Corridor Forum Meeting #1 – Summary

Tuesday, September 25, 2012
3:00 – 6:00 p.m.
Salem Fairgrounds, Hart of the Garden Room
2330 17th Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97301

Participants Present – Leadership Council members and their alternates noted (*)
Anna Peterson*, City of Salem
Bob Krebs, AORTA
Bruce Agnew, Cascadia Center
Brock Nelson, Union Pacific Railroad
Dave Rosenfeld, OSPIRG
Donna Jordan, City of Lake Oswego
Gary Gillespie*, Lane Transit District
Harry Dalgaard, Travel Oregon
Cam Gilmour, Clackamas County
John Lewis, City of Oregon City
John Russell*, Leadership Council Co-Chair
Judy Cleeton, City of Halsey
Kathy Figley, City of Woodburn and Mid-Willamette Valley Area Commission on Transportation (ACT)
Katja Dillman*, City of Portland
Kitty Piercy*, City of Eugene, Lane County Area Commission on Transportation (ACT), and Leadership Council Co-Chair
Kevin Watson, City of Junction City
Linda Modrell, Benton County
Matt Crall*, Department of Land Conservation and Development
Monique Beikman, City of Tualatin
Nancy Kraushaar, City of Wilsonville
Nate Brown, City of Keizer
Paul Thompson, Lane Council of Governments
Randy Carson, City of Canby
Sharon Konopa*, City of Albany
Steve Dickey, Salem-Keizer Transit
Steve Szigethy, Washington County
Teri Bankhead*, City of Milwaukie
Tom Boyatt*, City of Springfield

Additional Attendees
Alice Rouyer, City of Tualatin
Ben Bryant, City of Tualatin
Bill Holmstrom, Department of Land Conservation and Development
Georgia Edwards, City of Tangent
Julie Warncke, City of Salem
Marjean Cline, City of Halsey
Mark Ottenad, City of Wilsonville
Melissa Bowers, City of Junction City
Paul Smith, City of Portland
Ron Kilcoyne, Lane Transit District
Seaton McLennan, City of Tangent

Staff and Project Team
Jim Cox, Oregon Department of Transportation
Jyll Smith, ODOT
Stacy Snider, ODOT
Michael Holthoff, ODOT
Jonathan Bartsch, CDR
Jeanne Lawson, JLA Public Involvement
Bob Melbo, ODOT
John Schnaderbeck, ODOT
Stacy Thomas, JLA Public Involvement
Sylvia Ciborowski, JLA Public Involvement
Jessica Pickul, JLA Public Involvement
Scott Richman, David Evans & Associates
Theresa Carr, CH2MHill
Welcome, Team Introductions and Agenda Review

The Corridor Forum meeting was chaired by the Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council Co-Chairs, John Russell and Mayor Kitty Piercy. Seven additional Leadership Council members participated at the meeting. John Russell and Kitty Piercy kicked off the meeting and welcomed participants and guests. Russell explained why this project is happening now – discussing the projected growth in the Valley, and the planning opportunity afforded by the federal funding. He also explained the role of the Corridor Forum, and the importance of bringing leaders from all the communities in the corridor to the table to deliberate together. The role of the forum is two-fold – 1) to inform the Leadership Council’s discussions and decisions and 2) to take back project information and updates on the process to their constituents in order to keep information flowing and get people engaged.

Jeanne Lawson, the Corridor Forum facilitator, introduced the purpose of the meeting: to introduce and get feedback on the Oregon Passenger Rail Project Draft Purpose and Need statement; to identify issues and seek additional input to help form the project goals and objectives and evaluation criteria; and to seek input on potential rail alignment alternatives.

Project Introduction

Jim Cox, Oregon Department of Transportation project manager, discussed the project purpose and explained that the project focus is on intercity high-speed passenger rail. Scott Richman, deputy consultant project manager, provided a brief project overview including the study area, schedule and key elements in the project’s draft Purpose and Need statement.

Decision Making and Public Involvement

The project team reviewed the project’s decision making structure and the roles of ODOT, Federal Railroad Administration and the Leadership Council. They also shared other input opportunities for technical experts, project area communities, railroad industry, and the public at large.

