

Meeting Summary



Washington County
Transportation Futures Study
Exploring options • Informing choices

Study Advisory Committee Meeting #10

Thursday, January 5, 2017

3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Washington County Conference Center, 102 SW Washington St., Hillsboro OR 97123

Members Present

Meeky Blizzard
Loren Behrman
Mark Fryburg
Steve Larrance
Marc San Soucie
Kathy Stallkamp

Bruce Starr
Pam Treece
Jerry Willey
Robert Kellogg
Phillip Wu

Study Team and Staff

Andrew Singelakis, Washington County
Chris Deffebach, Washington County
Dyami Valentine, Washington County
Erin Wardell, Washington County
Jay Lyman, DEA

Bruce Warner, Warner Group LLC
Jeanne Lawson, JLA Public Involvement
Stacy Thomas, JLA Public Involvement
Tom Eiland, CFM Strategic Communications

Welcome, Agenda Review and Study Update

Andrew Singelakis, Washington County Director of Land Use and Transportation, welcomed committee members.

Chris Deffebach, Washington County, reviewed the agenda. She noted that there will be one final SAC meeting after today. She invited SAC members to attend the February Board of County Commissioners meeting where the Study findings, survey results and polling results will be presented. Chris thanked the committee for helping to get the word out about the online open house.

Jeanne asked for any comments on the October 13, 2016 meeting summary. There were none.

Online Open House

Overview

Jeanne Lawson presented a [PowerPoint presentation](#) that reviewed the online open house and results. She reminded committee members that the online open house presented the results of the Study and gathered feedback from the public. It was designed for participation at all levels, from casual to in-depth.

In addition to the notification that has taken place for past online open houses, this event also included a county-wide postcard mailing and prize incentives which significantly boosted participation. Participants overwhelmingly heard about the online open house through the postcard mailer.

5,319 people participated in the online open house. 5,022 said they live in the county and 3,227 said they work in the county. An additional 42 people participated in the Spanish-language only survey. Participation leaned a bit older and wealthier than census data, but there was good participation across the county and among all adult age groups, incomes and ethnicities. An SAC member noted that Asian participation was higher than Hispanic/Latino participation, even though it is a much smaller portion in the county. He noted that we will need to think about how to best reach the Hispanic/Latino population as we move forward.

Participants were asked how they commute; 65% said they drive alone as their primary means of transportation. One member commented that the number of people who said they primarily bike to work seems higher than the Washington County average. Tom Eiland, CFM Strategic Communications, noted that the online open house results are statistically valid based on the numbers, provide good directional information and accurately reflect the opinions of people in the County.

What We Heard

The online open house provided background information and Study results and then asked questions relating to that information to gather informed feedback.

Investment Area Priorities

The online open house asked participants to prioritize seven different investment areas. After reviewing information on each investment area, participants had 28 points to distribute, with no more than 7 points allowed per investment area. Participants rated transit as the top investment area, followed by freeway improvements and bike/ped. A SAC member noted that the result is misleading because transit is a single category and road-related improvements are separated in to three categories (freeway, new roads and arterials). Adding the points given to the three road-related categories puts roads as a higher priority than transit. Another SAC member pointed out that he had suggested separating bike/ped in the online open house, but they stayed together. Another SAC member observed that there is not a big spread among the investment categories, they all ranked closely, so it appears people want to make investments in everything.

The online open house then asked participants which objectives they considered in selecting their investment priorities. The results showed participants ranked improving traffic flow as the highest followed by having transportation options. Safety usually comes out on top in these types of surveys and in this case it didn't.

Support for Funding Sources

The online open house asked participants to indicate their support for four revenue sources. Road user charges and tolling had the least amount of positive support. The online open house asked participants to list ideas for other revenue sources to explore, and the most common responses included:

- Methods for bicyclists to pay.
- Vehicle registration fee.
- Sales tax (general) or a sales tax on purchase of vehicles, EVs, or bicycles.
- Fees/taxes on businesses and/or development that generates traffic.
- Gas tax increases.
- Commercial vehicle and freight fees and taxes.

Reduce Vehicle Trips

Online open house participants expressed a high amount of support for policies and programs to increase telecommuting and ride sharing. There was not a lot of support for tolls or user charges. Open-ended comments expressed support for:

- Increased frequency and destination of transit.
- Expanding or building new freeways.
- Encouraging and incentivizing telecommuting.
- Increased park-and-ride locations.
- Incentivized alternative work hours to reduce commutes during peak hours.

