

WEST EUGENE TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

INTRODUCTION: Transportation planning for the West Eugene area has been a long and complex process. This material has been developed to provide information for League members so we can be better informed on transportation issues in and around the West 11th Avenue corridor in west Eugene, Oregon. It describes three planning efforts focused on mobility problems in that area:

- 1) Lane Transit District (LTD) is working to extend an EmX bus rapid transit line to a West Eugene corridor and has undertaken an Environment Impact Statement process to evaluate routing and other options.
- 2) The West Eugene Collaborative, composed of 27 community members, issued a report in March 2009 on the set of recommendations it developed to address, transportation, land use, and environmental problems in and around west Eugene.
- 3) The City of Eugene is conducting a West 11th Avenue Corridor Study. A September 2009 draft provides recommendations in the areas of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, safety, access management, traffic signal operation, intersection improvements, and funding options.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: West 11th Avenue from downtown Eugene to Green Hill Road is a significant transportation facility that needs major improvements to enable it to function effectively and efficiently. The corridor served by West 11th Avenue includes large commercial developments, industrial uses, a growing residential population, and valuable natural resources.

The portion of West 11th Avenue that is east of Beltline Road is under the jurisdiction of the City of Eugene (City) and is designated as a major arterial from Beltline Road east to Garfield Street and a minor arterial east of Garfield. West of Beltline Road, the road is under the jurisdiction of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and is a state highway (OR 126) and a designated Freight Route.¹

Traffic volumes on West 11th Avenue range from 22,000 to 28,000 average daily trips, while the nearby West 6th and 7th Avenues each carry approximately 25,000 to 30,000 vehicles per day. The posted speed limit on West 11th Avenue varies from 20 mph in downtown Eugene to 55 mph west of Terry Street. The roadway has various configurations including a two-lane segment with no sidewalks or bicycle lanes, a five-lane roadway with sidewalks and a nearby bike path, and a one-way segment with two to three traffic lanes.²

Numerous transportation problems exist, particularly west of Chambers Street. The rate of collisions at five intersections raises safety concerns. 3 Access driveways are found in greater numbers and with closer spacing than are appropriate for a designated arterial. 4 Transit vehicles experience delays that result in poorer, slower service for bus riders and higher operating costs for LTD. 5

Sidewalks are missing or inadequate in some segments. Dedicated bicycles lanes are not provided along West 11th except for one stretch between Terry Street and Danebo Avenue-Willow Creek. However, west of Garfield the Fern Ridge bike path parallels West 11th Avenue, and there are bike lanes on five north-south roadways that intersect West 11th Avenue (Danebo Avenue - Willow Creek Road, Bertelsen Road, Bailey Hill Road, Seneca Road, Chambers Street). Deficiencies in existing facilities include the lack of connectivity from the Fern Ridge Path to West 11th Avenue and unsafe conditions at the interfaces between cars and bikes at grade-level street crossings. 6

1. BUS RAPID TRANSIT

WHAT DOES THE TRANSPLAN SAY? The West Eugene EmX Extension is proposed as the third Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project for LTD. The BRT strategy has its roots in Trans Plan (The Eugene-Springfield Transportation System Plan). As long ago as 1992, the Lane Council of Governments began work with the cities of Eugene and Springfield, Lane County and Lane Transit District to update transportation planning for the Metro area. The Oregon Department of Transportation, Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Agency, the Cities of Eugene and Springfield, Lane County, and hundreds of citizens participated in developing TransPlan, which was adopted in 2001.

The following information is from the July 2002 edition:

Relevant policies in TransPlan include reduced reliance on automobile use, nodal (mixed use) development so services are close to residences, Transit-Supportive Land Use Patterns (i.e., higher density, transit-oriented development along major transit corridors and more transit stations), transit improvements and BRT.

Why BRT rather than light rail? The Urban Rail Feasibility Study Eugene/Springfield Area (July 1995) concluded that "projected 2015 ridership for an urban rail system was too low to be competitive with other cities seeking federal rail funding; and BRT could significantly improve transit service for substantially less capital investment and lower operational costs than urban rail." As an LTD staffer commented in an interview, from the federal perspective, Portland is a small light rail city.

Elements of a BRT system include: dedicated facilities (exclusive transit lanes, transit ways, signal priority) to bypass auto congestion; improved transit stops and stations with shelters and lighting; easy-to-board low-floor vehicles; prepaid fares; and neighborhood connectors. TransPlan lists BRT specifications in some detail, including elements like service frequency every ten minutes.

The primary improvement over regular bus service is faster travel time (BRT has priority by extending green traffic signals, and the dedicated lanes mean fewer delays). Buses come more often than on regular routes, and passengers don't have to learn a schedule. The system is easier to use -- bicycles and wheelchairs can be brought directly on board -- and fares can be prepaid (beginning with the Gateway corridor). There are fewer stops, but in future corridors there will be connector bus service in residential areas.

