



Oregon Coastal Notes

Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association

June 1, 2004

Glimpsing the Future of U.S. Highway 101 — Onno Husing, Director, OCZMA

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Concerns Raised About U.S. Highway 101

Two years ago at OCZMA we asked local government officials on the Oregon coast to support having U.S. Highway 101 designated an “All American Road”—the top tier category of the



McCullough Bridge, Florence, Oregon

Scenic Byway Program. We thought getting support would be a no-brainer. After all, in 1997 coastal communities supported having Highway 101 designated a National Scenic Byway and that led to millions of dollars of federal grant money to improve the Highway 101 experience (e.g., kiosks, viewing platforms, brochures, marketing). Most important, the Scenic Byway designation did not usher in a federal takeover of land use planning for lands surrounding U.S. Highway 101 as some feared.

But, after we sent letters to coastal jurisdictions explaining the All American Road opportunity, we received some unexpected phone calls and emails. People questioned, “Why are we doing this? Traffic is already choking U.S. Highway 101 in the summer. Is it wise to attract even more people to the Oregon coast?” Many comments came from the North coast where traffic volumes are greater in the summer than other regions of the coast. And, let’s face it, every tourist community has a love-hate relationship with tourists.

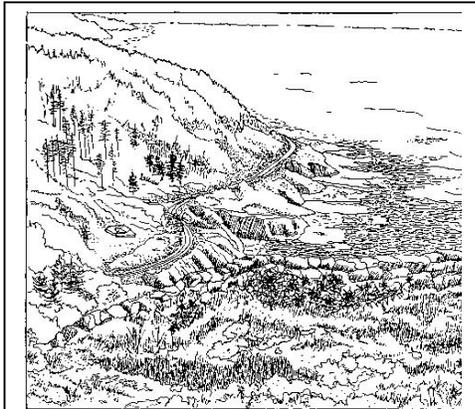
In the end the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) designated U.S. Highway 101 as an All American Road. The exercise, however, was revealing. We learned that many people on the Oregon coast believe U.S. Highway 101 is close to reaching a breaking point (at least in the summer). The future may happen sooner than we think. This summer and fall many areas of the Oregon coast are likely to experience a sharp spike in traffic volume because of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Commemoration. Clatsop County, the northern most county on the Oregon coast, is ground zero for the Lewis & Clark activities.

Past Efforts to Deal with U.S. Highway 101

Concerns about the functionality of U.S. Highway 101 are not new. Back in the 1980s ODOT approached coastal communities about developing stretches of “parkways” on the Oregon coast. ODOT pitched the parkway concept as a demonstration project. Parkway were proposed as four lane facilities—two lanes in each direction separated by a median. Some of the main features of the parkway concept were limited highway access and greater landscaping and vegetated buffers designed to be aesthetically attractive.

Many coastal communities did not want a parkway within their jurisdiction. People feared a limited access highway would hurt the local economy by denying highway access to businesses. In the end, only one parkway was built on the Oregon coast; the Lincoln Beach Parkway, a two-mile stretch of parkway in Lincoln Beach in Lincoln County dedicated in 1989. After the Lincoln Beach Parkway was constructed, the accident rate on that stretch of U.S. Highway 101 plummeted, just as ODOT predicted. Today, the Lincoln Beach Parkway provides an outstanding opportunity for traffic on U.S. Highway 101 to sort itself out.

Then, in 1992 ODOT launched the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan*—the first comprehensive corridor planning effort undertaken in the State of Oregon. The 101 corridor master plan exercise grew out of several policy directives including: the federal ISTEA requirements, the Transportation Planning Rule (TPR) promulgated by the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), the 1992 Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) and the 1991 Oregon Highway Plan (OHP). OCZMA helped ODOT carry out the ambitious project. According to the Executive Summary of the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan*,



**Proposed
Oregon Coast Highway
Corridor Master Plan**

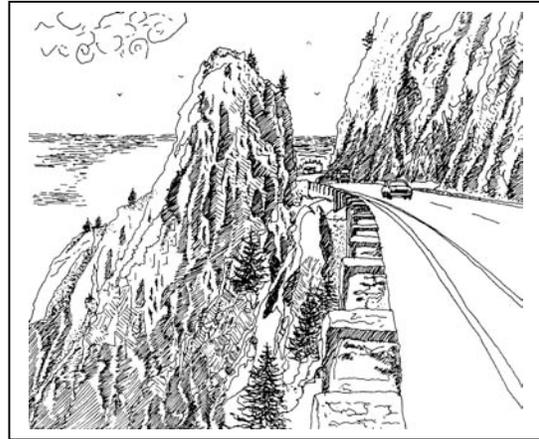
Oregon Department of Transportation
January 1995

...the Oregon Coast Highway Corridor was chosen for the first corridor planning effort because of the great need to improve transportation service in the corridor and the simultaneous need to recognize and protect the scenic resources along the Oregon coast.

