

Bend's Transportation Plan: Stakeholder Interview Summary

Prepared for: Project Management Team

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Introduction

Project staff interviewed ten stakeholders for Bend's Transportation Plan in January 2018. Stakeholder interviews focused on members of the public who have been involved in previous City projects and could offer perspective on successful methods, challenges and project risks. The interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes and will inform the development of an outreach approach. The City identified interview participants to represent a range of important viewpoints. Interviews were conducted by Joe Dills and Kristin Hull on January 26, 2018.

Interview Objectives

The purposes of the interviews were to:

- Identify key success factors and challenges for Bend's transportation system
- Understand the processes and engagement tools that have contributed to previous successful City projects or plans
- Understand opinions towards transportation funding, and other funding options
- Identify key community groups, stakeholders, and their communication preferences

Interview Questions

Interviews began with a brief introduction and general discussion of the project. Stakeholders were asked the following questions:

1. Tell us about a city project that you think went well. What did you like about it?
2. What does a successful transportation system look like in Bend?
3. What are the City's three biggest transportation challenges?
4. How do you think the City should fund transportation improvements? What do you think about the current approach?
5. Who/what groups need to be involved in this process?
6. How do you like to participate in these kinds of processes?

Interview Participants

Interview participants included representatives from the following stakeholder groups and interests: health care, real estate, natural resources and land use, engineering, funding of public investments, business and economic development, tourism, active transportation, and higher education.

Interview Summary

Stakeholder comments are sorted into categories based on general themes emerging from the interviews. The bullets reflect the range of comments for each discussion theme.

Success Factors and Challenges for Bend's Transportation System

Stakeholder comments reflect a desire for a transportation system that is safe, with robust multimodal options including a convenient and robust transit system. Interviewees also considered a successful transportation system one that maintains vehicles mobility and access through focused improvements at bottlenecks. Stakeholders recognized that Bend faces challenges as it continues to grow. Stakeholders cited potential for better land use and transportation integration to create opportunities for more people to access community amenities, services, and meeting places without driving. Many stakeholders brought up the need for east-west connectivity generally, and specifically mentioned challenges related to access between downtown and the Central District. Interviewees stressed the need to set clear performance measures throughout the City that will be used to select transportation projects.

Safety

- Safety is a key factor and should be considered as a performance measure
- Safety is important for everyone
- Need well maintained streets (street sweeping in bike lanes)

Mobility and Access

- The plan should focus on multimodal access.
- The plan should not ignore the need to accommodate drivers.
- The City should not reduce arterial speed limits to 35 MPH.
- The public needs to understand the tradeoffs for wider roads and make informed decisions. For example – if we only have three lane roadways, maybe it is not worth it to widen from two lanes except at intersections (for turn pockets). We may need to consider some five-lane arterials.
- The TSP needs to deal with visitor traffic and solutions, not just local traffic.
- Bend's system needs to address regional traffic – many people come into Bend for shopping, dining, school, work. One solution might be park-and-rides on the outskirts of Bend served by buses providing service to OSU, COCC and downtown.
- The City should continue building roundabouts. They are safer and look better (especially the art).
- A successful transportation system will make maximum use of the facilities and modes we have already, and target very specific improvements, focusing on flow and accessibility.
- Parking in downtown is a problem.

Transit

- Public transit is a good idea, but needs to be more self-sustaining, safe and easy.
- The bus system is not attractive to riders who have a choice as it takes too long to access most destinations.
- Not sure how much the City should invest in buses. The might be antiquated technology with AVs and ridesharing.
- There should be transit service to events (e.g. Amphitheater) to get people into the habit of taking transit.
- Voters will struggle to financially support transit because the general public does not know much about Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC) or Cascades East Transit (CET).