The project team provided an overview of the public input received during the recent open houses. The project team heard that frequency, convenience and reliability of service are very important to the public. Many members of the public expressed that a key reason why more people do not ride the train is because current service is not convenient. People want this study to be complete as soon as possible. There were many comments regarding the desire for commuter rail in the Willamette Valley – with more stops, serving more communities.
Project Goals and Objectives Workshop

The intention of the project Goals and Objectives workshop was to help identify the primary issues and values that should shape the development of the project's Goals and Objectives. Project team members facilitated small group discussions, and participants reported back key themes to the larger group.

The question each group was to focus on was:

*Based on what you’ve heard about the draft Purpose and Need and the public comments, what values/issues stand out to you as most important as we begin to develop our project’s Goals and Objectives?*

Report Back

Group 1 consisted of representatives from the City of Oregon City, City of Junction City, Benton County, Oregon Business Council, and Union Pacific Railroad. The main themes from their conversation included:

- Local transportation systems should be expanded, and passenger rail must integrate with these improved systems.
- Passenger rail improvements must be sensitive to community impacts.
- The project must keep freight railroad viable.
- Passenger rail service should be competitive with the automobile for trip/travel times.
- There is a need for improved regional connectivity.

Group 2 consisted of representatives from the City of Tualatin, City of Portland, City of Springfield, Washington County, Department of Land Conservation and Development, and Travel Oregon. The main themes from their conversation included:

- Passenger rail must serve key destinations.
- The project should consider the potential for development around each station location.
- Local transportation infrastructure is important.
- Passenger rail service should connect city centers.

Group 3 consisted of representatives from the City of Canby, City of Tangent, Clackamas County, OSPIRG, and the Lane Council of Governments. The main themes from their conversation included:

- Improvements must be cost effective.
- The project should minimize impacts to communities.
- Concern that higher speed rail would lead to safety problems at railroad crossings.
- Reliability and convenience are the most important objectives.
- Passenger rail should connect with local and regional transit and transportation services.

Group 4 consisted of representatives from the City of Albany, City of Lake Oswego, City of Halsey, and City of Milwaukie. The main themes from their conversation included:

- The project must determine passenger rail priorities. Faster speeds will result in fewer stops, which may negatively impact commuters. However, if higher speed is the goal, then stops will need to be eliminated.
- Concern that more frequent passenger rail service will create more automobile traffic in city centers through which rail service travels.
- Concern about community impacts, especially in Lake Oswego and Milwaukie.
- Rail/transit coordination is needed.
- The goals of the project should be convenience and reliability.

Group 5 consisted of representatives from the City of Wilsonville, City of Eugene/Lane County ACT, Salem-Keizer Transit District, and AORTA. The main themes from their conversation included:

- The project should protect, preserve and enhance capacity on the existing passenger rail line.
- The project must recognize the needs and interests of railroads and existing limitations and obstacles.
- New infrastructure is needed to enhance passenger rail.
- Passenger rail should integrate with the existing transit/transportation system.
- Passenger rail service should provide connections that are convenient in terms of time, reliability, and schedule.
- See infrastructure investment as a positive and embrace it.

Group 6 consisted of representatives from the City of Salem, City of Keizer, Lane Transit District, and Cascadia Center. The main themes from their conversation included:

- The project should enhance passenger rail service while protecting freight rail.
- Concern about community impacts.
- Frequency and reliability should be the goals of this project.
- The project should determine an alignment sooner rather than later.
- Passenger rail should be easy to use and provide connectivity.
- This project should lead to economic development, and the cost of rail improvements must be justified.

Project staff wrapped up the workshop by presenting a Wordle created using the key terms that were reported back from the table discussions. While “frequency, convenience and reliability” were key themes that emerged during the public open houses, the group agreed that connectivity should also be considered a key theme based on what was heard at the work shop.
Alternatives Alignment Workshop

The purpose of the Alternatives Alignment workshop was to explore alternative route ideas and identify specific geographic issues to consider when forming route alternatives. Participants were grouped into five different geographic areas, and discussed alignment alternatives in issues in these areas. At the end of the workshop, participants reported out main themes. The five geographic based groups included:

- Portland metro area
- Salem-Keizer area
- Albany/Linn County area
- Eugene/Springfield area
- Entire corridor (for participants with statewide interests)
Report Back