Under the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* U.S. Highway 101 was divided into 62 segments. The central vexing issue was (and remains) that U.S. Highway 101 serves as both a main street and as the major north-south means to move people, goods and services. Community input was solicited and a baseline of information was established for existing and planned land use, natural resources, visual resources and transportation on the Oregon coast. The effort underscored that U.S. Highway 101, along its 350-mile corridor, has different features and challenges. The *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* was directed at two main audiences: (1) it provided direction on transportation investments for the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), and (2) it served as a guide for local jurisdictions as they developed local Transportation System Plans (required under the TPR).

Interestingly, the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* was never formally adopted by the OTC. However, it did serve to inform a number of other local transportation system planning and ODOT project planning efforts along U.S. Highway 101.

After the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* process concluded in 1995, the OTC recognized the dialogue with coastal communities needed to continue. In response, the Coastal Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (CPACT) was formed. CPACT and several other regional/local transportation committees (the Medford area, the Mid-Willamette area and the Portland Metro area) were successful endeavors and a pre-cursor to ODOT's current efforts to partner with local governments. As a result, today, virtually the entire State of Oregon is blanketed by ACTs (Area Commissions on Transportation) which now provide local/regional input to the OTC about the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

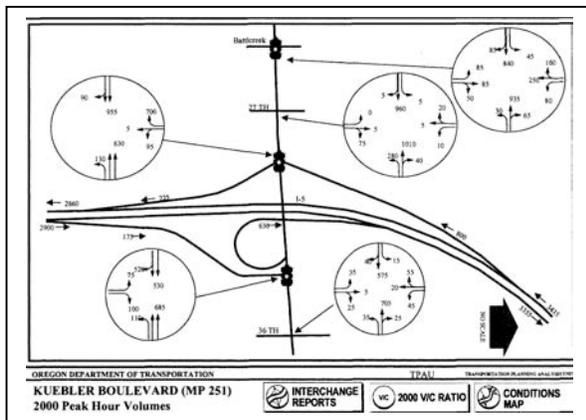


Tillamook County—Highway 101

The “Conditions Report”: ODOT Staff Develops a New Reporting Tool for Planning and Problem Identification

Looking back, the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* succeeded at establishing a dialogue between coastal communities and ODOT. And, a lot of good information about U.S. Highway 101 was assembled. However, the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* did not provide much practical technical guidance for how to solve U.S. Highway 101's problems. When the effort concluded in 1995, Oregon entered an extended period where funding for highway modernization became scarce. Additionally, during the last decade, ODOT had to spend many millions of dollars just keeping the existing U.S. Highway 101 intact. Indeed, many of the famous McCullough bridges built during the 1930s required refurbishment, and, several catastrophic landslides on U.S. Highway 101 (Arizona Inn, Hoosknaden, Cape Cove, and Cape Foulweather) illustrated the fragility of sections of U.S. Highway 101.

Then, in the late 1990s, ODOT began a corridor planning effort on another of Oregon's most important transportation corridors—the I-5



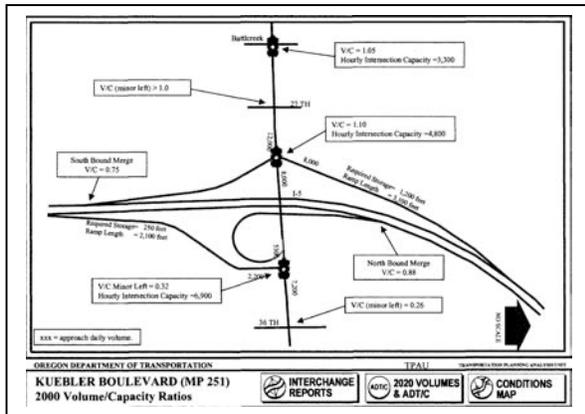
From ODOT I-5 Transportation Conditions Report

