



Task Force /Oversight Team Briefing

ATTENDEES: Task Force: Warren Bednarz/Downtown Business, Russ Beaton/Land Use, Mark Becktel/City of Salem Public Works; Betsy Belshaw/Parks; Tom Clark/West Salem businesses, Bob Cortright/DLCD, Scott Erickson/West Salem residents, Leon Fischer/Freight, Glenn Gross/City of Salem Community Development, Glen Hadley/Salem-Keizer Transit District, Fred Harris/North Salem Business Association, Mike Jaffe/SKATS, Austin McGuigan/Polk County Community Development Director, Cindy Schmitt/Marion County Public Works, Doug Parrow/BTA, Tim Potter/ODOT, Lorraine Pullman/Grant Neighborhood, Moya McKeon/Highland Neighborhood; Megan/Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Oversight Team: Sam Brentano/Marion County, Lloyd Chapman/Salem-Keizer Transit District, Richard Walsh/City of Keizer, Cathy Clark/City of Keizer, Eric Havig/ODOT, Tom Richey/Polk County

UNABLE TO ATTEND: Task Force: Darlene Strozut/Highland Neighborhood, Sam Litke/City of Keizer, Mike Karnosh/Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Ismael Perez/Hispanic interest;

Oversight Team: Dan Clem/City of Salem, Emily Laughton/FHWA

STAFF PARTICIPANTS: Dan Fricke/ODOT, Julie Warncke/City of Salem, Rod Thompson/ODOT, Tim Burkhardt/CH2M HILL, Dave Simmons/CH2M HILL, Aaron Geisler/WH Pacific, Ed Chamberland, WH Pacific; Calvin Lairwood, WH Pacific; Randy Johnson, PTV Associates

GUESTS: Senator Peter Courtney; Dan Worth; Kerry Rucker (Highland Neighborhood Association Chair); Pam Vorachek (Gilbert House); John Gear; Gary Obery; Linda Peterson (Statesman Journal)

DATE: July 23, 2008, Salem Public Library, Salem, Oregon

Welcome and Agenda Review

Tim Burkhardt welcomed the group. He then reviewed the agenda which focused on the introduction of a refined version of Alternative 2 (Widen Existing Bridges) and associated discussion.

Public Comment

Tim invited the public audience to introduce themselves and any organizational affiliation and then address the group if they had comments. A number of members of the public were

present and introduced themselves. Several indicated they had comments to share at the end of the meeting.

Project updates

Tim provided the following updates on activities since the previous Task Force meeting in May:

- The EIS is underway - staff are preparing “affected environment” reports which describe the existing conditions in the project area in a number of disciplines
- Alternative Refinements - In addition to Alternative 2 (subject of tonight’s meeting), there are minor refinements to several other alternatives as they are prepared for study in the EIS. Some of these are shown on the wall and people can look at them during the break or at the end of the meeting.
- TSM/TDM Options: As discussed at the May meeting, a subcommittee has been formed and will meet for the first time on July 24.

Proposed New Alternative 2: Presentation and Discussion

Tim introduced Aaron Geisler of WH Pacific indicating that he was a familiar face to the group as a result of his previous participation on the Task Force while with Polk County Public Works.

Aaron presented the New Alternative 2, which was introduced to the Task Force and Oversight Team via email prior to the meeting. As explained in the memo provided in the email, the design team developed a new version of Alternative 2 in response to concerns among the design team staff about practicality and constructability of the alternative as currently proposed. The Project Management Team has recommended that the new alternative replace the existing Alternative 2.

Aaron described the primary concerns with the current Alternative 2. Some of these concerns have become more apparent as design work has continued. The issues include:

- The two lane off-ramp from the Center St. Bridge to northbound Front Avenue is not geometrically feasible, requiring that a single lane exit be maintained.
- Constructing the new ramps on the west side of the river to the Center and Marion St. Bridges would require significant disruptions for a long period of time.
- Widening the existing bridges would require new bridge piers be constructed for both bridges, essentially constructing a two new bridges alongside the existing bridges.
- Widening Wallace Road from two to three travel lanes in each direction plus the addition of turn lanes would create significant impacts along Wallace Road.
- Widening Wallace Road and the existing bridges improves a portion of the existing transportation corridor, providing more capacity at these locations, but could cause problems beyond the study area due to “downstream” effects of increasing the capacity of only a portion of the existing corridor.