Smart Technology

Online open house participants expressed a high amount of support for using smart technology as a way to reduce the need for widening or building new roads. A fair amount of participants were undecided. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Enhance traffic signal synchronization for vehicles and bikes.
- Employ smart technology to reduce congestion for vehicles and transit.
- Improve transit apps.
- Explore and support autonomous vehicles technology focusing on safety.
- Smart technology and autonomous vehicles are not viable yet.

Transit

Online open house participants expressed a lot of support for transit, without a lot of opposition to increases in bus, MAX, and WES service. There was a fair amount of opposition for investment in transit lanes and transit priorities that reduced traffic lanes. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Need more parking at MAX stations.

- Add express light rail options.
- Transit is not efficient enough.
- Expand light rail and increase frequency.
- Increase safety at transit stops and while riding transit.

Bike/Ped

Online open house participants were pretty supportive of bike/ped investments. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Increase safety for bikes and look for ways to separate bike lanes when possible.
- Explore options for charging bikes a fee.
- Be diligent about enforcing laws for bikes.
- Don't decrease vehicle infrastructure for bike use.
- Use Europe as a model for how bike infrastructure should be integrated into the system.

Arterials

Online open house participants expressed support for most of the arterial improvements suggested, aside from reducing speeds in urban areas. Unlike the bike/ped and transit categories, a greater percentage of respondents said they were undecided or unsure about investments. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Don't decrease speed limits.
- Expand and improve existing arterials.
- Separate active transportation from vehicle infrastructure.
- Add new arterials.
- Avoid expanding or building new arterials.

New Roads

Online open house participants expressed a lot of support and a lot more undecided for all three investment options presented: the North Connector, new roads in rural areas, and new roads in urban areas. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Build or expand roadways, connectors and highways.
- Create connections and address congestion on US 26.
- Address congestion on Highway 217.
- Building or expanding automobile infrastructure will not address issues effectively.
- Preserve and protect natural habitats.

Freeways

Other than HOV lanes, there was more polarization among participants regarding toll lanes and freeway widening. Most common themes from the open-ended comments included:

- Enforce lane speed management.
- Add lanes.
- Restrict freight in HOV lanes 24/7.
- Provide HOV lanes on more freeways.
- Do not toll freeways.

Comparisons

In analyzing the online open house results, there were a number of nuances in how people of different demographics responded. Some of the key comparisons include:

- Baby Boomers versus Millennials
 - Both groups agree on the order of the six highest transportation objectives
 - On funding, millennials had more opposition on each category than boomers. For example, 1/3 of millennials oppose or strongly oppose gas tax versus 1/4 of baby boomers.
 - Both groups gave transit the most points, but differed on other investment priorities. Support for bike/ped investments was higher for millennials.
- Supporters of an increased gas tax versus supporters of tolling
 - Those who said they support both gas tax increases and tolling were also supportive of transit.
 - Supporters of tolling were somewhat more supportive of new roads and freeways.
 - Supporters of an increased gas tax were slightly more supportive of bike/ped and reducing trips.
- Drivers versus active transportation users (primary mode)
 - Drivers prioritized all investment areas relatively closely. Regarding funding, drivers ranked parking first, followed by gas tax, tolling and user fees.
 - Active transportation users prioritized transit, bike/ped and reducing trips. Regarding funding, active transportation users ranked gas tax first, followed by parking, user fees and tolling.
- Low versus high income earners
 - Higher income earners were better represented in the survey.
 - Lower income earners favored non-auto transportation (transit and bike/ped) investments.
 - Road oriented investments ranked higher with higher income participants.
- Minority populations
 - Participants' minority status did not seem to make a difference in how they ranked investment priorities.
 - Transit ranked equal between those who said they identify as an ethnic minority and other overall participants.

- Geographic comparison
 - Results were remarkably consistent across the county, regardless of where participants lived in the county (as analyzed by zone). There was no significant difference between the zones in support for smart tech and bike/ped investments, and only slight differences between the zones in the other investment areas.
 - Participants who live in the western zone expressed a more notable opposition to road user fees than participants from other zones.
 - Transit: There is strong support for MAX from participants who live in areas where MAX currently runs. There is a little less strong support for MAX in zones that are not yet served by it, but still high levels of support.
 - New Roads: Participants who live in the northeastern and west zones expressed stronger support for new roads than participants who live in other zones.

Spanish Language Survey Summary

A Spanish-language survey was conducted with the help of Centro Cultural, who administered the survey and distributed it to Spanish-speakers. We received 42 completed surveys. As compared to the online survey:

- Investments – there is more support for reducing trips, smart technology and bike/ped; transit received the least support.
- Funding – there is more support of tolls and less support for gas tax.
- Objectives – there is less support of traffic flow and more for environment.

