

Beltline Highway Facility Plan Open House #1 Summary

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Overview

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) held two public open houses from 5-7 p.m. on Monday, August 4 and Wednesday August 6, 2008. The first open house was held at the Irving Grange and the second open house was held at Eugene Christian Fellowship. All open house materials and a comment form were also available on the ODOT web site. The comment form was available through August 18, 2008.

The purpose of these open houses was to collect information on problems along the Beltline Highway corridor between Coburg Road and River Road. The project team shared information about the project schedule, the study area, existing traffic conditions, general problems, and environmental and land use constraints.

The open houses were advertised through newspaper ads and a postcard mailing to residents surrounding the corridor. The project also received coverage by three local news stations and the Register-Guard newspaper. Sixty-two people signed in on August 4, and 19 people signed in on August 6. In addition, several people completed an online survey or provided comments via email.

Both meetings, conducted in the same format, were designed as drop-in open houses where members of the public had the opportunity to discuss the project with staff members, review displays, complete a comment form, and comment on problems related to specific interchanges. The following displays were provided:

- Project background boards including the study area, project phases, project schedule, current traffic conditions, and facility plan purpose;
- Four study area intersection maps and a short description of problems previously identified; and
- Environmental and land use constraint maps, including wetlands, slopes, historic sites, earthquake hazards, flooding, and zoning.



Figure 1. Staff captured comments on displays

The comments on the problems on the highway generally reflected those identified by the Project Management Team, Steering Committee and by stakeholders that were interviewed at the beginning of the project. The discussion with the community at the open houses provided important insight about the relative importance of different problems and ideas about the causes of problems. In some cases, open house participants identified new problems that will be reflected in a revised problem statement.

Comments on Displays

Participants at each open house had a chance to write their concerns about general highway concerns and the four interchanges along Beltline Highway: Coburg Road, River Avenue and Division Avenue, Delta Highway, and River Road. Large blank pieces of paper, along with markers, were made available to allow people to comment. The comments from both open houses are included in the summary.

General Comments



Figure 2. Comments on problems in area

Many people indicated that another Willamette River crossing was needed because the current bridge is a congested bottleneck and it does not have facilities for all modes including bikes and vehicles that cannot travel at freeway speeds (e.g. mopeds and electric cars). Many people also cited the limited river crossings in the area.

Many people felt that the safety issues were the most important issues including emergency access to the new RiverBend Hospital. Other safety concerns include the short ramp lengths in many areas and the merging of truck traffic onto the

highway.

Congestion was another issue mentioned multiple times; local traffic is shunted onto the highway because of a lack of alternate routes and is faster than City streets to get downtown. Homes along the highway are impacted by noise that has increased as the roadway has become more congested.

River Road Interchange

Many comments about the River Road interchange focused on pedestrian and bicycle safety problems. Participants suggested improvements such as pedestrian refuges and walkways, and added street trees to allow all users to have a pleasant experience.

The interchange was also cited as a congested area where drivers often have to wait through multiple signal cycles at Silver Lane/River Avenue and the ramp terminals at peak times. Attendees mentioned that the merge from River Road east on Beltline is difficult, and entrances and exits to shopping areas are dangerous.

River Avenue/Division Avenue Interchange

The River Avenue/Division Avenue interchange, close to Delta Sand and Gravel, is used frequently by large trucks. Many attendees felt that the interchange ramps are not long enough to allow trucks enough time to merge, congesting the interchange.

Many participants also cited problems with cars merging at this interchange, noting that people do not yield properly at this location. Finally, some participants noted that this interchange is too close to the Delta Highway and River Road interchanges, providing too little space to merge. The bridge was consistently cited as too narrow, and many people suggested widening, adding additional bridges, and improving the bridge to current seismic standards.

Traffic at this intersection also was cited as a problem; much traffic cuts through the neighborhood. There were suggestions to close the Division Avenue/River Avenue interchange (permanently and at peak hours), as well as banning RVs and motor homes from using it, and installing ramp meters.

Delta Highway Interchange

Attendees highlighted the problem with the “cloverleaf” style interchange at Delta Highway, noting that the ramp is too short for successful merging and the loop is too tight to gain speed.

Again, additional bridges over the Willamette River were suggested, and many attendees believed that the

problems at this interchange stemmed from the bridge bottleneck. Most approaches are congested, and the ramps were not long or wide enough to accommodate traffic. Currently, there are temporary signals at the top of the overpass, which are confusing, and many drivers do not obey the merge or yield signs when exiting and entering the highway.