TransPlan envisions a 20-year BRT development to 61 miles of corridor. The downtown Eugene to downtown Springfield BRT, which is operational, was the first link because it forms the backbone of the transit system. The Springfield City Council recommended the Gateway segment, now under construction, as the second route. It will loop around by Riverbend. For the third route, the Eugene City Council recommended the West Eugene Extension after the West Eugene Parkway was taken off the table. Beltline and Coburg Road segments were also suggested in the original plans.

WHAT IS THE WEST EUGENE EmX EXTENSION? In the Fall of 2006, the Eugene City Council and the LTD Board of Directors selected the West Eugene corridor as the third BRT segment. The West Eugene EmX (pronounced "M X") proposes to implement improvements generally focused on east-west travel. The purpose is to develop "high capacity" transportation service in the West 11th Avenue area with a route of approximately seven miles. The objective of the project is to improve customer convenience by reducing travel time, increasing service reliability, helping to accommodate future travel growth by increasing public transportation travel and supporting LTD's and the City's sustainability policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Several alternatives have been proposed for routes from the Eugene Downtown Station including: West 6th and 7th Avenues with travel to West 11th by way of Seneca or Garfield/Chambers, 13th Avenue to West 11th, and an Amazon Creek route.

WHAT IS THE EIS PROCESS AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT? The West Eugene EmX Extension is expected to receive significant federal funding and thus must satisfy requirements of the National Environmental

Policy Act (NEPA). An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared and will consider the potential costs, benefits, and impacts. The EmX project is currently in the Alternatives Analysis (AA) phase in preparation for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In this phase the team performs an in-depth analysis of each alignment alternative.

The potential impacts and benefits will be studied for the following: transportation, land use, air quality, operating and maintenance costs, hazardous materials, fish ecology, energy and sustainability, financial system and various other categories. In the AA/DEIS study the team collects data and information about existing conditions and future plans. LTD is meeting with property owners and businesses along the alignment alternatives. The results of the analyses will be summarized in the AA/DEIS Document and made available to the public and agencies for review and comment.

The Draft Environmental Impact Study will be completed by mid 2010. The Lane Transit District Board will then solicit public input on the draft through a series of public events before selecting a “locally preferred alternative” for EmX in West Eugene. It is important to note that a “no build” option will also be included in the report. The project committees will recommend and the Metropolitan Policy Committee, the Eugene City Council, and the LTD Board will adopt the locally preferred alternative based on the DEIS and public/agency comment.

The conclusion of the EIS process will occur when the Federal Transit Administration issues a Record of Decision (ROD) in the Federal Register publicizing its final decision on the EIS. The ROD will select one of the analyzed alternatives, including possibly the “no build” alternative. The ROD is the culmination of all the previous steps in the process including public comment and recommendations by local jurisdictions.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT BE FINANCED? The funding sources for the West Eugene EmX Extension are divided into two categories: the Current Alternative Analysis Phase and the Project Development/ Construction Phase. Because the route alignment has not yet been determined, there is no firm estimate for the project. The funding plan for the West Eugene EmX is a combination of federal and state grant funds, which will not need to be repaid.

The funding sources for the Alternative Analysis Phase are drawn from the Federal Transportation (FTA) 5339 Alternative Analysis in the amount of \$1,548,300. This funding is to assist in financing the evaluation of all reasonable modal and multimodal alternatives and general alignment options for identified transportation needs in the EmX corridor.

In addition, FTA 5309 Bus and Bus Facility funds in the amount of \$1,886,300 will assist in financing capital improvements in public transportation service. Finally the amount of \$858,600 in LTD local funds will be used to provide matching funds.

A very rough figure of \$75,000,000 has been used as an estimate for the Project Development /Construction Phase. The federal funds come from the FTA 5309 Small Starts which will assist in the development /construction of fixed guide-way systems. At most, it is estimated that these funds would pay for 80% of the total project cost. Although the Gateway EmX Extension received 80% of the funding from FTA and Connect Oregon (a state program that is funded by lottery bonds and is intended for non-highway transportation projects), LTD believes that West Eugene EmX Extension will most likely receive 60% of the project cost or about \$45,000,000. The State Lottery Funds (lottery-backed bonds) will provide the remaining \$30,000,000 for project development and construction. These lottery funds are the matching funds for the Small Starts Funds. According to LTD, the Legislature approved the first installment of this (\$1.6 million) during the last session. LTD will seek the balance of the lottery funding in future sessions, as there is strong support for the commitment of lottery funds.