**Portland Metro Area**

This group consisted of representatives from the City of Portland, City of Oregon City, City of Woodburn, City of Lake Oswego City of Canby, City of Wilsonville, City of Milwaukie, Clackamas County, and Washington County. The main themes from their conversation included:

- In Canby, there is not enough room for double-tracking and there are existing safety issues throughout town.
- In Lake Oswego, increasing the number of trains will negatively impact automobile traffic.
- There are major constraints between Canby and Oregon City.
- Oregon City has many already-congested areas, and existing rail needs improvement.
- A lot of automobile traffic and freight already uses the I-5 corridor, leading to congestion. Look at the possibility of moving freight rail traffic west, between Tualatin and Sherwood.
- Passenger rail should continue to serve downtown Portland. It would not be sufficient to have rail bypass downtown and go to the PDX airport.
- Extend Westside Express Service (WES) commuter rail service to Salem.
- In Milwaukie, the Union Pacific line many constraints and will cause major impacts to the community.

**Salem and Woodburn Area**

This group consisted of representatives from the City of Wilsonville, City of Woodburn, City of Salem, City of Keizer, Salem-Keizer Transit, Willamette Valley ACT & COG, and AORTA. The main themes from their conversation included:

- Put a new passenger rail station in Woodburn.
- Do incremental improvements to existing line such as double tracking.
- Eliminate at grade crossings throughout the cities of Salem and Woodburn.
- The Oregon Electric line in Salem has water table issues, crossing the historic district and small creeks.
- Salem station is not accessible to transit.
- Develop a stop in Corvallis off the mainline.
- Concern that passenger rail service may negatively impact recently completed pedestrian improvements in Salem, and disrupt the newly instituted quiet zone.
- Passenger rail service should accommodate commuters.

**Albany/Linn County Area**

This group consisted of representatives from the City of Halsey, City of Albany, City of Tangent, and Benton County. The main themes from their conversation included:

- The long-term vision should be to have passenger rail and freight rail on separate lines.
- There is a need for redundancy in service. This should be a passenger rail “system,” not just one line.
• The current passenger alignment runs through the middle of some towns, such as Tangent, Halsey, and Harrisburg, dividing the communities.
• Passenger rail service should connect universities.
• Use Oregon Electric line when possible, but not in Albany, Salem or Junction City where the line runs down city streets in downtowns.
• Rail tracks between Albany and Corvallis are in good shape and could be used to provide passenger rail service to Corvallis.

**Eugene/Springfield Area**

This group consisted of representatives from the City of Eugene, City of Springfield, City of Junction City, Lane Transit District, and OSPIRG. The main themes from their conversation included:

• Passenger rail service should be extended south of Eugene to Cottage Grove.
• A new station should be put in Springfield.
• The Eugene community wants to slow trains down in town.
• The Oregon Electric alignment would have big impact on Junction City.
• Use a mix of Union Pacific and Oregon Electric lines.
• Concern about noise, speed, safety and traffic issues at railroad crossings.

**Entire Corridor**

This group consisted of representatives from Travel Oregon, Cascadia Center, OSPIRG, and DLCD. The main themes from their conversation included:

• This project could use tunnels and alternative technology in addition to traditional ways of doing rail. There should be an awareness and consideration of these alternatives.
• The project should use a hybrid approach to mix and match using combination of existing and new alignments.
• There should be a new, dedicated passenger rail line.
• Consider grade separation where feasible, and weigh the cost to bypass versus the cost to install grade separate facilities.
• Consider the benefits of stopping at many local stations versus improved travel times and express runs.

**Closing Discussion**

Brock Nelson, Union Pacific Railroad, shared Union Pacific’s perspective related to the issues raised and the overall project. He discussed the overall safety problem that 90-110 mph passenger trains present for freight rail and that mixing slow freight trains (40-50 mph) with fast passenger rail is a concern. In Union Pacific’s perspective, 79 mph is high speed. After safety, their next priority is to their shippers; faster passenger trains will require freight trains to pull off more often reducing capacity. Nelson reminded the group that currently a public system is running on their private investment, and they have put a lot of money into maintenance and improvement to their tracks.
What's Next

At the next Corridor Forum meeting, likely early spring 2013, participants will review and provide input on the draft Goals and Objectives, review the draft evaluation criteria, the refined Purpose and Need, and the results of the initial screening of the alignment alternatives.