Multimodal

- We need a safe, multimodal system, but the system needs to also serve vehicles.
- We need safe, connected bike routes – even shorter trips can feel unsafe.
- The successful system must provide separated paths for biking and walking, and get people out of cars.
- Bike improvements are a double-edge sword because there are strong opinions on both sides. From a bond passage perspective, adding bike lanes is a given. The plan should focus on getting the pro-car vote.
- A successful system will benefit the economy, be equitable for all folks, and provide safe, viable transportation options.

Biggest Challenges

Participants were asked to name the biggest transportation challenges facing Bend. Responses included:

- Keeping up with growth and providing access to Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) expansion areas.
- Identifying funding sources.
- Parking downtown and providing mobility on routes into downtown.
- Connecting the Central District to the Makers District and downtown.
- East-west connectivity:
 - As an example, Franklin Avenue should have an overpass that provides pleasant biking, walking connection between east and west Bend.
 - Need to provide east-west connectivity that does not widen Newport, Galveston or 14th.
- Additional traffic – particularly truck traffic – on 27th Street when Empire connection is complete.
- Creating safe bike routes from all parts of the city into downtown Bend.
- Connecting the high-quality bike infrastructure that currently exists to create complete routes.
- School-related congestion from school siting that is not walk-bike accessible; morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up leads to congestion.
- Working with ODOT to provide for both freight and local needs on the Parkway.
- Cooley Road improvements.
- Identifying a funding stream for maintenance and repair.
- A higher quality transit system with shorter headways.
- Explaining the multiple economic benefits of a multi-modal system. For example, providing for bikes, pedestrians and transit leads to less congestion for people who drive.
- Funding. Oregonians do not want to pay for what we say is important.
- Changing community dynamics. People have different perspectives on growth, especially from relative newcomers who do not always value the greater community good.

Other

- For success, ensure that the community understands the basic what, where, when and why of the project.
- The transportation system should support complete communities in all parts of city, particularly NE/SE.
- We need more pockets of neighborhood-serving retail throughout the community so people don't have to drive as far to meet their daily needs.
- Transportation investments should support land use plan; increase transit access, multimodal options in areas with increased density.
- People need to know congestion is going to get worse.
- Voters are sensitive (e.g. about benefits to them, and the credibility of the City) and bond measures need a good, strategic campaign.

- We should prepare for autonomous vehicles, although they will come to Bend later than other areas.
- A successful system will provide good access to job centers, and move freight through the Parkway.
- The north end has a mix of local trips with regional traffic that need to be addressed with more connectivity.

Processes and Engagement Tools for a Successful Project

Stakeholders cited clear and concise communication as vital to a successful project. Clear performance measures that guide project selection will build community trust and establish accountability.

- For success, ensure that the community understands the basic what, where, when and why of the TSP.
- Set clear performance measures throughout the City and use measures to select projects. Data-based approaches to project selection can correct for historic investment inequity. System planning to meet performance metrics will keep investments equitable and objective.
- The City has used groups similar to the CTAC in the past to get things done and they have had a huge amount of influence in past processes.
- Successful projects have a thoughtful process, but not too much of it.
- Work with ODOT, but don't let them dictate the terms.
- Make sure elected officials are supportive and engaged.
- The general buzz in the community is that this process is an exciting opportunity.
- CTAC will likely work well for people who are members; provide opportunities for those not selected to also influence project outcomes.

Transportation Funding Options and Opinions

Stakeholders shared a wide range of opinions about funding opportunities, but generally agreed that it will be a challenging conversation. Interviewees discussed options for bonding, system development charges, user fees, visitor taxes, and gas taxes. Stakeholders agreed that regardless of the funding option, the City must make a clear, compelling case for the funding need, and clearly explain which projects will be built with the funds.

