

Meeting Summary

St. Helens US 30 & Columbia Blvd./St. Helens St. Corridor Master Plan

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting #1

December 17, 2013

1 – 3 pm

St. Helens City Hall

1. Introductions and Meeting Objectives

- Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members attending:
 - Jenny Dimisho, City of St. Helens
 - Rodger Gutierrez, ODOT Pedestrian & Bicycle Facility Specialist
 - Mary Heberling, St. Helens Main Street Program
 - Scott Jensen, Port of St. Helens
 - Bill Johnston, AICP, ODOT Senior Region 2 Planner
 - Patrick Kerr, Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, Inc.
 - Eliseo Lemus Magaña, P.E., ODOT Region 2 Designer
 - Christina McDaniel-Wilson, P.E., ODOT Senior Transportation Analyst
 - Michael Morales, ODOT Region 2 Senior Environmental Project Manager
 - Sue Nelson, P.E., City of St. Helens
 - John Walsh, City of St. Helens (City Administrator)
 - Lonny Welter, Columbia County

- Project Management Team (PMT) consulting team members attending:
 - Matt Bell, Kittelson & Associates
 - Chris Brehmer, P.E., Kittelson & Associates
 - Jacob Graichen, AICP, City of St. Helens
 - Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group
 - Tim Strand, GreenWorks
 - Naomi Zwerdling, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)

1. Project Overview and Status Report

Matt Hastie reviewed work completed to date and next steps, including the following:

- Work completed
 - Initiated project
 - Developed project Website
 - Conducted initial meetings with project Citizen Advisory Committee and local business and property owners
 - Prepared draft Project Vision, Goals and Guiding Principles
 - Conducted City Council Visioning work session and briefing
 - Prepared Technical Memoranda 1-5 to address:
 - Relevant local and state plans, policies and regulations
 - Access management
 - Transportation conditions and projections
 - Land use, zoning and urban design conditions
 - Streetscape design ideas and strategies
- Next steps
 - Conduct meetings with local business and property owners, Planning Commission and other community members (January 14)
 - Update Technical Memoranda 1-5 to reflect meetings with advisory committees, Planning Commission, local business and property owners and others
 - Begin work on Streetscape Design Concepts (February – March)

Matt also reviewed the meeting agenda and objectives, including:

- Provide an update on work completed to date and next steps.
- Review and discuss draft Project Vision and Guiding Principles.
- Review and solicit comments on Tech Memos 1-5.
- Discuss preparations for upcoming meetings.

2. Project Goals and Objectives

Matt reviewed a set of draft project vision statements and guiding principles. He noted that they are similar to those reviewed by the CAC at their first meeting. Since that time, they have been updated to include vision statements for the US30 and Houlton area corridor segments and incorporate CAC comments. The City Council also reviewed them at a work session in November. They generally supported the draft document and had relatively few comments or suggested changes. Their primary issues of concern were related to the cost and cost-effectiveness of streetscape design projects recommended as part of this project. Similarly, the TAC did not recommend any changes to the document, other than to inquire whether the guiding principles address the issue of cost-effectiveness.

3. Relevant Plans, Policies and Requirements

Matt reviewed highlights from Technical Memorandum #1, a summary of state and local plans, policies and regulations relevant to the corridor planning area. TAC members did not have any comments on this memo.

4. Transportation Conditions

Chris Brehmer of Kittelson and Associates provided a combined summary of Technical Memoranda #2 and #3 (Access Management and Transportation Conditions). In discussing the transportation analysis, Chris noted that the “Level of Stress” (LTS) methodology used to assess conditions for bicyclists is a new tool being utilized by ODOT and it is important to forward comments/feedback to ODOT’s Transportation Planning Analysis Unit as part of this process. TAC comments included the following:

- Several years ago the City tried to implement measures to keep people from crossing Columbia Blvd. at Milton Way and there was so much community opposition that the City abandoned those efforts. Even though it represents safety concern and it results in people going against the flow of traffic on that section of Columbia Blvd., people really want that option. It also represents one of the only options for trucks to head in that direction if they find themselves on Milton Way or St. Helens Street, other than taking US 30 all the way back to Gable Road.
- The intersection at the couplet convergence point is an issue for trucks and other large vehicles who have trouble navigating the turn-around there and can get stuck in that location.
- The right turn lane from Columbia Blvd to 18th Street is a relatively recent project implemented by a previous public works director (Tim Homann). The City will review its records to better understand the rationale for that turn lane. *Note: the consulting team noted that right-turn volumes at this location are relatively low and could be accommodated in the outside through lane.*
- What is the timeline for adoption of the Corridor Plan and will the Plan result in any amendments to the City’s Transportation System Plan (TSP)? *Note: The consulting team and ODOT staff responded that the Corridor Plan may identify potential amendments to the TSP if any are needed to implement the Corridor Plan (e.g., specific improvement projects that should be listed in the TSP or new design standards). However, any recommended TSP amendments may be amended after rather than as part of adoption of the Corridor Plan.*
- The report notes that the peak traffic times are in the p.m. peak period but the charts in the presentation indicate that they are during the afternoon generally and in some places at mid-day. That seems inconsistent. *Note: The consulting team responded that in some locations that is true but that overall, the peak traffic periods continue to be found during the p.m. peak (commuting) period.*
- When are the peak pedestrian crossing times and how do they related to peak vehicle traffic periods and/or operational issues during those times? *Note: Staff noted that peak pedestrian activity seems to be at about 2 p.m. although there are several peaks during the day. The one time of day where peak pedestrian activity and peak vehicle usage coincide is during the morning peak in the vicinity of the school. In that area, things are somewhat “jammed up” for about 15-20 minutes during the school drop-off period but then those conditions dissipate.*
- The consulting team noted that in their previous meeting, some members of the CAC asked if the team would be considering converting Columbia Blvd. and St. Helens Street from a one-way couplet to a pair of two-way streets. The team has responded that converting those streets to

