Meeting Notes

COTOP
Technical Committee Meeting
March 8, 2013
12:30-3pm
Redmond Public Works Training Room, 243 Antler Ave. Redmond

Attendees:
Joni Bramlett (ODOT)
Jim Bryant (ODOT)
Tyler Deke (Bend MPO)
Scott Edelman (City of Prineville)
Karen Friend (COIC/CET)
Pat Hanenkrat (City of Metolius)
Joan Johnson (City of La Pine, OSU Student)
RJ Johnson (RJ Johnson Architecture)
Eric Porter (City of Sisters/Redmond)
Peter Russell (Deschutes County)

Staff:
Scott Aycock and Tamara Geiger (Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council)
Scott Chapman, Oren Eshel and Paul Lutey (Nelson/Nygaard)

Introductions
The meeting attendees gave their names, titles and organizations representing.

Project Status
Scott A. explained the purpose of the COTOP project was to explore the potential outcome of investments in transportation options as opposed to traditional highway investments like road widening and intersection improvements. The proposed 2030 baseline assumed some traffic congestion on each corridor, and the study only considered Central Oregon intercommunity travel not local travel. Scott C. explained that they tried to identify the different multimodal option investments that made sense for each corridor. The two options for investments were transit and vanpool (an additional study of commuter rail feasibility was also included).

Analysis Packages
The project identified four analysis packages: Baseline, Moderate Transit/High Vanpool, High Transit/Moderate Vanpool and Commuter Rail. The main idea was to determine how and what level of investment could change people's behavior. The highest level of investment would be for Bend-RDM because they have the highest commute numbers.

High Vanpool/Moderate Transit Methodology:
Scott asked how they identified any baseline data for vanpools. Oren explained that the assumed baseline for vanpool was zero because they didn't have any comprehensive data. Frequently vanpools are subsidized by an employer and can be offered for free to an employee, which incentivizes riding for employees. Scott E. asked about the cost of the Emergency Ride Home Program (if an employee takes a vanpool into he/she can be picked up and driven home at no cost in case of emergency) that's offered to incentivize vanpooling. Oren explained that in reality the use of the Emergency Ride Home Program is very low. Scott C. continued that it's a great incentive to get riders over the fear of being stranded but in reality it is not used very often and is very low cost (assumed .25 annual uses per 100 participants).

Scott C. explained that within the model, longer corridors that had less existing investment in transit responded to vanpool investment with greater mode shift. RDM-Bend, a shorter corridor with more existing transit, only responded 4% to a high investment in vanpool. Whereas a community like Sisters (actual number of work trips is small), the extra investment brings it up to 5% Sisters-RDM. Oren explained this is because there is still room

for vanpool to fill the market in Sisters because transit use is low. Jim asked whether the project is answering the question of which investment is better, transit vs. vanpool? Scott C. explained that the idea is for comprehensive vanpool and transit investments because they are complementary, and meet different needs.

Oren explained the methodology for determining mode shift based on transit investment (Slide 14). He related that an investment resulting in double the transit service doesn't result in a doubling of ridership – at a certain point the curve flattens out. He also explained that investment in transit results in a mode shift for all trips (vanpool only considers work trips). He explained the table on slide 16, which showed an example of the La Pine-Bend corridor results for moderate transit/high vanpool investment. He explained that the "mode shift" represented the number of increased trips and the "mode split" showed the percentage of trips that are represented by transit or vanpool. He noted that the most significant impact of cutting SOV trips on the long corridor was significant GhG reduction.

High Transit/Moderate Vanpool Methodology
Oren explained the high transit/moderate vanpool investment package. He explained one mistake on Slide 17, that high investment in transit results in a "decrease" in headways, rather than an "increase" as stated on the slide.

Action Item: Change "increase" to "decrease" in headways on Slide 17.

