

Summary Minutes
Rogue Valley MPO Public Advisory Council
May 20, 2014



The following attended:

MPO Public Advisory Council

Aaron Prunty, Chairman	Eagle Point	864-9868
Al Willstatter	Mass Transit	482-2807
Brad Inman	East Medford	734-5409
David Chapman	Ashland	488-0152
Ed Danehy	Senior Citizens	858-0367
Eric Heesacker	Talent	455-7138
Glen Anderson	East Medford	770-6577
Kay Harrison	Central Point	664-1066
Mark Earnest	Jacksonville	899-8080
Mike Montero	Central Point	779-0771
Mike Stitt, Vice Chair	Phoenix	535-2504
Ron Holthusen	Jacksonville	878-3019
Thad Keays	Talent	774-8273

Staff

Jonathan David	RVCOG	423-1338
Sue Casavan	RVCOG	423-1360

Others Present

9 people from the public (Austin Cummings / Lokyee Au presenting the transit study for Agenda Item 4)

1. Call to Order/Introductions/Review Agenda

Chairman Aaron Prunty called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. Review/Approve Minutes

Chairman Prunty asked if there were any changes or additions to the March meeting minutes. Brad Inman noted that it looked like his name and Al Willstatter's name were interchanged in the attendance section.

On a motion by Kay Harrison and seconded by David Chapman the Council unanimously approved the minutes with subsequent changes.

3. Public Comment

None received.

4. Exploring Transit Alternatives in the Highway 99 Corridor

Paige Townsend, RVTD, introduced students from the University of Oregon who participated in the transit study. She noted that RVTD started public engagement work last fall on Hwy 99 transit improvements from Ashland to Central Point and a final report will be given to the Policy Committee in June. She briefly explained

the surveys that were used in the study and mentioned that the project looked at transit service on Hwy 99 to determine if RVTD should invest planning resources and grant resources to improve service. She hoped that with the public input from the study that RVTD could move forward in considering future Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding and planning for transit improvements in the region. She indicated that transit improvements are probably 10-15 years down the road and that this is just the first step. If RVTD does decide to move forward with a major grant from FTA for the improvements it will require a vote from the RVMPO Policy Committee.

Glen Anderson asked if the service would still go to Front Station and if it would include new buses. Townsend responded that the corridor route has not been planned yet but it is anticipated that it will go to Front Street and the buses will be branded and have higher capacity.

Al Willstatter asked if RVTD was willing to support it financially and Townsend noted that the RVTD Board will be asked to determine the next steps.

Students, Austin Cummings and Lokyee Au, facilitated the transit discussion. Austin Cummings began the Power Point presentation and noted that they will discuss Bus Rapid Transit specifically and gather perceptions and opinions from council members. Cummings said that RVTD is currently experiencing overcrowding and frequent delays, especially along the Hwy 99 route. He informed members that ridership exceeded the FTA threshold for utilizing and developing High Capacity Transit (HCT) along Hwy 99. The study suggests that there will be projected population and employment growth leading to an increased demand for transit throughout the area. He reminded the group that this was a long-term planning process and the region is at the very beginning planning stage. Public perception is important as the process will require heavy investment in financial resources and involve a number of political processes. He emphasized that the public process will need to go on throughout the 10-20 year window it will take to implement.

Lokyee Au briefly discussed the different forms and benefits of HCT:

- Express Bus
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- Bus Rapid Transit Lite ((BRT)
- Light Rail and Commuter Rail

Au referred to a previous study that showed the Rogue Valley does not have the density required for light rail. She noted the following preliminary findings:

- Needs to be a strong case made for transit enhancements and it needs to be communicated well.
- Active and continuous engagement with various stakeholder groups (especially business community) is necessary.
- Riders are supportive of more reliable transit options but not as supportive of reducing stops for increased reliability and speed.
- RVMPO TAC favors improvement of transit services but suggested BRT system may not currently be in demand.

Au asked members what they thought transit in the Rogue Valley should look like in the future and what role should transit play in the valley:

Willstatter agreed that light rail was not viable for the region but noted that there are rails through the valley and asked if commuter rail with feeder buses was addressed. Au indicated the study had said that rail itself was not a viable option because the population density required to implement it was not in the Rogue Valley.

Ron Holthusen mentioned that perhaps the region should be looking at a longer transit planning horizon, instead of 20 years maybe 50 years.

Kay Harrison added that light rail is not feasible at this time but agreed if the planning horizon was longer that might change. She briefly discussed the current users and noted that transit should be incorporated into future long range planning efforts in the region.

