

RVACT *Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation*

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To: Members, Rogue Valley Area Commission on Transportation

From: Pat Foley, RVCOG

Re: Summary of September 11, 2007, RVACT Meeting, Grants Pass City Council Chambers

Date: September 11, 2007

Members and Alternates in Attendance: Arthur Anderson and John Vial, ODOT; Paula Brown, Ashland; Dale Petrasek, Jackson County; Rob Brandes, Josephine County; Bob Lewis, Phoenix; Skip Knight, Medford; Tony Paulson, Cave Junction; Tim Cummings, Grants Pass; Vicki Guarino, MPO Policy; Ernie Garb, RVTD; Alan DeBoer, Reeve Hennion, Stacy Kellenbeck, John Watt, Richard Smith, James Lowe and Jeff Hunter private sector representatives from Jackson and Josephine Counties

Members Absent: Butte Falls, Central Point, Eagle Point, Jacksonville, Gold Hill, Rogue River, Talent, Shady Cove and private sector representatives Craig Stone and Mike Montero

Staff: Gary Leaming, ODOT; Pat Foley, RVCOG.

Other: Mike Baker, Joe Thomas and Ken Cannon, ODOT; Tom Loynes, ODOT/NMFS, Alex Georgevitch, Bill Waggoner, Dick Hanlin, Kate Brownell, Jim Frick, John Harelson, Lyle Woodcock, Malcolm Drake and Tom Hawksworth

1. Self Introductions and Roll Call

Jeff Hunter

Chair Jeff Hunter asked all participants to introduce themselves. A quorum was present.

2. Approval of Minutes

Jeff Hunter

Jeff Hunter asked if there were any changes to the July 10, 2007 RVACT minutes. The minutes were approved as written.

3. Public Input

Jeff Hunter

Members of the public were asked for comments.

Bill Waggoner: He is opposed to Josephine County having a gas tax. He feels that a state gas tax is a different subject.

4. Golden Salmon Award Presentation

Joe Thomas and Ken Cannon

Joe Thomas introduced Kate Brownell, representative for Hamilton Construction. Hamilton Construction replaced four bridges on Redwood Highway between Cave Junction and O'Brien. ODOT found Hamilton Construction very responsive to environmental issues and is presenting them with an award of recognition today, the Golden Salmon Award.

Ken Cannon, ODOT Biologist, said this is the first time ODOT has presented an environmental award to a contractor. The company went above and beyond the call of duty with environmental issues and impacts on sensitive species. Hamilton Construction did a tremendous job replacing these bridges. There were a number of endangered species and a plant species at these sites. From an environmental aspect the issues that were faced in this project do not get any more complicated. Hamilton did a super job in staying in compliance with water quality regulations and minimizing adverse effects on plant and animal species. On behalf of ODOT Ken presented Hamilton Construction with the Golden Salmon Award. Kate Brownell accepted the award for Hamilton Construction.

5. Oregon 140 Freight Study, Letter of Support

Art Anderson

Handout: Draft Letter of Support

Jeff asked if there were questions, comments or changes to the RVACT draft letter of support for the Oregon 140 Freight Study. Art Anderson added, at the last RVACT meeting Julie Rodwell gave a presentation on the freight study. At that meeting the RVACT members requested that a letter be drafted in support of the project addressed to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

Discussion:

John Watt: He is concerned that if the RVACT starts supporting projects they may be putting themselves into a position where they could be forced to choose one project over another, i.e. Highway 97/Highway 140. John questions whether the department needs a letter of support for the Highway 140 Freight Study at this time. But, he went on to say, this letter of support is generic enough. It says we support Highway 140 improvements because anything that is done to improve freight movement is going to benefit the Rogue Valley.

Skip Knight: He said Highway 140 is an east-west corridor; Highway 97 is a north-south corridor. He thinks that as an organization support both. These are two separate issues. He thinks the RVACT should go ahead and send the letter of support.

Art said there was a discussion on who the letter should go to. The RVACT was commissioned on the part of the Oregon Transportation Commission. We need to be commenting back to them in regard to our issues and not necessarily to specific Legislators. We do not want to get into the mode of lobbying for projects.