Figure 3. Staff discussed concerns with participants

Coburg Road Interchange

This interchange is congested, and the comments reflected this issue with suggestions for additional lanes at the interchange, an arterial bridge, and the need to extend right turn pockets north of Beltline on Coburg. Another problem area is the eastbound exit to Coburg, which backs up the signal at the ramp terminal for northbound traffic.

Comment Summary

In addition to the comments captured on the blank sheets of paper and flip charts, attendees were invited to complete a written comment form. Thirty-one forms were completed at the meetings and five were completed online. Two-thirds of those who filled out the comment form had heard about the open house through the newspaper and the rest had learned about the meeting from television.

Environment

Some people commented that there have been concepts to “fix” interchanges in this area over and over again and expressed frustration that it has taken so long to make anything happen. Several people suggested that construction should start as soon as possible, and planning was just delaying any future benefits.

One person commented that growth should be slowed and restricted in the areas, and other attendees suggested that the environmental constraints were important to consider. One person suggested that riparian forests were not indicated on the wetlands map, specifically a forest on the west bank of the Willamette just south of Beltline Bridge, and another was concerned that flood plains were arbitrarily redrawn to allow more development and cited a need to conserve Delta Ponds as important habitat. Another attendee suggested that there were actually very few environmental constraints, and were limited to the river proper, and a widened and expanded bridge would not harm sensitive habitats.

One attendee felt strongly about peak oil and the future applicability of road improvements. He felt that building roads was not necessary given the future shortage of oil, and that investment in other modes and city structures was a better use of public funds.

Traffic

Attendees were then asked to add information to the traffic data on display.

A couple of respondents were frustrated with money being spent on bike lanes when there were large traffic problems along the corridor. One person specifically mentioned charging bikes an annual fee to use Eugene facilities, and then using the money for street improvements.

Many attendees agreed that traffic was a big problem, primarily in the Delta/Beltline and the River Road areas.

Again, a new bridge alignment along Wilkes was suggested by a few people, along with a suggestion to extend the Delta Highway north. The participants said this would relieve some of the traffic pressure for people traveling east-west.

Many of the comments dealt with adding more lanes to Beltline and other parallel routes to reduce pressure on the corridor. One respondent believed that adding capacity and planning for future traffic needs would greatly improve the safety issues.

One attendee expressed concern that the traffic analysis repeated work conducted as part of the McKenzie-Willamette Hospital traffic impact study and that traffic analysis conducted for the facility plan should be consistent with previous work submitted for the development application.

Three Biggest Problems

Respondents were asked to name the three biggest problems on Beltline Highway. The most frequently mentioned problems included:

- Congestion at the Delta/Beltline interchange.
- Congestion and capacity issues on the highway.

- Bottleneck at the bridge that will require a new or expanded bridge in the area because it is currently the only close way to cross the river.

Problems related to River Road, Delta Highway and River Avenue/Division Avenue interchanges were also mentioned as one of the three biggest problems on the highway. Coburg Road was not mentioned in this section. These comments are detailed below.

- River Road:
 - Lack of capacity at the entrance to the Beltline Highway eastbound from River Road
 - Too little queuing space on the River Road off-ramp
- Delta Highway:
 - Traffic queues on the Delta Highway as cars try to enter the Beltline Highway westbound
 - Too little queuing space on the River Road off-ramp
- Division Avenue/River Avenue:
 - Design does not work
 - Ramps are located too close the bridge

General Comments

A few people mentioned that they enjoyed the open house. There were two questions regarding the status of the blue heron habitat near Wilkes Road and the effect of a recent accident on August 1st that affected the bridge. One participant suggested expanding the study area to include the Highway 99 interchange.

Some respondents suggested solutions to the problems they identified. These included:

- Temporary fixes such as closing the River Avenue on and off ramps and the Division Avenue off ramp, painting traffic control stripes, installing cameras and traffic boards to regulate traffic, increase safety and reduce crashes
- Limit large trucks at certain times of the day, and prohibiting them from using certain on and off ramps because of the congestion they cause

In addition, many participants mentioned previous planning efforts and additional river crossing concepts, and wondered why those had not been carried forward. Some participants specifically mentioned the Wilkes Drive and Roosevelt/Chambers to Valley River concepts as an additional bridge to relieve pressure on the existing facility.