Polling

Tom Eiland explained that CFM Strategic Communications will administer a county-wide telephone survey. It will be a representative random survey that is statistically valid. He provided the following survey details:

- Random digit dialing will provide access to the most households. A minimum of 20% of the interviews will be conducted on cell phones.
- Surveying 400 people results in a margin of error of +/-5%.
- The questionnaire will be pretested thoroughly to make sure questions are understandable.
- Interviewers are highly experienced in public opinion research.

Objectives for the telephone poll are to:

- Help complement input from the online open house.
- Determine the importance of plan goals.
- Assess perceptions about how strategies will impact the county overall.
- Determine what conditions generate support for North/South Roadway and Northern Connector.
- Test price sensitivity for improvements and what information may change opinions.

The survey should be completed by the third week in January.

Committee Comments

SAC members asked the following questions about the telephone poll:

- Can the poll ask for registered voter status and political party affiliation?
- Can we clearly define that the preferred route for the North-South Connector is within the urban growth boundary? This is the route that pulls the most traffic off local streets. It will be more meaningful to people if they can see the benefit.
- Can a black and white question be asked about whether participants prefer investment in transit versus roads? If roads are the answer, a follow up question regarding “what kind of roads” can be asked to find out if support is for freeways, new roadways, arterials, etc. If transit is the answer, a similar follow up question “what kind of transit” could dig in to support for MAX, WES, bus, etc.
- Can we ask participants questions about what they think their grandchildren will want? This fits into the 50-year time frame of the study. Tom responded that this type of question was difficult to conceptualize for focus group participants, which means it will be more difficult in a phone survey.
- Because this Study is a 50-year look ahead, and SAC members encouraged the team to try to find a way to get people thinking that far out.

Public Comment

Naomi, Beaverton: Participated in the survey. Her primary transportation mode is biking, and secondarily she uses MAX and walks. Few people brave current bikeways that aren’t safe for them, but are made safe for cars. She referred to the “Who Pays for Roads” report (2015), as it addresses that bicyclists pay for roads through their taxes, but don’t necessarily see benefits for biking. She is on the roads maneuvering infrastructure as it is today, and would like to feel safer. In the future, she would like everyone to feel safe to ride. There are also currently issues for people who rely on motorized wheelchairs. It isn’t safe or easy for them, and they need to get around too.

Ron Soren: He thanked the team and the SAC for all the work that has been done on the Study. He has been in favor of a Northern Connector and a light rail supporter from the early days. He lives and works in this area. When the economy was so bad in Oregon in the 1980’s we welcomed in high tech firms, and that created a high cost of commuting in from other counties. It was the cost of reviving the poor economy we had. Whatever your position, we need to be realistic. When we promote economic investment we need to own up to the costs of commuting. He followed the CRC issue and believes we need some sort of new interstate route. The Northern Connector is a solution. It follows travel shed theory and is not a bypass.

SAC Round Table Discussion

Jeanne asked SAC members for their final thoughts and observations:

- Glad we are doing a freight study as a follow on to the Study, because freight data is not represented here (and wasn't intended to). We need to accept what is here and move forward. We need to look at opportunities to ask additional questions. It is frustrating to worry about how the data presented. It is so much more substantial than what we expected.
- The data is overwhelming. How do we get all of this into a digestible format to be useful to a wide audience over 50 years? Chris noted that the team is working on an executive summary that should help with this.
- The tremendous amount of data is beyond anyone of us to totally comprehend. You can end up in the weeds regarding where the data came from and what it means. This is high level, guiding information. The input we received says that the general population is a lot more enlightened than we give them credit for. The data does say something we need to listen to even if we can argue about pieces of it. It is guiding, not determinative.
- The data is high level and we should focus and recognize this moving forward. Participation was not as diverse we would have expected. Perhaps we should weight what millennials are saying; they are the future and can have very different priorities.
- This is good and helpful information to the County for its TSP update. However, it doesn't really help policy makers anticipate the future in the way I hoped it would.
- Keep an eye on polarization on freeway issues as you talk to the public. As we ask questions, we need to ask some open ended questions to find out where people are coming from. For example, what are the top three issues they face or their community faces?

Next Steps

The final SAC meeting will be held in about a month. SAC members are invited to share comments in person or in writing (no more than two-pages each) which staff will give to the Board along with the Final Report.