Corridor. Terry Cole, a Transportation Planner at ODOT involved with that project explained, “We began the I-5 Corridor Plan with the intent of producing a plan that would provide solution recommendations based on sound and thorough technical analysis. However as we completed the analysis of existing and forecast conditions, our budget was cut short.” Terry Cole continued, “Rather than shelving the effort, we determined that we could, instead, produce a new planning tool for ODOT, something we called a transportation conditions report. The idea behind the transportation conditions report

was not to recommend solutions, but, rather to make quality, consistent information available about where highway conditions were a problem, or where they would be a problem, if no action was taken over the 20-year planning horizon.” Terry Cole explained,

“This, in turn, provides ODOT and our partners with a technical, comparative need basis for determining where best to make our next solution planning or project development investments. In a sense, it is like triage in an emergency room, but for the highway. When your needs are greater than your resources, you have to decide what it most important to take care of first.”

With this new product defined, ODOT and its contractor (CH2M Hill) began compiling all of the data and analysis for I-5 that had been produced thus far and started organizing it in an electronic format using Adobe Acrobat. Terry Cole recalled, “When we began the process of looking at I-5, we had many different data sets in ODOT generated by different departments.



There were crash data, traffic counts, pavement conditions, land use information, geometrics of the roadways, bridge data. We brought all this information together in a common electronic format using Acrobat, a program that most computer users have access to and that we could distribute for free with the report. But rather than just copying the files into Acrobat, we also took advantage of its ability to link information and made the conditions report interactive by enabling a user to navigate from section to section from maps to text and back.”

From ODOT I-5 Transportation Conditions Report

The I-5 Transportation Conditions Report was completed in 2000 and was ODOT’s first interactive conditions report on compact disc (CD). It is important to note that a conditions report is not a plan for the highway. It is just a comprehensive set of current and forecast data that is intended to help determine where planning and project development needs are greatest and a means to understand the nature of existing problems or forecasting potential problems.

ODOT is Preparing a Conditions Report for Highway 101

Work on a U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report is now underway. A first draft is scheduled to be complete next summer. Because it has been four years since completion of the I-5 Transportation Conditions Report, the U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report is expected to be a significant technological improvement over the I-5 effort. For instance, the I-5 report was only published on CD and was not made available through the Internet. In addition, while it used information from ODOT’s emerging Geographic Information System (GIS), a set of databases that can display geographic information graphically, the I-5 Report was not a GIS product. It is merely a set of static files and images linked using Adobe Acrobat software. Both of these drawbacks will be addressed in the U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report. This report will also incorporate zoning maps, tax lot information, geologic information, terrain maps, and highway access information. Unlike the static maps provided by the I-5 report, the U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report will offer several pre-set maps series that can be modified by users to add or subtract data sets and create custom maps to aid problem identification and analysis of specific issues. Because the report will be linked to ODOT’s central GIS system, people can access periodic updates for CDs and real-time updates.

Understanding the Value of a Conditions Report

Paul Mather, ODOT's Region 3 Manager, helped me understand what a conditions report for U.S. Highway 101 could mean for coastal communities. Region 3 encompasses the Southern Oregon coast and 168 miles of the I-5 Corridor from Douglas County to the California border. Paul Mather shared, "In Region 3 we use the *I-5 Transportation Conditions Report* constantly. It was especially helpful when we geared up to do the bridge repair work on I-5. Condition reports are much more practical to use than traditional Corridor Plans. Using the aerial photo displays and the operational analysis already performed, we analyzed, for instance, our interchange capacity. We had a ready-to-use data base with all the important elements organized."

Paul Mather continued, "The local governments are using it too. For instance, Wal Mart wanted to build a store in Central Point. Because of the information in the *I-5 Transportation Conditions Report*, Wal Mart and the City were readily able to understand deficiencies in the existing system that would need to be addressed if the store went in." Paul Mather explained, "It was invaluable to have a shared data base which no one questioned. Conditions reports can serve as screening devices for the private sector. Companies looking for sites can use the *I-5 Transportation Conditions Report* to quickly determine if a property meets their needs. The Conditions Report helps them understand, early on, whether it is likely that they can afford the required road or intersection improvements. That's invaluable information for both the private and public sector."