Motion:

Stacy Kellenbeck made a motion to send the letter of support as written. Skip Knight seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Connect Oregon II

Mike Baker

Mike Baker said two years ago we went through the Connect Oregon I process. Connect Oregon is a lottery bond based initiative to invest in non-automobile/non-highway type modes (air, rail, marine and transit facilities). Some of Connect Oregon I project's are now being built. There is \$100M available statewide for Connect Oregon II grants, loans or a combination of both. Connect Oregon I divided the monies between the five regions; 15% to each region and \$25M that could also be applied for. Connect Oregon II will give each region \$10M (10%) worth of projects and the remainder will be competed for statewide. The application process started early this month and will go through to the end of November 2007. Connect Oregon II will require a 2% match which will be used for a multi-modal transportation study which will access 1) where we are in some of our in some of our modes, 2) how to fund those projects and 3) make suggestions and recommendations. Grants require a 20% match. There is no match requirement for loans.

Summary:

- Application process through November
- Modal committee for review (approximately six weeks for decision – will be given to the RVACTS during this time)
- RVACT recommendation
- Region recommendations
- Public hearing in May 2008
- Final project selection by the OTC in June 2008.

Discussion:

Alan DeBoer: He asked how long of a term and what is the retainment source for the \$100M? Mike said that the \$100M is based on bonds that we are going to sell. There is no timeline as to when the projects have to be delivered but the sooner they can be delivered the higher their priority. Alan added, if we sell \$100M worth of bonds and they are being repaid from lottery funds in the future (20 years) we are borrowing against future revenues and spending the money today. In ten years where does the money come from for new projects?

Stacy Kellenbeck: At the last meeting there was an expressed frustration about property being used as a match. It could only be counted at its original purchase price rather than at its current market value. Has this changed? Mike said this has not changed. Property used as a match is based on the value at the time the property was purchased.

7. Oregon Gateway Proposal, Senate Bill 21

Art Anderson/John Watt

Handouts: Draft Letter of Support

Art Anderson said that at the last meeting RVACT members requested that a letter of support be drafted for the Oregon Gateway Proposal, email attachment.

John Watt explained that SB 21 was a separate bill that ultimately became a part of HB 5036. There were other projects included in this bill. There is a \$60M allocation for the Oregon Gateway Proposal over a period of time with \$10M up front to start dredging Coos Bay. At this

point everything hinges on A.P Moeller. A lot of negotiations are going on with A.P. Moeller and the railroads. A.P. Moeller will be making a decision in December on whether or not to go forward with the project. If they choose to go forward with the project then the dollars will be allocated. If A.P. Moeller chooses not to go forward with the project the allocated dollars refer back to the state. A key point to this letter of support is that it is supported by the Southwest Economic Transportation Team. The last paragraph of the letter is probably the most important. I think it is understood by all who use these systems now, but it doesn't hurt to put this in black and white for our legislative delegation: and that is, the people who are going to use the system need to be aware that they have to provide a binding commitment to the potential project before any discussion of investments would take place. The legislators need to understand the importance of the economic benefits to our region but also the importance of the fiscal responsibility. Referring back to Alan DeBoer's question; John said this is a concern that everybody has, when we go out and bond for transportation projects, we are encumbering future dollars. When all of these projects are looked at we have to consider overall how we are funding transportation in the state of Oregon. This is important.

Motion:

John Watt made a motion to forward the letter of support for the Oregon Gateway Project to the OTC. Jeff Hunter seconded the motion. The motion passed.

8. Forest Highway Enhancement Program

Art Anderson

*Handout: Letter dated August 15, 2007, Oregon Forest Highway Program, Enhancement Project Proposals
Project Evaluation Criteria and Application*

Art Anderson reviewed the Forest Highway Enhancement Program. Enhancement projects are road related activities such as, but not limited to, interpretative signing, kiosks, viewpoints, restrooms, and trailheads, and culvert replacements for environmental mitigation. Scenic Byway corridor improvements are another category of enhancements. Forest Highway enhancements are designed to benefit the Forest Highway users. Proposed projects must be located on, or in close proximity to, a designated Forest Highway Route.