Aaron then walked through the key features of the new alternative, which included:

- A better connection between Highway 22 and points north and east of the existing bridges without sending traffic through the downtown core.
- Wallace Road would remain a 5-lane facility instead of being widened to a 7-lane facility due to routing of more traffic along Marine Drive.
- Traffic operations at the Commercial Street and Marion Street intersection will be greatly improved by removing the signal and allowing traffic to exit the downtown streets more efficiently. (This is accomplished by closing southbound Commercial Street at Marion Street.)
- Traffic operations on most of the local street system will be better than with the “Widen Existing Bridges” concept.
- Construction staging will be greatly improved by not having to close lanes on Wallace Road or the existing bridges to widen these facilities.
- It would open up the Riverfront Park area to better pedestrian access to the downtown core.

There was a lengthy discussion and a number of questions from Task Force and Oversight Team members about the new alternative. While many felt the new alternative was a good addition, there were concerns about dropping the existing version without additional information and answers to outstanding questions. Issues of concern included procedural concerns with making such a change without more time for review or with greater public participation; the cost of the new alternative in relation to the existing one; the physical footprint of the new alternative in relation to the existing one (it appears much greater on the drawing, but is it really?); and clarification of whether and how the existing Alternative 2 is “fatally flawed.”

Toward the end of the meeting, Tim asked the Task Force and Oversight Team members to indicate whether they were ready to drop the existing Alternative 2 in favor of the new Alternative 2 for study in the EIS by indicating thumbs up (yes), thumbs down (no), or thumbs sideways (have questions or need more information).

There were 12 thumbs up, 6 to the side, and 3 down. (Richard Walsh and Cathy Clark from Keizer had to leave before this exercise but, based on their comments during the meeting would have been expected to be an additional thumbs up.)

Tim then asked the “sideways” responses to indicate their questions and concerns.

- Glen Hadley - What about Alternative 4B (White + Existing Bridges) – if you change the Existing Bridges alternative, how does 4B change? He was also concerned about potential increased traffic and roadway widening on Broadway and whether that could adversely impact the High Priority Transit Corridor plans for that corridor.
- Fred Harris – Also wanted to know what the elimination of the existing Alternative 2 would do to White (Alternative 4B).
- Mona – Agreed with Fred. Also concerned about the short time frame for review – need more time to make a decision.

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- Warren Bednars – Concerned about Front Street NB and SB onto the Marion Street Bridge – the traffic concerns on this street are not given enough weight. Also would like to see the existing Alternative 2 stay – the new alternative would have a number of impacts on downtown – politically if not physically – and just removing the existing alternative would be problematic.
 - Lorraine – Concerned that the new alternative would put too much traffic in the neighborhood to the north. Also wants cost estimate before making a decision.
 - Russ Beaton – He does not clearly understand what we are giving up if we eliminate the existing Alternative 2. Also skeptical that the cost of the new alternative 2 would really be similar to the existing one – the new one looks much more extensive.

Tim then asked the “No’s” for their comments:

- Doug Parrow- Concerns about shifting away from making the existing bridges work better. Too much emphasis on mobility standards – these are not reasonable downtown.
- Bob Cortright – The proposal warrants more time for consideration. He favors putting both options in the EIS.
- Lloyd Chapman – The new alternative 2 seems like a reasonable alternative – but if we remove the existing Alternative 2 it seems like we have replaced the Low Build with something much bigger. Also asked whether we have done enough to try to make a direct connection between the existing Alternative 2 and Marine Drive.

Tim thanked the group for their input and time and summarized the outstanding issues as follows:

- Some members need more time to make a decision
- Need to clarify cost of refined version of Alternative
- Need to clarify what happens to Alternative 4B (White + Existing Bridges) if the current alternative 2 is removed
- There were a number of Task Force/Oversight Team members interested in including both the existing and refined versions of Alternative 2 in the EIS
- Traffic flows – are traffic flows really different between the two alternatives and if so, how and where?
- On a related note, need to improve the graphics of each alternative so that a direct comparison of “footprint” – where there are expanded roadways in particular – is more apparent
- Clarify whether the current Alternative 2 is really “fatally flawed”

Public Comments

A number of the public in attendance addressed the group with concerns that included potential impacts on the Gilbert House, concerns about advertising the meeting to the public with advance notice, and how the project is or is not addressing current and future oil prices.

Next Task Force Meetings

Tim suggested an additional meeting to discuss this issue within about a month. One possible date is August 20; however several staff will be gone on that day. The actual day will be clarified with the group via email.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at about 8:00 p.m.