Indeed, one of the most exciting aspects of a conditions report is that it includes forecast transportation operation system analyses at intersections, interchanges, and along the highway mainline that are based on forecasts derived from land use plans and historic growth rates. As mentioned previously, the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* will also include highway access and zoning information. ODOT and cities and counties can better comprehend the impacts of future growth along the full corridor, furthering Oregon's ongoing effort to integrate land use and transportation planning and make better choices about prioritizing future planning and project development.

I asked Paul Mather what he learned about the I-5 Corridor in Region 3 from the *I-5 Transportation Conditions Report* that he didn't already know. Paul Mather responded, "I would have never guessed we would not need to provide additional mainline lane capacity for most of I-5 in Region 3. And, I did not know we would need to add a truck climbing lane at Roberts Mountain (south of Roseburg) in the near future. Because of the *I-5 Transportation Conditions Report*, we started the process of getting the Roberts Mountain project into the STIP before Roberts Mountain begins impacting traffic flows and safety on I-5. Those are two big things that come to mind."

I then asked, "Paul, should ODOT perform condition reports for the entire highway system?" Paul Mather replied, "I don't think so. Conditions reports are most helpful for corridors where the greatest opportunities for future growth exist. So, you don't need a full-blown conditions report for corridors passing through timber lands or public lands where growth is unlikely."

What Will the Conditions Report Tell Us About U.S. Highway 101?

As I interviewed people I asked, "What do you think we will learn about Highway 101 through the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report*?" That, of course, is an unfair question. The whole point of doing a conditions report is to unearth new facts and perspectives

about U.S. Highway 101, subtle but important things we don't already know. But, we can speculate about what kinds of things we will learn by preparing the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report*.

- *How Do Local Transportation System Plans (TSPs) Relate to the Overall Highway 101 Corridor?*

During the late 1990s, after the *Oregon Coast Highway Corridor Master Plan* concluded, many coastal cities and counties prepared TSPs, which are required under the Transportation Planning Rule (TPR). In October 2003 at DLCD's annual meeting of coastal planners, one of the local planners asked, "How do all our local TSPs fit together when you look at the entire U.S. Highway 101 corridor?" That was a great question. No one had an answer. I volunteered that ODOT was going to prepare a conditions report for US Highway 101 and that will help us learn a lot about U.S. Highway 101 and how local TSPs impact U.S. Highway 101. There was a lot of interest. I recently spoke with Bob Cortright of DLCD, a principal author of the TPR, to learn more about the connection between U.S. Highway 101 and the local TSPs. Bob Cortright reviewed the coastal TSPs as they were developed. Bob Cortright sighed and said, "Highway 101 is a many splendored thing."

Bob Cortright continued, "I like the work ODOT did on Highway 101 in the late 1980s where it was recognized U.S. Highway 101 is really a very different highway at different places along the corridor." He elaborated, "For instance, the section between Coos Bay and Florence is a real working highway. It can readily move truck traffic and other traffic. In contrast, you have sections of Highway 101 like the area between Yachats to Florence where you can't really widen the highway. What do you do there? And, with future development, traffic problems will only get worse over time between Newport and Lincoln City. That's a real challenge."

Bob Cortright stated, "The TSPs prepared by coastal jurisdictions call for a range of transportation projects. These projects, like the replacement of the Yaquina Bay Bridge in Newport and the McCullough Bridge in Coos County, vastly exceed what can realistically be accomplished." Bob Cortright continued, "Has anyone added up what all these projects in the TSPs would cost? We have to get real about this. What are our real strategic choices? What happens when the revenues to carry out these projects are not there? We developed TSPs without considering any financial constraints." When I explained that ODOT was beginning to develop a conditions report for U.S. Highway 101, he commented, "Well, it could be a way to force people to deal with the harsh realities of limited budgets." Indeed, I expect the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* will alert us to existing problems and forecast future problems we aren't even aware of today.

- *Defusing Ticking Time Bombs Under U.S. Highway 101*

Mike Long of ODOT, a geologist-engineer by training, has valuable observations about the conditions report and U.S. Highway 101. I first met Mike Long during the Cape Cove Slide when U.S. Highway 101 was closed for a month between Yachats and Florence. Mike did a great job leading the ODOT repair effort for the Cape Cove slide.