The link showing eligible routes is: http://www.wfl.fhwa.dot.gov/fhp/oregon/or_base.pdf.

The second handout shows the grading criteria used for the program and application.

The key to applications is jurisdictions need to have a project sponsor. ODOT has sponsored these projects in the past.

9. Updates to Oregon Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan

Mike Baker

*Handout: Summary of Changes: Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update, August 2007
When are bike lanes needed in urban/suburban settings?*

Mike Baker gave an overview of changes to the Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update. This is the first update of the Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan that was originally developed in 1995. This is not an update of the entire plan; it is an update to the design elements.

The different concepts under consideration are:

1. Bicycle Boulevard; A road that provides good access for bicyclists and discourages heavy vehicle use.

2. Road Guides; A large road (typically a four or five lane section) changed to a three-lane road. This is a way to provide bike lanes on heavily traveled road.
3. Advanced Stop Bar; A new treatment for multi-lane roadways that can save lives.
4. Improved Signage; Signs that provide direction, mileage and destination travel time.
5. Removal of Fencing; To provide a more comfortable ride. Looking how to separate uses on multi-use paths without a raised barrier.
6. Bike Box; A bulb-out at intersections where bicyclists are visible to oncoming traffic.
7. Big Block Crosswalks; Allows pedestrians to cross at the mid-point of long blocks.

These recommendations are scheduled for consideration by the OTC early in 2008.

Comments/Questions;

Richard Smith: He asked who is funding this project. Mike said this is funded through ODOT with gas taxes and Federal Highway Funds. Richard went on to say that he feels bicyclists should pay for these improvements. He recommends that there be taxes on bikes that use the highways.

Skip Knight: He agrees with Richard. We spend millions of dollars every year for bicycle lanes and they pay nothing for it. We are diverting funds from general transportation needs. These funds are being skewed too much toward bicyclists. You used to have to register bicycles and pay a fee. It would be appropriate to charge a fee.

Paula Brown: She is not disagreeing with these statements but added Ashland's perspective on bicycles. Ashland pushes the use of bicycles. Adding bicycle lanes on Siskiyou Blvd is a great example. There was a huge return on the ability for bicyclists to use Siskiyou Blvd. Ashland has done a significant study on how things get funded. She agrees with bicycle registration but wants to keep bikes in the forefront and allow their use as well.

Alan DeBoer: Some of these recommendations; streets that can't add bike lanes or slowing traffic down to 25 mph. would have significant impact on traffic. Also, a four lane highway being converted to three lanes with bike paths on either side, there has to be a reasonable assumption that there are certain highways that this can't deal with this. Long blocks with cross walks in the middle are pretty dangerous. Changing these rules becomes the guiding factor for future improvements. In some cases you can't do this. Alan is against bicycle registration fee. He doesn't want to create another government bureaucracy that takes fees. We need to work within the size of government we have.

John Watt: He asked if legislative changes were incorporated into this proposal. Mike said this is a draft plan. This plan is one of the elements of the state TSP. These are just design considerations.

Tim Cummings; Using population increases for the next fifteen years, reducing lanes and slowing down traffic seems to be somewhat opposite to moving traffic. Mid-block cross walks sounds like a disaster.

Malcolm Drake: He is totally against bicycle registration. We need to encourage alternative forms of transportation. He feels that it is safer to cross in the middle of a block because you can see the cars coming in both directions.

Jeff Hunter: He agrees with both sides: 1) Bike registration and 2) encouraging bicycle riding because that reduces the number of cars.

Dick Smith: In the rural area (Merlin/Galice) where roads are narrow, we are seeing a thousand bikes a day. They do not pay one nickel to maintain the roads. If you are going to use it, pay for it. We are in the process of keeping this county funded and we can't seem to do it. These people are riding free.

Stacy Kellenbeck: Most people who have bikes have cars and they do pay.

James Lowe: Most of the bikes in the Merlin/Galice area are recreational. They are not eliminating any transportation needs. There has to be funding brought back in for the recreational use.