- Consider Local Improvement Districts and other sources that allow all property owners to contribute to funding transportation improvements in expansion areas.
- The gas tax was voted down because it wasn't well thought out and did not have full council support.
- A gas tax is palatable as a user fee. Property tax is less desirable because all property owners pay regardless of how they use the system.
- It will be hard to sell new taxes until government tightens its belt and shows that it isn't wasting current funds.
- The Council's reputation with the voters will be key; voters must trust the City and the Council needs to be unified in its support for a bond. Trust equals accountability over time. For voters, it must be clear what is in it for them; the benefits must resonate at a personal level. The Parks bond passed because there was a lot in it for a lot of different people.
- Bonds are political which won't drive good decision making about transportation investments.
- Not opposed to taxing residents through property taxes if you can 1) develop a unified vision and 2) define projects that will be built for those tax dollars.
- System Development Charges put a lot of pressure on new development to pay for improvements – the burden should be more balanced.
- The public supports developers paying system development charges to ensure development pays for itself.

- Westside Consortium is a good examples of property owners working together to solve problems.
- City should look at urban renewal as a funding source.
- Gas tax revenues will decline. A system based on other user fees (pay per mile) needs to replace that revenue source. User fees should be established at state level, not locally.
- The City will have to go big on a major transportation bond, but be savvy about the balance and timing because there is a lot of competition for them. For example, CET is going after a transit levy.
- Can we collect revenue from bikes? How does Amsterdam do it?
- Not much local appetite for user fees.
- Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements, per HB 2017, will be important to implement. Bend should have shelf-ready projects in the plan.
- Include a way to have visitors contribute in the funding strategy.

Stakeholders and Community Group Engagement, Communication Preferences

Stakeholders encouraged the City to use Bend's many organizations, business and community groups to engage community members and distribute information. The City should work with organizations, but not cede the process to outside groups. The project team should utilize opportunities for online interactions, but also focus on in-person, localized meetings.

- It will be important that the City owns the public process and does not let the Chamber, Bend 2030 or another group lead the public process; process needs to be perceived as open, transparent and not directed by an outside group. Don't delegate out the process.
- Look to the Chamber and EDCO to provide and distribute information to their members and networks.
- CTAC members should be ambassadors; people will listen to their neighbors.
- Specific organizations to engage include: Land Watch, Commute Options, Neighborhood Associations, Homeowners Associations, CET, School District, Young Professionals group within the Chamber, ODOT, MoveBend, EDCO, Bend 2030, City Club, Building a Better Bend, ADA interests, St Charles, CCOC-OSU, churches, and Rotary Club.
- Engage small businesses at the north end of the City.
- Need to bring people together and have access for everyone – young/old, new residents/long-time residents, drivers/cyclists.
- Specific individuals to engage include: Todd Taylor, Taylor NW; Mike Hollern; Casey Davis (especially on bike issues); Bill Smith; Sharon Smith (School District).
- Include opportunity for regional input, with opportunity to comment by residents from Sisters, Prineville, Redmond. Many commute into Bend.
- Use the NextDoor site; many people read it.
- Use public meetings and open houses because we need civil discourse around these important issues; people need to talk to each other at public, city-hosted forums.
- Use tabling and pop ups at local events, such as WinterFest.
- Charrettes and workshops can help reach older audiences.

Communication Preferences

- Online information: website and council Facebook feeds.
- Use organizations to distribute information via email, websites: Rotary, Chamber, Cascades Business Journal, St. Charles, OSU, Neighborhood Associations.
- Newspapers: Bend Bulletin, The Source.
- Do e-blast informational updates. They are helpful, real time, and readily forwarded to others.
- Bend is still a small town in many ways, so word of mouth is important.

Other Comments

- The Elbow development area is going to be a challenge because developers don't want to build commercial or industrial and there is too little residential capacity to go around. Drafting the subarea plan will be a challenge as it is hard to get developers to agree on a plan to fund infrastructure.
- OSU is the best thing to happen to Bend, but it has created problems that need to be addressed.
- Bend has such a high rate of change that no one has a handle on the baseline – or what will be developed. Between OSU and westside development we are already outbuilding land use assumptions from the UGB process. Some UGB data was as old as 2008 and we cannot base the next transportation plan on that data.