Anderson suggested the region also plan further in to the future and include transit systems that would evolve with the population. He noted that the ridership changes with faster more efficient systems.

Mike Montero agreed that transportation investment planning should be tied to land use to make the best use of funding. He mentioned that the state is working on multi-modal performance standards and there might be an opportunity for this study to evaluate how strategic investments into transit could serve to meet other planning requirements.

Cummings asked members to comment on a regional scale how they would like transit to move and where should it go:

Ed Danehy suggested the Hwy 99 corridor and coordinate transit planning with regional land use planning.

Ian Horlacher discussed the fact that the regional plan assumptions done 10 years ago had a higher growth rate than what has actually occurred which resulted in lower traffic volumes than expected. He would suggest better efficiencies within the current transit system before a major funding investment. Members agreed but emphasized the need for regional planning to include transit in future planning efforts.

Jonathan David indicated that origins and destinations will be looked at concerning land use and densities and that will filter out and become apparent. As far as dedicated Right of Way for transit in regional planning he emphasized that it would have to be a policy / regional political decision.

Mark Earnest thought planning should take into account the geography of the valley with the corridor and the idea of a feeder service to the Hwy 99 main line should be considered.

Holthusen gave examples of transit and integrated bikeways to communities.

Willstatter noted the large population of elderly in the region and Montero added that demographics will be secondary to a mechanism for financial stability for transit. In order for the business community to provide commitments for the future he indicated that regional financial support for transit would be necessary.

Cummings asked how members thought BRT or HCT would be received in their communities and what concerns they had:

Anderson commented that the community was typical America; they would like it as long as someone else was paying for it. Biggest draw for population and public transit would be to have superb transit as a first option, people would like it and use it but he is aware that funding scenarios do not work that way.

Harrison mentioned that not everyone will see the need for it at this time. If it was connected to the economy / employment center she could see the BRT as the option to work.

Inman asked if the presenters had more information about capital costs and operating deficits. Cummings replied that this study did not address the financial aspects and was focused on gathering public perceptions about how palpable the transit options will be. Another student referred to a citation at the bottom of the Power Point presentation and said financial information could be found there. Inman felt that public response and acceptance to any proposed plan would have concern about costs as transit systems don't typically run at a profit.

Au asked if members saw a need for BRT or HCT and are they viable options to consider for transit concerns:

Earnest thought there would not be a need until the feeder bus strategy was worked out to the Hwy 99 corridor.

Prunty mentioned that he would like to see better piece connection (bike to bus) and then a very rapid corridor transit. He agreed that transit should definitely be included in long range planning.

David thought as fuel costs increased people transit might be a bigger priority. He felt there was a need in the region for park and rides to be more accessible.

Willstatter noted that there is a lot of duplication for transit (public, private) and felt that should be looked at.

Anderson indicated that it appeared that express bus service could start quickly without great expense.

Cummings asked, in moving forward how this group wants to be involved and interact with RVTD and what information will be needed to move this idea forward.

Montero suggested keeping it as a running agenda item for this council.

Holthusen asked if partnering with a similar region or city to see how they move forward and what the long range planning looks like and Cummings noted the comment and thought it an interesting idea.

Au asked if members had any suggestions for RVTD with moving this plan forward:

David Chapman suggested looking at the region as a travel shed, Grants Pass-Shady Cove / Medford to Ashland. With the rail running through the valley there would be very little infrastructure cost for commuter rail. He felt small changes implemented over much time will not get people out of their cars. Stitt agreed that it will take a better system to get people out of their cars and he noted that an education program on how to ride the bus would also be beneficial.

5. Strategic Assessment Discussion

Jonathan David informed the council that the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC) would like to come back and make separate presentations to the TAC and the PAC at a later date.

Members discussed the statewide goals and mandates issued by the Oregon Legislature and noted that scenario planning for this region was not mandatory at this time. Some members were concerned that if implemented the assessment might lead to new requirements.

Some members agreed that the assessment should be seriously considered. Obtaining a baseline now could be beneficial and funding is provided. Chapman suggested getting in line for the assessment and if the region changes direction they could back out. There was discussion about making the modeling 'fit the region' and Eric Heesacker said that he had previously worked with the modelers and they were very sensitive to regional needs. Inman was in favor of waiting.

6. MPO Planning Update

David announced that RVACT had requested a Technical Advisory Committee to be formed from current MRMPO and RVMPO TAC members.

Mike Montero requested to be moved to the Freight PAC position from the Central Point position.

7. Other Business

None.

8. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Prunty at 7:10 PM.