NN showed RDM-Bend as the example corridor since it was identified as more responsive to transit investments (a shorter distance and a relatively high existing transit investment). Scott A. explained that the broader regional connections that the Bend-RDM corridor serves (Bend-Madras or Prineville) are not captured in this study. Scott C. explained that both Moderate Transit/High Vanpool investment and High Transit/Moderate Vanpool investment did not make a large impact on local congestion at the destination (downstream impact).

As a result, NN also completed a "Reach-out" scenario (Slide 19). Since "reasonable" investments didn't make a big difference in mode split, they wanted to know what a 10% mode shift to transit would look like. They did this without estimating the cost. Joni asked why the numbers in the "reach-out" scenario are lower. Scott C. explained that the number of vehicles will be lower because they have been reduced by a great investment in transit.

NN continued to explain that transit and vanpool generally offer cost savings compared to driving. The cost comparisons are the bus fare compared to $.60/mile federal driving rate. Scott E. asked if the cost of driving from Madras-Prineville is really $15. He related that he has calculated it for his car and it's a lot cheaper than $15. NN explained that the federal rate accounts for gas, insurance, and other variable costs. Scott E. explained that he would always have a car and need to pay insurance so it cannot really be counted as a part of the savings. Scott C. and Scott A. explained that the figure accounts for some fixed and some variable costs. They also explained that investments in transit/vanpool result in 1-2% cost savings to all users of the corridor (most people are still driving), and a $1-1.5 million savings by folks switching to alternate modes.

Scott C. explained that vanpool investment can be a cost-effective use of resources. Cost is about $3 per new rider in the High Vanpool scenario and about $5-6 per new rider on transit (transit is more expensive because investment has both capital and operating components).

They explained the large difference between the cost to operate vanpool in the high vs. moderate vanpool scenarios. The high estimate, $280,000 accounts for: a subsidy (35% of fixed vehicle cost), Commute Options rewards, FTE Commute Options, and the guaranteed ride home. The low estimate, $40,000 accounts for: some Commute Options staff to push it and the guaranteed ride home program.

Scott C. also reviewed the potential reduction in VMT from these investments, and how it's harder to estimate the reduction for transit emissions because more research has been done on passenger vehicle emissions. Scott A. asked about the impact of running a natural gas fleet, but Scott C. explained that there would still be emissions.

Commuter Rail

Scott C. presented their findings on the potential for commuter rail from Madras-Bend, with an assumed operating speed of 45mph. Karen commented that since the operating speed is slower than the speed limit, it seems like the mode shift would be small.
Oren explained that they tried to determine the operating costs compared to other systems (assumed operating cost was $833/hr). Scott A. related that in comparison the operating cost of transit is $58/hour. Paul explained that part of the high cost of construction is crossing improvements for the community (identified in a 2009 COACT study) that are not required. Oren explained that in looking at extending the service to La Pine, two trains could get 120 minute headways between Madras-La Pine which is a greater distance penalty compared to Madras-Bend. Scott C. also explained the assumption that commuter rail would charge something similar to the current Community Connector fares.

The consultants reviewed pricing considerations, and how different fees (parking fees, toll roads, etc) could impact SOV travel and interest in other modes. Scott A. explained that the most likely price change would be a state gas tax replacement. Scott C. noted that regardless of the fee, they all raise the price of the trip. Scott A. related that some of them change the way the price is paid by the consumer and consumers may react differently to how they pay for the different types of fees. Oren related that even with a fee most people would not change their behavior. Scott A. said that if a fee existed, a community would have to provide additional transit service to serve the people who wanted to change their behavior. Joni related that with a state gas tax replacement as a funding source, the more people convert to transit or vanpool the less money is made off of the tax.