He offered that the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* should be



seen as part of a larger ODOT effort on “Asset Management.” Mike Long said, “ODOT Director Bruce Warner has been very proactive. He wants ODOT to be a leader in accountability.” Mike Long continued, “Why is Bruce so interested? Well, I think it’s because he served as Region 1 Manager in the past. That’s valuable experience. And, when we learned 400 bridges in the State of Oregon needed to be repaired or replaced, it came as a shock. Bruce Warner wants ODOT to be in a position where we don’t have any more surprises like that.”

Asset Management is a national trend sparked by the Government Accounts and Standards Board (GASB) in 1997. Today, due to the GASB guidelines, many states and localities voluntarily conduct Asset Management studies for all infrastructure because their bond ratings are directly influenced by these assessments.

Mike is especially interested in the status of culverts along U.S. Highway 101. An aging dysfunctional culvert under U.S. Highway 101, or any other roadway, is a ticking time bomb—especially during high rainfall events. If a hillside can’t drain because of a plugged culvert, the chances of hillside failure increase dramatically. Indeed, there is strong evidence the slope failure at Cape Foulweather was caused by insufficient drainage.

Mike Long commented, “For the last 20 years we have been so focused on delivering the STIP, we made the Maintenance Section shoulder this burden. They have had to deal with this after the problem became acute or after bad things happened, like slides.” Mike Long continued, “We have documented 4,000 culverts under U.S. Highway 101. Many culverts need to be diagnosed to see what kind of shape they are in. That’s not always easy to do. Sometimes we have to send in camera equipment down through the culvert. And today, we are also examining the soil properties where a culvert is located. The soil information and hillside characteristics are being integrated with information about the status of deterioration of a culvert.”

Mike Long is excited that all that geology and soils data will be added to the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report*. Mike Long explained, “We will be able to put all this information together and create a matrix which compares the immediacy of the problem, the risk of slope failure, the economic consequences of an interruption of traffic on Highway 101, and the availability of alternative routes. This will be a big step forward.”



Readers of *Coastal Notes* may recall last year we reported the hillside just North of the Cape Cove slide on U.S. Highway 101 looks like a future land slide waiting to happen (see photo to the left). A failure of the hillside at that location could take out the entire roadbed. That scenario would create an even worse situation than the Cape Cove slide. Mike Long shared that Region 2 Manager, Jeff Scheick, committed \$150,000 to research of that fragile hillside. As a result, today, a geotech consulting firm has

instrumentation embedded into that hillside (inclinometers) to provide the data ODOT needs to understand what needs to be done to stabilize the hillside. Ben Franklin, the author of the aphorism, “A stitch in time saves nine”, would be pleased.

The Big Picture: OTC Launches Update of the Oregon Transportation Plan

The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) has established a Steering Committee of thirteen individuals to prepare an updated *Oregon Transportation Plan* (OTP). The previous OTP was issued in 1992. OTC Commissioner Gail Achterman chairs the Steering Committee. I have the

OTP Steering Committee Members	
13 members	
Gail Achterman	OTC member, Chair
Bruce Warner	ODOT Director
Craig Greenleaf (alternate)	TDD Division Administrator
Lori Sundstrom (alternate)	Chief of Staff
Mike Burrill	Burrill Real Estate, Medford
Pat Egan	Port of Portland
Onno Husing	Director, Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association
Ellen Lowe	Ecumenical Ministries
Jim Lundy	Professor, Oregon State University
Mike Marsh	ODOT Finance
Mike McArthur	Sherman County Judge, Area Commission on Transportation, Chair
Mary Jane Rose	Mayor, City of Haines
Tom Schwetz	Transportation Program Manager, Eugene/Springfield MPO
Ethan Seltzer	Director, School of Urban Studies and Planning, Portland State University
Duncan Wyse	Director, Oregon Business Council

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honor of serving on the Steering Committee. Several subcommittees will report to the Steering Committee. These subcommittees include: the Mobility and Economic Vitality Policy Committee, the Safety and Security Policy Committee, and the Sustainability and Transportation Policy Committee. The OTC hopes to issue a draft of an updated *Oregon Transportation Plan* for public comment in December 2004.

It's hard to overstate the influence of the OTP to the State of Oregon. Under Oregon law, the OTP sets the basic policy framework for all decisions the OTC makes about which projects to fund on the STIP. Unlike many other states where transportation decisions are made formally or informally by the state legislature, in Oregon, the OTC makes those decisions in collaboration with ODOT and their local government partners. The OTP provides guidance to the decision making process as Oregonians grapple with how to invest in the transportation system over a twenty year planning horizon. As such, U.S.