10. Regional Problem Solving Transportation Update

Vicki Guarino

The Regional Problem Solving (RPS) process is looking at long term growth in Jackson County and addressing population needs. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is looking at the RPS process in the form of a comment to the final document. The MPO is addressing four topic areas; 1) what are the transportation needs, 2) how should the region pay for needed projects, 3) what land protections should be put in place to hold down the cost of right-of-way. We are assuming that cities will continue to fund new roads as they have in the past. We are looking at the connections as those roads are built in the growth areas in the urban areas and what kind of new connections opportunities do they offer. The land protections are intended to enable land to be purchased for a feasible price. The need is being identified through modeling. We have received a lot of modeling results just over the last few days. The modeling looked at transportation and development scenarios and then mixed and matched.

1. On the development side we looked at what would happen if all of these growth areas that have been identified are built out basically along the lines of the way development has been occurring in the Rogue Valley.
2. Another scenario, the nodal alternative, made a concerted effort to develop in ways that would be most beneficial to the transportation system; whatever can be done in terms of mixed use; putting high density development in certain places, creating neighborhood centers, those kinds of developments.

The last scenario is called Regional Attractors. This is where there are large developments at various locations throughout the region that attract large volumes of traffic with concentrations of housing, or employment campuses and large businesses. The transportation scenarios were the network as now planned in the Regional Transportation Plan, a network with some capacity increases and an enhanced network with some major road building including a new north-south corridor. What we found in the modeling is that the type of land use really does make a difference to the transportation system. The most beneficial in terms of saving transportation network capacity is the nodal development, the idea of concentrating growth throughout the county through mixed use. That limits the number of trips that people are taking and reduces the length of trips. The other two scenarios do not function as well. Interestingly, under both the existing policy and regional attractor scenarios, increasing capacity doesn't have bit impact on congestion. The kind of development pattern makes a difference in roadway operations; however the degree of difference in performance between one scenario, say the regional attractor scenario and nodal development scenario, is not huge.

The thinking now is that we need to look closer at what the impacts are and would certain areas benefit from certain kinds of development. An important piece of this modeling work that has not been completed is the transit element. There are some problems that need to be ironed out. Meanwhile the MPO is proceeding to look at funding on a preliminary level. We have developed about 11 different possible funding sources including a gas tax. We are looking at twelve different possibilities for preserving the land for transportation corridors. The simplest and most straight forward is preserving the rural zoning that is already in place. After we get the modeling piece completed and we know what will be needed for the transportation network we can look more closely at what the underlying zoning is. Another option that we are looking at is the early purchasing of properties. The overall process is wrapping up. There are public hearings scheduled on the RPS plan. The Policy Committee will be looking at RPS transportation impacts this month and finalizing its comments this fall.

Art Anderson said this may not be the most exciting topic but you have to think about the impact this will have on the transportation system. This is the forward thinking piece that is really needed. He thinks that in twenty to forty years from now people are going to look back and say this was a really smart idea.

Ernie Garb said Medford is developing TOD's. Unfortunately there is very little transit. Transit is supposed to be a part of the development that is going on.

Skip Knight said we have to keep in mind that some of the corridors that are talked about are in existence at the present time. We have to look at improving them in order to maintain a good flow between the different communities within the Rogue Valley and the RPS system. There may be some situations where we may need a new corridor.

11. Break

12. Gas Tax Discussion

All

Jeff Hunter opened the discussion on gas tax. This item was discussed at the last meeting. Jeff asked for further discussion and comments.