Analysis Results

Scott C. explained that investment in transit and vanpool is not going to get everyone out of their car. However, investment in transit is essential so people don't have to drive if they don't want to. There is a question of how to quantify the benefits of additional transit when they only result in 2-4% reduction in auto use. Oren gave an overview that investment in transit benefits both transit dependent and potential choice riders. High vanpool investment is generally for the potential choice rider and commuter rail only serves a limited corridor and benefits a limited number of people

Scott C. reviewed the study limitations, primarily that the scope of work focused on intercommunity corridors that are supposed to remain relatively uncongested through 2030. Scott A. asked if this was a study limitation or just a conceptual problem. The capacity constraints are in the towns, not on the corridors. The scope of work on the corridors makes it a regional project but it would that have been interesting for this study to be centered locally because there are more capacity constraints on the local systems. Karen asked if 2030 congestion was assumed when writing the scope of work.. Scott A. explained that yes, since it was based on pre-recession figures, congestion was assumed. Scott C. explained that most similar studies are for larger cities (LA, Seattle) where there are HOV lanes on the corridors. Peter related that in Central Oregon almost all multi-lane facilities are state highways, but that it's the non-highway segments that seem to be the most impacted by congestion. He thought that both corridors and in town segments should have been analyzed and related that the study came from the belief that if everyone got on the bus we could alleviate the traffic problems on a few intersections. However, most of the corridor traffic is through traffic and the investments do not get everyone on the bus. Scott A. related that this study doesn't prove anything for local funding – Peter rebutted that every good study calls for more study.

Oren continued that one of the key findings was the high level of through travel, and that the majority of trips are not Central Oregon intercommunity. Jim asked about the Bend-RDM corridor during peak hours. Oren replied with examples: 60% during peak hours is Bend-RDM, only 21% Madras-RDM all day is intercommunity. Scott asked if there was always a peak in the intercommunity traffic during peak hours. Oren related that no, it is not consistent, and Scott related it back to the CET transit schedule. There was an assumption that peak transit hours would be normal commuting hours, but it hasn't always worked out that way.

Scott A. asked if ODOT would be satisfied that they had reviewed the potential for commuter rail and can demonstrate that it has been considered. Jim explained that the cost is more than just high and it's just not that convenient. Peter added another operating component that fixed route at the destination is required, otherwise commuter rail is worthless. Oren explained that because the baseline is 2030, fixed-route in RDM and Bend is assumed. Everyone agreed that rail is too expensive and inconvenient to be feasible.

Scott E. explained his understanding that one of the goals of the project was to see if we can avoid highway projects by investing in vanpool/transit. Jim related that since we're not spending money on highways, it's not a trade-off anymore. Scott explained that we don't have a clear answer to how much money should be designated for different types of projects. Now it's just adding to a balanced transportation system. Three potential outcomes from the project include:

1. Investments provide mobility options at a lower cost
2. 'x' investment in transit can save 'y' hours in road projects - can't get that number. Still need to weigh mobility improvement cost vs. the cost of transit
3. Investment type is more of a geographic consideration – concentrate transit on high demand areas and/or long-distance

Scott C. asked the group to contribute some policy implications or anything that should be considered for follow-up analysis and investigation:

- Maintain balanced transportation investments (traditional plus multi-modal investments)
- Concentrate transit investment on high demand and/or long distance connections
- Revisit regional vanpool programs - provides benefit for relatively low cost
- Better use of Drive Less Connect - carpooling is more common than vanpooling
- Study how establishment of fixed-route service (at destination) supports carpooling
- Build similar methodology into local transit master plan exercises - how could investments in transit impact congestion in certain local intersections?
- Pricing study - how does pricing become an effective TDM program? (The REAL cost of driving needs to be more visible)
- Study benefits of transit priority. Impact of taking priority measures (transit lane, cutting ahead at lights, etc).

Next steps

Scott A. explained that he will add some COTOP information into RTMP stakeholder meetings that will be held over the next two months and see if there are any additional ideas or thoughts. He explained that the study most likely does not have the same policy implications as the Regional Transit Master Plan as far as implementation. Scott C. suggested changing some of the 'potential policy implications' into challenges in order to maintain the plan's relevance.

Scott A. thanked the technical committee for their service and adjourned the meeting.