Highway 101's future will be directly influenced by the policies enumerated in the OTP update.

It's too early to project what the OTP update process will be. And, I am only one member of the Steering Committee. But, I am impressed with the caliber of people serving on the Steering Committee and the Subcommittees and the quality of the dialogue.

The Brave New World of Globalization

The Steering Committee held its first orientation meeting on February 13, 2004. OTC Commissioner Gail Achterman began the meeting by praising the *1992 Oregon Transportation Plan*. She suggested the OTP update process should begin with the *1992 OTP* and look for some modifications. The major policy focus of the *1992 OTP* was developing a multi-modal strategy. The *1992 OTP* forged an integration between land use and transportation investments, which didn't exist before 1992.

The February 13, 2004 meeting was marked by several outstanding presentations about transportation trends. I found Bill Wyatt's (director of the Port of Portland) presentation, the most compelling. Bill described the challenges facing the Port of Portland. His remarks are relevant to anyone doing business in the State of Oregon. Bill Wyatt said, "There's a new

business model today called ‘just in time manufacturing’ and ‘just in time delivery’. Goods and services move rapidly across the globe. As a result the cost component of transportation is now catching the attention of CEOs and transportation costs are becoming a central component of locational decisions. That was not true twenty years ago.” In this brave new world supply-chain logistics have become dominant considerations.

Bill Wyatt described the Port of Portland’s major competition—the huge container ports of Seattle, Tacoma and Long Beach. Looking concerned, Bill Wyatt remarked, “In this business, size matters to attract services. We are barely big enough to compete. We are in a desperate struggle to stay relevant, so we need to be smart in what we do.” Bill Wyatt believes the Port of Portland can compete because: (a) they are located on the I-5 corridor, (b) the two major railroads (the Union Pacific and the Southern Pacific) have rails extending east from Portland, and (3) PDX, the Port of Portland’s international airport, is a quality facility.

Bill Wyatt used the automobile business to demonstrate how globalization impacts commerce. He shared, “Today, when you order a car at a Dealer, in most cases that car has not been built yet. There is no big parking lot somewhere with thousands of cars waiting to be purchased. You specify what features you want. The Dealer places an electronic order with the factory and then the factory begins building your car.” Wyatt continued, “A short time later your car is placed on a ship or train and it speedily reaches a distribution hub. The car is then trucked to the Dealer.” The growing importance of overnight mail and package service delivery is another feature of this new business model. To be competitive in business these days, you not only need reliable broadband telecommunications, but you also must have access to reliable overnight mail and package services. The explosion of Internet commerce has accelerated this trend.

It was frightening to learn how time-sensitive international and national commerce has become. Today, businesses calculate transit times of their products in hours, not weeks or days!

To me, the implications of these global trends are clear. If the State of Oregon fails to make adequate transportation investments to keep goods and services moving through the state—Oregon cannot compete. The impact of not investing in the transportation system would be particularly great on the non-metropolitan communities that rely on highway transportation to maintain economic ties to the metropolitan areas and the world. Freight mobility has taken on much greater importance.

The Steering Committee Elects to Undertake a Major Re-write of the OTP

At the last Steering Committee meeting in Portland on May 7, 2004, a consensus emerged that a fundamental re-write of the OTP is needed. I don’t sense any Steering Committee members favor rolling back the connection between land use and transportation forged under the 1992 *OTP*. From my perspective, two major themes are emerging:

(1) The operations of the existing transportation system must be improved to squeeze more capacity out of the existing system. The greater emphasis on operational efficiencies is a growing trend in transportation circles around the country and the developed world. And, thankfully, exciting new technologies can help ODOT achieve those efficiencies. For instance, cost-effective wireless technologies coupled with state-of-the-art transportation system models will enable the tracking of all vehicles so congestion can be anticipated and mitigated before it happens. The 1992 *OTP*’s original emphasis on forging a seamless multi-modal transportation system in Oregon remains relevant in 2004.

