

Background Report (Revised)

Comprehensive Plan Update

June 8, 2015

To: Community Advisory Committee
Cc: Project Team
From: Rich Faith, Senior Land Use Planner
Re: Comprehensive Plan Policy Issues List – Transportation and Public Facilities

OVERVIEW

This report presents a brief summary of preliminary policy issues that have been identified for further discussion by the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and subcommittees. The issues are related to policies addressing transportation and public facilities. Issues are described briefly in this report in order to provide background and context for the CAC and to allow committee members to begin reviewing and prioritizing them for future discussions, particularly in the Transportation and Public Facilities subcommittee.

The basis for identifying these issues included:

- Has been identified as an issue of concern by community members expressed in comments from the November open houses
- Represents a frequent or long-standing area of concern for County staff and/or decision makers.
- Has been identified as a policy gap during an initial review of the existing Comprehensive Framework Plan and Rural Area Plans.

ISSUE SUMMARY

TRANSPORTATION

Bicycle Infrastructure. Bicycle use has become increasingly popular in the Portland Metropolitan Region as a desirable commuter alternative to the passenger vehicle as well as a recreational activity. Within our heavily populated urban areas, significant investment is being made to improve the transportation system for the safety of bicycles now sharing the roads with vehicles. For the more sparsely populated rural areas, much less investment has been made in improving the road system to accommodate bicycles and to reduce road sharing conflicts with vehicles. Promotion of bike touring as an economic engine will likely draw an even greater number of bicyclists in the future to our rural roadways and bike paths.

Questions: Given the current conditions of the County's rural road system and the potential increase in bicycle recreation, how can Multnomah County best address increased bicycle/vehicle conflicts? How should the County's rural roads be improved to safely accommodate vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian traffic and to reduce conflicts between them?

Are there particular designs the County can adopt for temporary bike/pedestrian infrastructure (assuming larger capital projects may still be 10-20 years in the future).

Improve Traffic Flow on Westside Roads. Many of the transportation related comments from the Westside open house held last November talked about the need to improve traffic flow on roads in the West Hills. In addition to traffic slowdowns that come from more bicyclists on the road, traffic flow is also hampered by other factors, most notable of which is the increased number of vehicles that now use these roads – far more than the roads were designed to handle. Higher traffic volumes can be attributed to residential development in the West Hills and in surrounding areas that interface with it causing more traffic between where people live and where they work and shop. The County has begun to address some of these issues through planning for safety improvements to Cornelius Pass Road and other improvements identified in Rural Area Plan transportation system plans.

Questions: What are some specific Westside road system improvements or design alternatives that would improve traffic flow? What are the highest priority projects for improving traffic flow on West side roads? Are County roads in the West Hills appropriately classified on the Functional Road Classification Maps? Should the County consider singling out a particular road where bike improvements would be the highest priority?

Address Increasing Traffic and Safety Issues Without Widening/Building More Roads. Although rural County residents recognize the need for improving the local road system, they also cherish the rural character of the areas they live in and prefer not to have more roads built or existing roads widened to a significant degree in order to accommodate increased traffic and to provide greater travel safety. Many of the comments from the November open house point out the traffic problems caused by growing population and commute patterns, but seek solutions that will not result in more road construction. Clearly, residents value the trees and the pastoral countryside characteristic of Multnomah County's rural areas and do not want to see the landscape diminished by construction of new and expanded roads, particularly in areas of steep slopes where large retaining walls would be necessary. Rural residents will see even greater demands placed on the local road system as nearby urban lands are developed. Possible solutions for addressing increasing traffic and safety concerns might include public transit, strategically located traffic signals, dedicated bike paths, and sidewalks or wider shoulders in appropriate places.

Questions: Which areas of the county not currently served by public transit ought to be? How do we address increased traffic (e.g. commuters and freight) on County roads? Should Multnomah County consider a policy to encourage minor, low-cost safety improvements when performing basic maintenance such as lane striping or overlays?

Better Road Maintenance. With increased use of the County's rural roads comes the need for more road maintenance. Rural residents have cited better road maintenance as a major concern. The key to sustaining an effective, ongoing maintenance program is funding. State and local gas tax money is the customary source of funding used for local road maintenance. The state gas tax has not been adjusted to keep pace with the growing need, the increasing cost of road maintenance and diminishing revenues associated with improved fuel efficiency. The County has a local gas tax which similarly has not been adjusted to reflect cost increases.

Question: Should the County consider adopting an increase to its current local gas tax or adopting other funding sources such as user fees dedicated to road maintenance?

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Sewage Disposal Requirements for Rural Developments. Most rural development relies on its own private septic system for sewage disposal. Current county policy establishes that in order to approve a proposed development a finding must be made that it will not exceed the carrying capacity of the site for sewage disposal. Because of high water tables and other poor site conditions, some developments have been unable to obtain septic permits (i.e., they exceed the carrying capacity of the site) and therefore have needed to install sewage holding tanks as an alternative.

Questions: Should the current policy be changed to recognize sewage holding tanks as a valid sewage disposal alternative to septic systems?

A public rest stop or park in Springdale or Corbett. Historic Columbia River Highway is heavily used by bicyclists traveling into the Columbia River Gorge. Some property owners along this popular route believe that a public rest stop or park should be constructed in Springdale, Corbett or another appropriate location for the benefit of bicyclists. The facility could also serve the needs of motorists as well. A park could provide a community gathering spot and recreational opportunities for East County residents.

Questions: Should the County explore development of a public rest stop, park or similar facility along Historic Columbia River Highway? Who should the County partner with in this effort, given that it does not develop parks?

PRIORITIES

CAC members were asked to prioritize the six issues discussed in this memorandum at their May 27, 2015 meeting by placing dots next to the issues that were of highest priority to them. Each CAC member was given two blue dots for voting on transportation related issues and one red dot for voting on public facility related issues. The result of the voting exercise was as follows.

Address traffic/safety issues without building/widening roads - 13
Sewage disposal for rural developments - 8
Bicycle Infrastructure – 6
Better road maintenance - 5
Improve traffic flow on west side roads - 4
Rest stop/park in Springdale or Corbett - 4

The above results will help the project team, CAC and subcommittee prioritize their time and energy as they review and discuss each issue and associated potential amendments to County policies.