Tim Cummins: He cannot support increasing gas taxes to send up to Salem. He thinks that Josephine County, with the reduction in timber receipts, has lot of funding issues. Gas taxes in Josephine County would be a hard sell. It would be interesting to see how much of the taxes paid to ODOT actually benefit Josephine County and what the comparison is in each of the counties. Our population of persons over 65 in the Rogue Valley is going to double in the next 15 years. We are going to have serious problems as a work force to generate enough taxes to support the needs of an aging community

Alan DeBoer: If this is put before the voters, it would probably be done separately in Jackson and Josephine Counties. It takes a vote of the people to increase taxes. If the county(s) votes for a gas tax, the money would go to the county(s) and the city(s) with none going to the state. Currently if the state puts a tax in there is a predetermined formula that shows how the taxes are spent. There is a percentage to the state, a percentage to county(s) and a percentage to city(s). There is no overhead cost to do this because we are already taking pennies per gallon; the state fuel tax is currently 18.3 cents. He is terribly disappointed with our elected legislators and

governor. Up until 1990 the state generally increased the gas tax a penny every time they met. Since 1990 it hasn't been moved at all. What they have chosen to do instead is bond for the future 20 years. It is that credit card approach. Our road issues are not going to decrease 10 years from now. We have massive construction which has driven the bid up because we only have so many road construction people. We are doing all of this construction in three or four years but we are going to take 10 years to pay for it. The real problem is 10 years from now when money is needed and we have leveraged all of our expenses and are paying back the debt plus interest. It is really easy for our elected officials to shirk their responsibility by saying we will let the next guy pay for it rather than dealing with it now. Nobody wants to pay more taxes. Half of the gas tax paid in Josephine County probably is not paid by Josephine County residents but by people driving through and stopping to refuel their cars. Driving costs can be cut by shortening our routes. One thing ODOT doesn't talk about much is vehicle miles traveled. He cited the street configuration at the Pear Tree Stop where a new left turn lane would decrease time spent waiting to get through. If we lower the amount of gasoline we put in our cars we would be paying less for fuel even though we may be paying a higher tax. He wants to use fewer gallons to drive less miles and in order to do that we need to have infrastructure in place.

Skip Knight: As cars become efficient, we are going to receive less gas taxes. We should strongly consider a gas tax. It should be a two county situation. If just Jackson County puts in a gas tax then people will be motivated to travel across the county line to fuel up. Because of volatile price increases for gas he doesn't think the general public would feel an increase of 3 to 5 cents. This is a discussion that we should take up. All of us are scrambling for funds for highway projects. He predicts that we are not going to see another SAFETELU project out of the federal government for roads and improvements.

Paula Brown: Ashland has gone through a transportation financing taskforce to look at all of the ways to fund transportation projects. For us transportation does include sidewalks, transit and bicycle projects. Looking at deferred maintenance, Ashland's Loop had somewhere around \$1M that was needed to keep our system alive and well. We estimate that we are probably looking at \$400K returning to us with a 3 to 5 cent gas tax. Those are extremely rough estimates. That makes a big difference to small cities, even large cities when you compound who is paying, who is buying and who is getting that return. I am doing this in advance of presenting all of this information to our city council. I would expect that Ashland would support a two county local gas tax before returning funds back to the state.

Stacy Kellenbeck: She thought Grants Pass already had a gas tax. Tim Cummings: The city council could create a gas tax. City councils can do this but the county would have to have a public vote on this issue.

Bill Waggoner: Under Article I of the constitution of the US, the federal government has financing control of all major clear surface roads. In Josephine County Hwy 199, the Caves Highway and I-5 are to be paid for by the government. This committee could lobby for the state to bring a suit against the federal government for not maintaining these roads instead of putting the burden on the local citizens through a gas tax. They are fully responsible for financing and maintaining these roads for military purposes in the defense of this nation. We have to make them face up to their responsibility on these highways that they claim that they own. I will oppose a county gas tax because most of our roads are federally owned. The only things we have are the county roads. Other than that there are the roads in Grants Pass and Cave Junction.

