following tasks:

1. Assess the current conditions of Oregon's transportation system
2. Develop a long-term vision for the future of Oregon's transportation system
3. Create a series of recommendations that can be enacted in the near-term to lay the groundwork for this vision

Forum Details

The regional forum was held on January 25th, 2016 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Grant County Regional Airport (72000 Airport Road, John Day, OR 97845). Approximately 51 people attended the meeting.

Meeting Format

The meeting was organized around a discussion facilitated by Jeanne Lawson, JLA Public Involvement, between the meeting attendees and the chairs. The agenda was as follows:

1. Welcome and initial activities:
 - Dot exercise
 - Comment Wall
2. Panel overview
3. Preliminary findings, regional needs/priorities, and financing discussion
4. Wrap up and summary

Upon arrival, forum attendees were given a sheet explaining the preliminary findings, a comment card and four dots. They were then guided toward two posters listing the Key Preliminary Findings as well as a comment wall with questions about the region's needs and priorities. They were instructed to place their dots next to the issues on the posters they would most like to discuss, and answer the questions on the comment wall.

Once attendees were seated, the Co-Chair gave an introduction explaining the preliminary findings and turned the floor to Jeanne to facilitate the discussion. The discussion revolved around the issues identified on the Key Preliminary Findings poster, as well as the specific needs and priorities of the region. Jeanne wrapped up the discussion by asking attendees if there were any recommendations for financing transportation.

To close the meeting, forum members were briefly reminded how the input from these forums will be used, and thanked for their participation.

Key Input

Group Discussion: Preliminary Findings

At the beginning of the meeting attendees were asked to identify the preliminary findings that they wished to discuss using a dot exercise. The issues with the highest number of dots were then used to guide the group conversation. Below are the issues with the highest number of votes, and the input pertaining to them.

Freight

Invest in strategic intermodal freight infrastructure

- There was strong support for continuing Connect Oregon
- Port of Morrow and other smaller ports are choosing to bypass shipping through the Port of Portland due to limited shipping resources and missing intermodal facilities, and are looking to invest in short sea shipping facilities
 - Shipping companies have chosen to be based out of Seattle or other major ports
 - Longshoremen issues
- Consider increasing the number of passing lanes on Highway 97 and improving infrastructure to facilitate safety between single-occupancy-vehicle (SOV) and freight traffic
 - Rural freight needs to accommodate the movement of the agricultural and forest products
 - Don't make Highway 97 an interstate, rather invest in lane separation
- Port of Portland is a bottleneck for transporting product through to Seattle
- Consider reworking the routes to and from the Finley Butte Landfill to better support roundtrip traffic
- The region needs a facility where potential truck drivers can acquire commercial driver's licenses (CDLs)

Bicycle & Pedestrian

Invest in bicycle and pedestrian improvements targeting safety, system gaps, and road congestion

- Safety is a concern for bicyclists traveling to or from eastern Oregon, consider separating bike paths from freeways and highways
- Biking could be an economic opportunity for eastern Oregon
 - Painted Hills brings bicycle tourism
- Improvements to bike infrastructure are not eligible to be funded by Connect Oregon due to right-of-way (ROW) requirements
- Tax impediments and issues with fees for land use have made accomplishing new infrastructure difficult
- It would be beneficial to work with federal partners to simplify the permitting process
- Rails-to-Trails may offer an opportunity for funding new bike infrastructure

- With the increasing population of aging residents, it is crucial that investments be made in forms of transportation other than SOVs

Bottlenecks

Reduce roadway bottlenecks and enhance freight network alternatives

- Enhancing and investing in Highway 97 as an alternative to I-5 will improve access to California from northeast Oregon
- Consider increasing the number of passing lanes on Highway 97 and improving infrastructure to facilitate safety between single-occupancy-vehicle (SOV) and freight traffic
 - Don't make Highway 97 an interstate, rather invest in lane separation
- Port of Portland is a bottleneck for transporting product through to Seattle