HOW WILL WE BE AFFECTED? HOW CAN WE PARTICIPATE? In an interview, Rob Zako, who is a member of both the West Eugene EmX Extension Corridor Committee and the West Eugene Collaborative, said he has heard a lot of community concern around possible routes for the West Eugene EmX Extension. Close in neighborhood associations have already impacted potential routings (although changes made to address their concerns seem not to have lessened the opposition of some). Businesses, environmental groups and bicyclists have concerns as well. He believes the "multi-way boulevard" concept on West 11th will take a long time because it will require redevelopment for more density and multistory buildings. The EIS will be the key document.

LTD staff note that including the impact of the "no build" option will be critical, to show what will happen as traffic density increases. The closure of Hynix may have provided a respite, but as that property and others in the Willow Creek area are occupied and operating, traffic will increase. Residents of West Eugene and areas west of the City will not be the only ones feeling the effects in time delays, more accidents and air quality.

HOW CAN WE BE INVOLVED? When the EIS is completed in mid-2010, public hearings will be held. The Steering Committee's meetings are and have been open to the public, but there is not always an opportunity for public comment. There are many ways to have a voice:

- * Email LTD at we.emx@ltd.org.
- * Check the website for meeting information and to sign up for e-newsletters at www.weemx.ltd.org.
- * Write to P.O. Box 7070, Eugene OR 97401.
- * Call (541) 682-6100.
- * Schedule a guest speaker to give an update to a neighborhood, business, organization or other group by calling Cosette Rees at (541) 682-6143.

2. WEST EUGENE COLLABORATIVE

A CITIZEN GROUP: The West Eugene Collaborative (WEC) was formed after the West Eugene Parkway project was terminated by the Metropolitan Policy Committee in 2006. Members of the collaborative include people who work, own businesses, recreate or reside in the west Eugene area as well as representatives of government agencies and other organizations.

The WEC recommendations are the culmination of two years of discussion, analysis, and consensus. One major conclusion is that no proposed solution to traffic problems can be implemented without broad support. Because the WEC is merely a forum without any governmental or implementing authority, its recommendations are only advisory. Since issuing its report in March 2009, members of the WEC have made presentations to over 30 groups including local governments, state agencies, business associations, and community groups.

The recommendations are organized under the framework of eight broad principles:

1. Improve Efficiency of the Transportation Network
2. Increase Public Transit
3. Enhance Pedestrian Paths and Bikeways
4. Intensify Development Appropriately
5. Relocate Some Land Uses
6. Enhance Open Space/Natural Resources
7. Enhance Natural Watershed
8. Enhance Appreciation and Connections to Natural Resources

This paper focuses on the transportation – related recommendations.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS (by the end of 5 years): To achieve traffic congestion relief on West 11th Avenue in the short-term, the WEC recommends way-finding and intersection upgrades to encourage higher use of two local alternative routes:

- An “inner” alternative route connecting from Highway 99 near the Big Y, east and west along 5th and 7th, and via Bailey Hill to

West 11th Avenue, and

- An “outer” alternative route connecting from Highway 99, east and west along Roosevelt Boulevard, and via Beltline to West 11th Avenue.
- Enhancement of these two routes would be accomplished primarily within their existing rights of way.

The WEC also recommends the following studies:

- Develop and implement a community design process to test the multiway boulevard vision for west Eugene.
- Complete a Highway 126 safety and mobility study (as proposed by Senator Prozanski and Representative Holvey).

The WEC recommends the following along West 11th Avenue:

- Enhance public transit service.
- Improve traffic signalization.

The WEC recommends the following actions to be taken to improve the safety and efficiency of alternative modes of transportation:

- Construct safety improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle paths throughout the corridor, with particular focus on safe connections and improved signage, to and from the Fern Ridge Path.
- Add striped bicycle lanes along 5th Avenue and 7th Place as part of alternative route development.
- Construct significant crossing improvements at Oak Patch and City View on the Fern Ridge Path such as bicycle underpasses or other appropriate improvements.
- Increase the number of bikes that LTD vehicles can carry to further facilitate the bike/transit interface in the short term.

Much of the WEC study area lies within the City of Eugene, and several current city initiatives may result in the implementation of some WEC recommendations, primarily the short term ones. Relevant city activities include the West 11th Transportation Corridor Study (described elsewhere in this report), the Eugene Transportation System Plan Update including Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, Eugene Comprehensive Lands Assessment, potential council adoption of access management regulations, coordinated planning with LTD for the West Eugene EmX extension (described elsewhere in this report), and coordinated planning of traffic improvements with the Oregon Department of Transportation.

MEDIUM AND LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS: The medium and long term recommendations have implementation time frames of 10 year and 20 years, respectively. Their goal is to phase in land use, transportation and environmental components to achieve the vision of a “multi-way boulevard” in the West 11th corridor.