Ernie Garb: We have to get our hands around the size of the problem. He doesn't know what is the problem is. He would like to know what ODOT's share of the budget is: 1) What did ODOT request? 2) What did ODOT get? 3) What are we going to have to cut? Just to say we need more money for our infrastructure is not enough. We have to see what the size of the problem is. As an example, RVTD hasn't had an increase in its taxes in fifteen years yet during that time we unionized. The way that we have met these added expenses is by cutting services. If we are going to have a meaningful transportation system, cutting services is not the way to do it. For RVTD you will probably see something happen within the next twelve months as far as funding is concerned. We can't go on like this. Similarly if you are facing a problem, I would like to know the size of the problem. Art Anderson: This issue came up at the last meeting. We are seeing a large portion of money, \$56M, being moved out of the ACTs and transferred to the state in general. The legislature decided to do this. It wasn't something that ODOT was saying that we need more money. We are funded on an annual basis. Look at all of the requirements we have when we build our MOD program every two years. We have \$25/45B of requirements and we get \$12M every two years for two counties. You can do the math. The issue that I am struggling with is; the governor has made a strong statement that he is going to take transportation as a forefront issue in the next legislature. He has already moved his staffer, Chris Werner, to work in ODOT's Director's office to handle what he is calling a transportation portfolio. I think that what you are going to be seeing is a formulation of how do we get our hands around the problem and what does that look in terms of dollars that we need. My concern is that I think that a gas tax is going to be on the table of the next legislative cycle. If there is going to be a state gas tax, and we are talking about countywide taxes, how do those two marry up? Do you do something now and then get a double whammy later because the state tax is going to add on across the board.

John Watt: \$1.25B a year is needed in addition to what is in the budget now. This group needs to have their legislative delegation here to answer questions. Transit is not included in the dedicated funding for transportation. As Alan has said the legislature has not seen fit to raise gas taxes since 1993. There is a problem. There are more people in Oregon than there ever were before. That is not likely to change. There is a county allocation study where you can see how much Josephine County gets for every gas tax dollar that is sent to Salem. You also need to look and see how those dollars are allocated to the different counties. Everyone assumes the Multnomah county gets the lion share of the dollars. That is not the case. Wheeler county gets more dollars for the gas tax dollars. You need to have an understanding as to what we are getting back and what other people are getting and how that impacts us. If you want to enact a county gas tax and everyone is assured that they are never going out of their county, no problem. How many of us travel to other counties. I make the trek to Salem frequently. A couple years ago gas prices in Grants Pass were 10 to 15 cents lower than in Medford. How many of us in Medford drove to Grants Pass to get our gas. I don't understand the argument that it needs to be done in two counties. If you are willing to drive to Josephine County why you wouldn't be willing to drive to Klamath Falls? Should you include Klamath County? The decision makers on this are not here. They are your legislators. If your legislators don't understand the scope of the problem, they need to be here. They need to hear what the need is in their region. It is not ODOT that has the problem. ODOT did not bring the problem to the legislature this last time. They tried to make the legislators understand what the needs are to maintain what we have. What did it get them? They lost \$56M.

Malcolm Drake: He has been impressed with Josephine County's Public Works Department efficiency. He would probably support a local gas tax. But with ODOT, he can't tell how

efficient they are and how well they are spending their money. Every now and then he sees an example of an egregious waste of money. Example – the replaced \$4M worth of signs (which look exactly like the ones they took out) and added custom galvanized steel supports. He would like to see money put into pavement or bike lanes or bridges.

Jim Frick: He travels the highway from Grants Pass to Cave Junction everyday. We are not taking into account the responsibility of our legislators and how they have not been listening to the folks that need to be heard, the common citizenry. He serves on the Southern Oregon Resource Alliance. Right now your commissioners are back in Washington DC with their cup out asking for a four year extension. We have our last opportunity right now with the Western Oregon Plan Revision. All of you should be involved in this. We are having a meeting in Josephine County tomorrow and at the BLM Interagency on Thursday in Medford. The plan has to do with long term O & C funding using a crop that was taken away (1937 O & C Act). We have monies. They are sitting out there on a crop that should be harvested, if for no other reason, than fuel suppression. The fuel load is the highest ever seen in the 30 years. A catastrophic fire is at your backdoor. The BLM has done a most collaborative comprehensive study. There are three alternatives on the table of which none are locked in concrete. They will take input from anyone. He feels like an endangered species in Josephine County because he can't afford to keep paying tax after tax on top of tax especially when he knows there is a crop out there for 53 years that would pay for most of your road ways, public safety, and even protecting kids that are going to school. If we are going to do anything please get involved in that process and then we can resolve this funding crisis.