two-way streets was not considered or noted as a potential need in the city's Transportation System Planning process and was not contemplated for study and analysis in the scope of work for this project. The team can highlight the benefits and challenges associated with one-way and two way streets in this area based on experience in other communities. The team also can identify some of the steps that would need to be undertaken as part of such a conversion, including potentially costly changes to the railway crossings for both streets. Any analysis beyond that would require an amendment to the consultant's scope of work and direction from the City Council.

5. Land Use and Urban Design Conditions

Matt and Tim Strand of GreenWorks summarized key findings from Technical Memoranda #4 related to land use and urban design conditions and development code standards. TAC comments included the following:

- Patrick Kerr of Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, Inc. provided the following comments re: priorities and issues for the railroad in this area.
 - ODOT Rail owns the right-of-way within which the railroad operates and the railroad manages operations there. Any changes that affect the railroad would need to be coordinated with ODOT Rail.
 - The railroad wants to be a good neighbor and participate in this process and is open to a lot of ideas and solutions. However, it also needs to be concerned about any proposals that will affect its operations and the safety of people in this area.
 - Trees and landscaping parallel to the rail line may be OK but will need to be located so that they don't interfere with railway operations, including maintenance activities. The same will be true for any proposed pathways. The railroad likes pathways because they help keep people in a designated area outside of the railroad right-of-way, rather than on or right next to the tracks. However, the railroad typically likes to see pathways located at least 25 feet from the tracks or within the outer 10 feet of the right-of-way. Meandering/curving sidewalks also should be avoided.
 - It is important to maintain good drainage conditions in the railway right-of-way.
 - Fences are fine for keeping people from crossing the tracks but they should be placed on both sides of the rail line and they should be tall enough to really discourage people from climbing over them (at least 4-5 feet tall).
 - The City should avoid creating crossings on US 30 that lead to "nowhere" and then encourage people to cross the rail line away from designated crossings. "No trespassing" signage also can be provided to discourage people from crossing the tracks.
 - The railroad supports improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists at designated crossings. It also is important to maintain clear sight distances at these locations. For example, the railroad recommends no signs or plantings that obscure peoples' view of the railway within 250 feet of a crossing. Traffic pre-emption and storage issues also are very important considerations at crossing locations.

6. Streetscape Design Ideas

Tim Strand summarized information from Technical Memoranda #5 related to a variety of streetscape design ideas that may be incorporated in streetscape design concepts to be development in subsequent stages of the project. TAC comments included the following:

- Pedestrian crossings using different paving materials or other strategies can be confusing to drivers. It is important to avoid adding more confusion for drivers.
- Basalt bedrock conditions occur in virtually all of the study area. There are locations outside the study area where this isn't an issue and there may be places within the study area where it is less of an issue. However, the City does not have a map of such locations. Street trees have been planted in some areas in the past but they have to be taken out in locations where they are damaging the sidewalk or creating other problems. *Note: During the subsequent CAC meeting, one of the CAC members suggested contacting the firm that has done much of the City's infrastructure work. Recent contractors have included Landis and Landis and Tapani Underground. Wes Fisher also was mentioned as having done previous excavation work for utility poles in town. Research or reconnaissance associated with stormwater drain line work on Columbia also may be a source of information about the depth of bedrock in this section of the project area.*
- Street tree maintenance also is a big issue. If the City is considering planting street trees, it should consider low-maintenance species. Locust trees have smaller leaves and appear to be good from a maintenance perspective. Drainage within tree wells also is important to consider.
- Although the City's code may say that property owners are responsible for street tree maintenance, the City currently provides a certain level of maintenance. They periodically prune street trees and they water the trees in planters along Columbia Blvd approximately once a week during the summer.
- Vegetated stormwater facilities and/or rain gardens may not be practical if shallow bedrock is present in those areas.

7. Next Steps

Matt summarized next steps again, including the following:

- Conduct meetings with local business and property owners, Planning Commission and other community members (January 14)
- Update Technical Memoranda 1-5 to reflect meetings with advisory committees, Planning Commission, local business and property owners and others
- Begin work on Streetscape Design Concepts (February – March)
- Review the results of that work with the TAC and CAC in March

Matt also noted that the team would investigate options for improving the ability and conditions for ODOT staff to participate in the meeting by phone (e.g., by using "Join Me" or other meeting software).