Jurisdictional Transfers

- Ensure that transferred roads are in good condition and can be maintained by the city or county
- Rural roads cannot support the capacity necessary
- In Morrow County the air force has jurisdictional authority over a historical road that the county would like back
 - There have been negative impacts to energy, internet and private land
- Tribes should be considered jurisdictions
- Consider developing a cohesive process for cities and counties to share in the costs of maintenance and facilities
- Grant County has more reserves and would like to take jurisdictional responsibility of more roads

Transit

Invest in transit service improvements targeting road congestion and system gaps

- In Morrow County, the state helped fund the transit system, but used an outside consultant that caused confusion with identifying authority
 - There needs to be better coordination and explanation during this process
 - Ensure that ODOT provides more technical assistance
- There needs to be a sustainable funding source for rural mobility

Group Discussion & Comment Wall Exercise: Regional Needs/Priorities

The discussion was then guided toward the questions posed in the comment wall exercise pertaining to the needs and priorities of the region.

What do you see as the key driver of your region's economy? How does the transportation system impact these economic drivers?

- Agriculture is a key component of the economy
- Those commuting to Morrow County for employment need transportation alternatives
 - People are relying too heavily on SOVs and causing congestion

- Reliable and efficient public transit is needed
- Forest resources drive a major part of the economy
 - The region is working with PGE to secure a biomass project
 - Roads between forests and coal need improvements to sustain growth
- Housing is needed near employment centers
 - The rental market needs to be expanded
 - Decreasing workers' commutes will take pressures off of bottlenecks
- There is a transportation gap between Stanfield and Boardman
- The region needs a facility where potential truck drivers can acquire commercial driver's licenses (CDLs)
- Rural areas rely on smaller projects for improvements to infrastructure
- Kayak public transit is effective
- Improving the transportation system in will increase access to buildable areas

What are the strengths and weaknesses of your region's transportation system? What are its important connections to the rest of the state and nation?

- Strengths
 - Grant County's roads are in good condition
 - Improvements are needed on Highway 395 towards Pendleton to enhance safety and freight mobility
 - OTIA, JTA and Connect Oregon
 - Access to airports
 - River and port access in Morrow and Umatilla counties
 - Diverse agriculture products
- Weaknesses
 - Barriers against exporting the region's products to global market
 - Functional classification is failing

As you look to the future of your region, how does the transportation system serve your community's long-term goals and priorities?

- Leverage more private investment in system upgrades by expanding the Immediate Opportunity Fund (IOF) categories
- Reduce pressure from freight on bottlenecks by ensuring a viable Columbia River option
- Increase funding for off-system projects that improve the overall transportation system
- Consider removing barriers to school bus usage to allow for public transportation
- Increase student ridership of public transit

Group Discussion: Transportation Financing

Concepts for consideration

- Consider taxing all sources of CO₂
 - Carbon Cap

- Banning coal
- Increase and index the gas tax
 - Ensure revenue from gas tax goes to roads and safety
 - Consider modifying funding distribution
 - Current model allocates 75% to 9 counties, 26 counties are missing out
 - There have been negative impacts on farm to market model
- Use the Oregon Annual Social Indicators Survey (OASIS) to capture out-of-state revenue and distribute funds more equitably
- Build renewable energy sources in Oregon
- Meter roads in order to better identify areas of the system that are in the most need
- Invest in attracting residents to rural areas
- Consider a bike user fee or tax to fund improved infrastructure

Comment Cards

Below is the feedback, not raised during the group discussion, from the 11 comment cards submitted by meeting attendees.

Seismic

Invest in seismic resiliency

- Hwy 97 need to be able to carry a larger volume of freight and emergency equipment post seismic event
- The influx of population after a seismic event will put strains on the region
 - Investments in infrastructure and mobility are necessary to support this population
 - Improve reliable roads, bridges and local mobility capacity

Make Oregon a Transportation “Hub”

- Clean Air Vehicles (CAVs) offer an opportunity to put Oregon ahead of the curve

K-12

Increase the flexibility of K-12 student transportation services across the state

- Consider removing barriers to yellow bus usage so as to allow for public transportation

Facilitate Jurisdictional Transfers

- Ensure that roads that are transferred are in condition and can be maintained at a reasonable cost