Skip Knight: He respects John's opinion but disagrees with him. He thinks we should have a two county tax. If somebody is going to drive from Medford to Grants Pass because the gas is cheaper, it is only 20 some miles. If you want to go to Klamath Falls it is 70 miles. He wants to get our southern Oregon delegation involved in this process. He has been involved in this process for several years and we haven't gotten anywhere. He thinks that any tax that is imposed can be taken away. If we impose a gas tax in southern Oregon and then the state legislature says we had better have a state tax on gasoline, then we could rescind local taxes.

Stacy Kellenbeck: She thinks that it is ridiculous to think that a couple cents a gallon in gas tax is worth driving 40 to 60 miles round trip. If somebody is willing to do that let them. I think that if the state is looking at a gas tax the counties chances of getting a gas tax through the system is less.

Rob Brandes: We all realize the situation the transportation system has a whole with the gas tax not being raised since 1992. Looking back, we were paying about a \$1.35 per gallon in 1992. In our county gas is probably a \$1.5M line item. Now we are paying more than double. With O & C funding looming as an unknown, the system has a big hole that needs to be plugged or we are going to start seeing a loss of quality of our system. Whether or not the solution is a local or statewide gas tax I am not sure. I am sold on either option as being better than the other. Another option that I have heard thrown out is a vehicle registration fee specific to counties which captures gas efficient vehicles; you capture the same amount per tire. I drive a hybrid Escape and I do the exact same amount of damage to the road as somebody driving a standard gas powered Escape. Gas efficiency is going to go up. Maybe the solution is a combination of vehicle registration fee to gas tax.

Art Anderson said we have a lot of comments but there does not seem to be any direction. Does the group want to wait until the next meeting to discuss the issue further?

Richard Smith: We need the decision makers here. That should be the legislators and county commissioners and city councils. We need there feedback.

Skip Knight: He thinks it would be appropriate to have a letter composed and sent to all the county commissioners and city councilors saying that we have had this discussion and the sentiment generally was that we need additional gas taxes. We should ask them to come back to us with what the revenues would be for each city if they had their own gas tax. We could then make a recommendation to go forward to some other agency such as the OTC or the state legislature.

Tim Cummings: Josephine County is more dependent on timber receipts and I believe that those are going to go away. If gas taxes are increased statewide we won't have support to do anything on a local level.

Art asked what the group wanted to do.

Richard Smith: We have to have the decision makers here.

Paula Brown: She asked, "From ODOT's perspective, if you think this is actually going to continue to move forward and gain traction, how is ODOT pursuing this from the state level?" We need to better understand how the appropriations go back to the different entities. We have heard that RPS has spent the gas tax. We are all looking at the gas tax to do different elements.

John Vial: He reminded the group that this is a board that is chartered as an advisory group to the OTC. As you consider sending letters remember that you are acting on behalf of the OTC. He would have some caution in sending a letter to all of the elected officials saying that RVACT feels like this because in a sense you are speaking for the OTC and that may or may not be how the OTC feels. If you have a desire to pursue a local gas tax, my recommendation is to send something up to the director of ODOT or to Stuart Foster, chair of the OTC, and ask for some clarification and guidance from them as far as this group pursuing that. I just want to make sure that you stay within your charter.

In the past the OTC has been fairly resistant or concerned about local gas taxes. The main reason is that they are afraid that you could create a situation where you have some winners or losers. There have been some concerns and at the same time the OTC recognizes that local governments have problems. They have never come out and said no to a gas tax, but they do have concerns.

Ernie Garb: Why don't we invite the members of the five county delegation to our next meeting so that they can hear us?

John Watt: John Vial made a very good point. But there is nothing wrong with having those people here to hear what are our needs are. We have elected you to figure out how to help. I don't think you have to support a gas tax, county or statewide, I think you can simply say here are our needs in our region. We need your help to decide how to get those things.

13. Local Construction Projects

Gary Leaming

Gary Leaming gave an update on local transportation projects:

August 1st the Governor was in Medford at the airport to sign the Connect Oregon II legislation. Local and state delegations were on hand.