The multi-way boulevard design consists of three “realms”:

pedestrian, transit, and through going. These areas would be separated from each other by medians. The model envisions a large pedestrian realm that consists of a sidewalk, trees, and a local access lane that also serves as a bicycle lane and as storefront, on-street parking. The transit realm provides a dedicated right-of-way adjacent to the pedestrian realm for rapid transit. The through-going realm provides a mid- to higher-speed thoroughfare with minimum access. The vision also includes multi-story mixed-use developments between the multi-way boulevard and the Amazon Creek.

Achievement of the recommendations will require amendments to the City of Eugene's land use code and significant expansion of the public right of way. Thus, it is expected to occur gradually over many years and as properties are redeveloped.

3. WEST 11th AVENUE CORRIDOR STUDY

A September 2009 draft of this study was prepared by outside consultants for the City of Eugene. The report presents analyses and short-term strategies to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities, corridor safety, access, signal timing, and traffic operations. The work was done in the context of the policies and projects found in the Central Lane Regional Transportation Plan. Recommendations include the following:

1. Construct the 17 suggested pedestrian and bicycle improvements in order to provide connectivity between the Fern Ridge bike path and West 11th Avenue, reduce conflicts with vehicles, and provide continuous and direct routes. 7
2. Consider closure, consolidation or modification (such as restriction in some turn movements) of access points such as driveways which are adjacent to intersections. 8
3. Install traffic separators and medians in selective locations to improve safety and enhance operations. 9
4. Implement new coordinated traffic signal timings between City View and Terry Street in order to reduce vehicle travel times, delays, and stops.
5. Improve intersections by constructing additional lanes at the intersections of West 11th with Seneca Road, Bailey Hill Road, Beltline Road, and Terry Street.
6. Consider implementing supplemental system development charges to assist in funding short-term improvements.

END NOTES

1. DKS Associates Transportation Solutions, West 11th Corridor Study, p. 1. 42.

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2. Ibid., p. 8
3. Ibid., p. 1
4. Ibid., p. 2
5. West Eugene Collaborative, A New Vision for West Eugene, p10
6. DKS Associates Transportation Solutions, West 11th Corridor Study, p. 26
7. Ibid., p. 26
8. Ibid., p. 39
9. Ibid., p. 43

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- Eugene City Council Agenda Summary for August 12, 2009 Work Session on West Eugene Collaborative Recommendations
- Lane Transit District, Connecting the Community brochure
- Lane Transit District, Funding Pie Chart for West Eugene EmX Extension
- League of Women Voters of Lane County West Eugene Transportation Update, February 2010
- Lane Transit District West Eugene EmX Extension section of the EmX portion of LTD's web site www.ltd.org. Articles titled "West Eugene EmX Extension Project Home," " West Eugene EmX Extension Project Description," and "West Eugene EmX Project Get Involved" were downloaded on various dates.
- Lane Transit District Meeting on September 18, 2009 with LTD staff members: Cosette Rees, Tom Schwetz, Director of Planning and Development LTD, Stefano Viggiano, Assistant General ManagerLTD.
- Piercy, Kitty and Mike Eyster, "The Next EmX line needs a different kind of conversation," The Register Guard, July 8, 2009.
- West Eugene Collaborative, A New Vision for West Eugene, March 2009

Committee: Carol Hildebrand, Kathy Ismail, Joyce Andrews, and Pat Hocken. Thanks to Fred Andrews for technical assistance.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to the outside readers who reviewed this report: Rob Zako, Cosette Rees

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do we need a West Eugene EmX? Do you think the proposed project meets the needs of our growing community, supports economic development, and reduces greenhouse gases?
2. Many concerns have been expressed: the impact along a possible

Amazon channel route; impact to the value, access and operation of businesses along West 11th; reduction of parking spaces near some businesses; possible impacts on residences, natural environment and historic properties; and possible impacts on bike paths. What would you suggest as ways to mitigate these concerns? Do you think they are serious enough to scuttle the project?

3. How can LTD engage the public in a conversation about the future of the West Eugene Corridor based on accurate information?
4. Do you think the Eugene-Springfield Metro area is ready for less reliance on cars?
5. How far out does a planning window make sense- 10 years? 20? 30?
6. How, if at all, should LWVLC be involved in the Environmental Impact Statement process for the West Eugene EmX Extension?
7. Are there other transportation projects which are needed in West Eugene in response to current and projected traffic problems?

From the list below, select all that are needed and your rationale.

- a. Improvement and greater use of "inner" and "outer" alternate routes to avoid travel on West 11th Avenue.
- b. Improved traffic signal timing and safety upgrades at intersections on West 11th Avenue.
- c. Improvements to bike and pedestrian facilities in the West 11th Avenue corridor.
- d. Multi-way boulevard and mixed-use development.
- e. Other.