

Bend Transportation Funding Stakeholder Interviews – May/June 2019

HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

The City of Bend is evaluating policies, project priorities and funding options for the community's multi-modal transportation system, as part of updating Bend's Transportation System Plan (TSP). A 25-member Citizen Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) has been meeting for over 14 months to advise the City and contribute to the Plan.

Barney & Worth, Inc. was retained in early 2019 to assist the City of Bend in evaluating options for transportation funding. A component of the work includes opinion research exploring citizens' views on funding options. An initial step is conducting interviews with community leaders and other key stakeholders who have been closely involved with transportation issues and funding options. The results will help identify the best path forward for the City of Bend to provide timely funding for transportation priorities.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted in May and June 2019, in-person and by telephone, with 15 persons who are familiar with Bend's transportation system and funding options. (A participant list and discussion questions accompany this summary).

The report reflects the advice, feelings and attitudes of the individuals interviewed. It is not intended to provide a scientifically valid profile of community opinion as a whole.

Highlights

Key findings from the combined interviews:

1. **Stakeholders are unanimous on Bend's imperative to move ahead with transportation funding solutions.** Close observers remain high on Bend's livability, but are convinced Bend lacks adequate funds to meet its transportation needs, and they support the effort to develop a major transportation bond measure and pursue other funding sources. But these community leaders are still wrestling with the best timing for a bond measure to be placed on the ballot, how much should be proposed, and what the funds should pay for. A starting point is reminding voters of Bend's successful track record of completed projects.

“Stuck in traffic? We need to pay more.”

“Among the lowest property taxes per capita in Oregon. Being among the top growing cities makes this an impossible situation.” “Constrained. Bend has a very low tax rate.”

“Transportation funds are lacking.”

“Bend needs to treat transportation as a utility. Have a TUF and up-to-date SDCs.”

“The disconnect: a large, sophisticated community with small town resources.”

“What were the results of the \$30million bond? The City has a good record of project delivery.”

2. **The project list is important.** Knowing which specific priority projects will be funded in a “balanced program” is thought to be a key to enlisting the broad-based coalition of community leaders it will take to campaign for a bond measure, a coalition that is considered by most as essential for winning voter support. The winning formula, they say, would include both congestion-relief projects and neighborhood and school safety improvements. The two-year TSP process provides authenticity.

“Need to get a true mix of projects – appealing to voters.”

“Let’s place more emphasis on big, busy streets. I don’t find residential streets unsafe.”

“Safety is also a priority – as much as reducing congestion. This is what neighborhoods want.”

“Safety is CTAC’s #1 priority.”

“Honor the community process.”

3. **The leading criterion for deciding project priorities is “connectivity”.** Bend’s shortage of continuous north/south and east/west routes needs to be taken into account when selecting projects. Another key word for many community leaders is “balanced” – but there’s not yet agreement on what the optimal multi-modal mix of projects might look like.

“This needs to be a balanced program that promotes connectivity.”

“Make connections where they don’t exist today. We need more ways to move around.”

“Don’t build around summer – improve connectivity and capacity.”

“A bigger issue is lack of connectivity.”

“More connectivity: E/W and N/S.”

4. **Partnership opportunities can help build a community-based coalition to back a transportation funding measure.** Opportunities to be considered include partnering with Bend-La Pine School District to select and jointly propose school safety projects; with Bend Park & Recreation District to partner on completing bicycle and pedestrian

trails that serve both recreational and community needs; and with the development community on opening up tracts within the UGB for sorely-needed housing construction.

“Initiate a process with the School District to identify school crossing projects.”

“Collaborate with Parks – added value, and an efficient way to augment what’s already been done.”

“Get some trails done – together with the Park District.”

“Bend needs a big investment in transportation infrastructure to support new housing.”

5. **Most stakeholders interviewed want to ensure bicycle and pedestrian projects aren’t left out of the Bend package.**

“Bend has a car culture – but needs alternatives: transit and other travel modes.”

“Make alternative transportation a signature of this community.”

“More people would walk and bike if they felt safer.”

“Walking/biking infrastructure is undervalued in Bend: no sidewalks or only one side; unsafe school crossings; no safe and continuous bike routes.”

“I really don’t know what the issues are – probably a lack of sidewalks to places like schools, parks, jobs, shopping.”

6. **A well-orchestrated communications program will be needed.** Observers say reaching everyone is a challenge and will require starting right away and using multiple communication channels. A positive message is important, too.

“The gold standard is word of mouth – that creates advocates and is most effective for recruiting volunteers.”

“We need to consider all segments of the population (including lower income) and show they are not being unfairly taxed.”

“Be inclusive: make sure every part of town, every group benefits. Add value for the greatest number possible.”

“We must find a way to reach the majority – who will not attend meetings.”

“Build community pride in investing in the future.”

“We should all be out there talking about this now.”