Highway 199 Expressway Project: Gary showed a slide of the Grants Pass Working Group's proposal. This proposal is being studied along with Concepts A and C. This has been included into the supplemental EA which is due October 1st. There will then be a 20 day public comment period and an open house.

Beacon Drive, I-5 MP 57.06: Part of OTIA III, the traffic is down to a single lane. Work began after Labor Day.

Illinois Valley Bridges: The bridges are almost done. Stripping on bridges due this week.

Highway 199, Laurel in Cave Junction: Widening project was done last week. There will be a traffic switch this week.

Highway 199, passing lane between Elliot Creek Road and Round Prairie: Proposed construction in 2009. An open house was held last fall. There will be another open house in Wilderville on September 25th.

South Medford Interchange: The widening of Highland Drive has been completed. Work is being done on Barnett Road.

Exit 11 – Northbound movement into Siskiyou Blvd to Hwy 199

Exit 21 – Original bridges over the interstate. Contractor is taking down part of the deck, repairing the rebar, and defective concrete. This is a 6 to 8 week project.

Walker-I-5/Hwy 99: Project is finished.

Hwy 62 Corridor Project: The project footprint is set. Technical reports are being done. The draft EIS is due in February 2008.

Fern Valley Interchange: The EA will probably be published this winter.

14. Oregon Transportation Commission/Legislative Updates

John Vial

John explained the purpose of the sign replacements on I-5 (pictures distributed by Malcolm Drake). Traditionally signs are replaced when the highway is paved. We found that we were spending too much money on things other than pavement and pulled all sign replacements out of projects. We have not done signs on the interstate for many years. All of the signs are reflective dead and cannot be seen at night. Daytime shots of those signs look pretty good. If you drive the freeway at night those signs look very different. A lot of the signs lost their reflectivity.

Many of our signs had substandard supports. New breakaway standards were used in order to reduce serious damage and fatal accidents.

The last OTC meeting was one of the most interesting. The state is facing a big shortfall in terms of our modernization programs. The state revenue is projected to be \$65M less than we thought for 2006-2011. The reason for that are fuel efficient cars and the expensive cost of gas. People are driving less. Through collective bargaining agreements with our representative employees many received COLAs. Typically the Legislature gives us increased budget for COLAs that amounts to about \$53M. With SB 994 the legislature chose to take \$56M out of ODOT's budget and to give to the counties to help with the timber revenue issues. The department is about \$168M short for the 2008-2011 STIP period. That is a big enough number that we can't make minor cuts to get over this. This is a significant issue. The challenge for the STIP is that all of these projects are programmed or are in the design stage. The OTC discussed what to do about this problem. There were different points of view brought up ranging from reducing all programs across the board equally: bridge program, pavement rendering program and safety, or do target reductions. They ended with programs that take care of what we have now. The exercise that we have been asked to do is figure out how to cut \$168M out of the modernization program. I don't know if that is where they are going land in the end. Tomorrow there is another OTC meeting in Portland where they are going to discuss this item further. The ACT is twofold; 1) make you aware of the need and 2) as these modernization cuts are made, what will likely happen, is the OTC will direct ACTs to do this. Art is going to be preparing recommendations for this group to say here are some thoughts that we have and then ask this group to be the decision making body. This is just a heads up. We have some pretty big changes in the MOD program coming.

Included in your meeting packet was the draft letter that you directed staff to prepare in response to the \$56M that was taken and given to the counties. Are there any comments?

Changes were suggested. The letter will be further discussed at the next meeting.

14. Agenda Build/Next Meeting

Jeff Hunter/Art Anderson

Art asked for input on items to be included on the next RVACT meeting agenda.

1. Gas Tax Discussion/invite commissioners and city councilors
2. Review Letter of Concern, Senate Bill 994
3. STIP-MOD Process
4. JACO projects regarding Senate Bill 994
5. Historical allocations by area
6. Stacy – Jurisdiction/ODOT coordination

The next RVACT meeting is scheduled for: Tuesday, November 13, 2007
9 a.m.
ODOT Conference Room B
White City