

Public input sought on Hwy. 126 corridor

Feedback will help City and County prioritize improvements along the stretch of highway



JASON CHANEY/CENTRAL OREGONIAN

The Tom McCall/Hwy 126 intersection (shown here) is one of the top priorities identified by local government thus far.

Jason Chaney

Next week, local residents will have their first opportunity to propose improvements and upgrades they would like to see along Hwy 126.

The City of Prineville, Crook County, and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) are currently working on a new corridor facility plan that will address needs and concerns along the highway from the Crook/Deschutes County border to the west “Y” in Prineville.

Portions of this corridor have already come under scrutiny in the past. Four years ago, plans emerged for a roundabout at the “Y” and another roundabout at the Tom McCall/Hwy 126 intersection.

So far, neither option has a firm footing in the new corridor plan. Multiple committees comprised of city and county officials and planning commissioners are meeting several times throughout 2011 to establish priorities and projects for the plan.

During the same time period, Kittelson and Associates, a consultant firm, will host public meetings seeking input from local residents. The first meeting will be held in early February with two others scheduled in April and August.

“The idea is to try to get the public more involved,” said City of Prineville Senior Planner Scott Edelman. “It’s to get initial thoughts from the public on what types of improvements would be best. It’s kind of a brainstorming session.”

During the meetings, people can look at the highway corridor and suggest improvements with computer software enabling them to see the impact.

“Someone will say, ‘We need a turn lane here,’” Edelman explained, “and they’ll be able, with their software, to put a turn lane on and they’ll see what it does to traffic, what types of right-of-way it takes up. It’s going to be a fairly interactive thing.”

The primary focuses of the plan include the Powell Butte Highway/Hwy 126, and Tom McCall Road/Hwy 126 intersections, as well as the west “Y.” Of those, the Tom McCall intersection will receive the most attention.

“Tom McCall is the priority in this project because of industrial development impact,” Edelman said. “That intersection could really limit development unless interim solutions are found.”

Under the current transportation systems plan (TSP), a new business that generates enough jobs to significantly increase traffic and stress the intersection would be required to pay for an approximately \$20 million grade separated interchange. Edelman explained that the TSP contains no provisions for step-by-step intersection improvements, such as a turning lane or roundabout, so any developer who pushes the traffic load too high has only one, expensive option. With the corridor plan, they hope to add some incremental alternatives.

“Instead of \$20 million, it would be a couple-hundred-thousand (dollars), which is still a lot, but it’s doable for a business coming in,” Edelman said.

Down the road, the work spent determining and prioritizing projects for the corridor plan is crucial for securing funding.

“Before we can get any kind of state funding whatsoever, we have to get these things (individual projects) designed,” Edelman said. “This is the first step to getting those designed.” In addition, a concrete picture of the corridor plan will help the City and County determine how much money they need to collect and help establish a timeline for corridor improvements.

In the end, the public is asked to contribute suggestions that may have been overlooked so far. While the focus of the plan thus far has involved three main areas, people are welcomed to request changes on any portion of the highway.

“Anything is on the table,” Edelman said.

Local residents interested in voicing their ideas for the Hwy 126 corridor are invited to attend a public meeting at the Prineville City Council Chambers at City Hall, Feb. 2, from 7 to 9 p.m.

A second meeting is scheduled for April 12 and a third on Aug. 23.

For more information call City of Prineville at 541-447-5627.