7. **Community leaders are split on two possible strategies for deciding the size of the transportation bond request.** One strategy is to request a smaller amount – less than \$100 million – to build credibility with voters, and with the clear understanding

another transportation bond measure will follow this first *Stepping Stone* in a few years. The competing advice is *Go Big*, seeking voter approval for a larger measure – \$100 million or more – that produces results citywide that every Bend resident can see and appreciate.

“Be ambitious – Bend may have 120,000 people in 10 years.”

“Address baseline projects first. Propose smaller ‘stepping stone’ bonds.”

“Go Big – we don’t want people underwhelmed by results.”

“Go Big – it’s a harder sell, but will get us down the road for 10 years.”

8. **Some observers worry the proposed May 2020 election date may be too soon, others want to move ahead.** Questions are raised about whether work on the Transportation System Plan will be completed in time to select priority projects and conduct effective public education. Others say it is best to move ahead now to get projects underway as soon as possible.

“Seems really soon. I worry about ruining it – this could be our biggest bond measure in history.”

“May 2020 is too soon – it doesn’t leave us enough time for robust outreach. We only get one time at bat.”

“Honestly, if they can hold off it would be better. But May 2020 is doable and has a chance. Get started on something!”

“If we are going to do it, the sooner the better.”

“There’s enough time for a campaign either way.”

“If it’s May 2020, we better get going.”

9. **City Council leadership will be crucial for election success.** Consensus support from Bend City Council and Councilors’ willingness to champion the measure are widely viewed as necessary ingredients for winning voter approval for a transportation bond measure.

“Councilors are officially supportive – it’s in their goals.”

“City Council must lead the public discussion.” “Make sure it’s a thoughtful, well researched rollout that starts with a united front from City Council.”

“Postpone other decisions that require significant political risk (e.g., transportation utility fee).”

“Focus – no distracting controversies (e.g., paid parking).”

“They’ll need backbone. Be ready to make tough decisions, take risks.”

“The situation requires Council to show courage and take risks.”

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PARTICIPANTS

Casey Bergh, P.E., OSU-Cascades

Katy Brooks, Bend Chamber of Commerce, CTAC member

Lou Capozzi, MoveBend, Council on Aging, CTAC member

Tony DeBone, Deschutes County Commissioner, Steering Committee member

Karna Gustafson, Central Oregon Builders Association (COBA), CTAC Co-Chair

Lindsay Hopper, Bend Planning Commissioner, Steering Committee member

Michelle Healy, Bend Park & Recreation

Steve Hultberg, Radler White, CTAC Co-Chair

Hans Jorgensen, Chair – Neighborhood Leadership Alliance

Justin Livingston, Bend City Council

Ariel Mendez, Bend Bikes, CTAC member

Mike Riley, Environmental Center, CTAC Co-Chair

Sharon Smith, Bend-LaPine School District

Ruth Williamson, CTAC Co-Chair

Sharlene Wills, Central Oregon Coalition for Access

Bend Transportation Funding Stakeholder Interviews

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Organization: _____ Email: _____

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

The City of Bend is considering funding options for local transportation priorities. City officials are interested in hearing the views of community leaders on these potential priorities.

For City Council:

1. How long have you been on the City Council, and what interests brought you into elected leadership? Have you been involved in other aspects of City government?

2. What are the programs or issue(s) you care about most?

3. Do Bend voters share your interest or concern about those program(s)/issue(s)?

For Other Stakeholders:

1. How have you been involved with the City of Bend?

2. What's your general outlook on Bend's quality of life? Any pressing issues or concerns?

3. How would you characterize the City of Bend's current financial condition?

Transportation Priorities

The City of Bend is considering a 2020 General Obligation bond measure to pay for transportation improvements. There are several priorities for the bond.

4. One possible priority is to improve traffic flow and ease of travel:

- Build new bike and pedestrian paths
- Fix intersection bottlenecks
- Install or improve roundabouts
- Make better road connections
- Widen roads and add more lanes

What's your reaction? What questions do you have?

5. Another possible priority is to improve the safety of neighborhood streets:

- Add more bike lanes or separated bike routes
- Complete off-street biking and walking trails citywide
- Reduce congestion on major streets so people don't cut through neighborhoods
- Safe routes to schools
- Sidewalk and crosswalk improvements to ensure that they meet Americans With Disability Act standards

What's your reaction? Any questions?

6. Are there are other priorities that should be considered?

7. Are there local groups that might support either or these transportation priorities – improve traffic flow and ease of travel – or improve the safety of neighborhood street?

8. The election date being considered is May 2020. What's your reaction?

9. What things should the City Council consider in making a decision on a funding measure?

Communications

10. What information will be of greatest interest to you / your organization about the transportation funding measure being considered by Bend?

11. What is the best way for the City of Bend to get information to you if a funding measure moves ahead?

12. What's the best way to communicate with voters about funding for transportation improvements?

Wrap-up

13. Are there any other people or organizations you would recommend we contact to get their views on funding priorities for Bend's transportation improvements?

14. Can you offer a single most important piece of advice for the City of Bend as it considers transportation funding priorities?

15. Any further comments or suggestions?