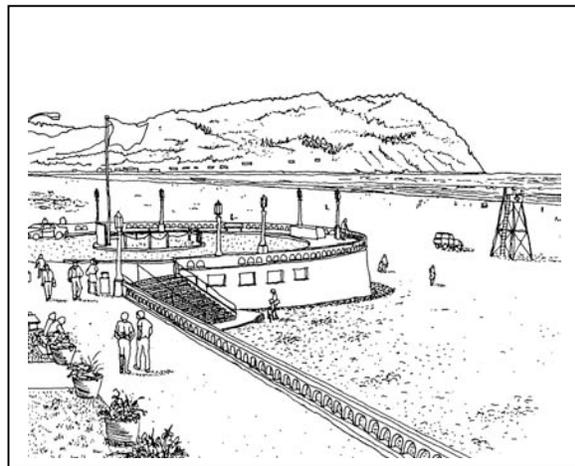
(2) And, as part of a balanced transportation policy, when the State of Oregon modernizes the highway system, it must do so in a thoughtful and creative way. One school of thought holds, “We can’t build our way out of this congestion issue”—especially in urban areas. An alternative school of thought holds, “We must build new facilities to reduce congestion as the population grows, but we must do it more strategically if we are to succeed.”

I believe the State of Oregon is on the right track. Oregon, so famous for innovative public policy, is adapting to global change. The groundbreaking work of the Oregon Business Council (OBC)—*The Oregon Business Plan*—is a good example of how business and government leaders in Oregon are rethinking how to improve the business climate without sacrificing Oregon’s reputation as a livable state. One can anticipate other economic development planning efforts at a regional scale to follow. The Oregon Economic & Community Development Department’s (OECDD) new strategic plan is an adjustment to globalization. For instance, OECDD’s program to have “shovel-ready” certified industrial sites available to businesses interested in expanding or locating in Oregon reflects the accelerating pace of business. Brand Oregon is a leap forward in marketing the State of Oregon nationally and internationally. The Governor’s Office of Rural Policy, a cabinet level office, is about to be established. Other states with Rural Policy Offices (e.g., North Carolina and Texas) have found these offices to be valuable. Oregon’s initiative to streamline the regulatory process and take a hard look at Oregon’s Higher Education system are other examples of needed reform. The Oregon Legislature addressed transportation funding needs by passing OTIA (the Oregon Transportation Investment Act) 1 & 2. And, in time, I predict the OTC’s update of the OTP will be among the most important strategic initiatives undertaken during this era.

Yes indeed. There is nothing like a deep, painful and protracted recession to challenge assumptions and spark needed change.

Circling Back to the Future of U.S. Highway 101

Coastal communities have an enormous stake in these outcomes. If coastal businesses can’t move people and goods and services back and forth from the I-5 Corridor, that will hurt the coastal economy. Mike Burell, a respected businessman from Medford who serves on the Steering Committee, made a profound observation at a recent Steering Committee meeting. Mike Burell commented, “Some of the biggest bottlenecks for rural Oregon are on I-84 and I-5 in and near the Portland Metro Area. If rural Oregon can’t get its products through the Port of Portland in a timely manner, we will suffer.” Indeed, it’s time to view the entirety of Oregon’s transportation infrastructure as a single integrated system. So, here on the coast, we should appreciate that our prosperity hinges on modernization projects like the Newberg-Dundee bypass going forward.

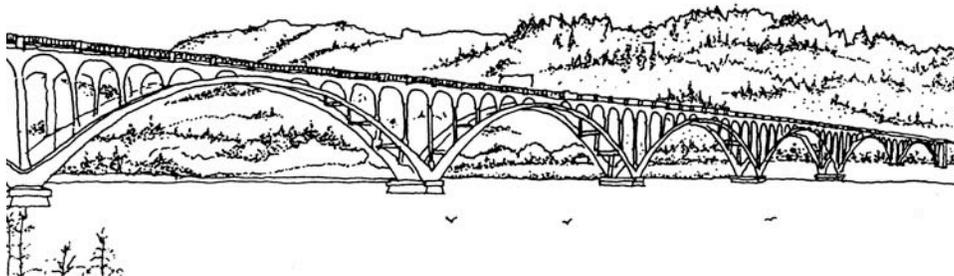


Seaside Turnaround

The demographic and economic trends on the Oregon coast are disturbing. Like many rural areas in the United States young people with families are forced to leave our region. This has a direct impact on school enrollment/finances and the vitality of coastal communities. And, over the last ten years, the middle class on the Oregon coast has declined. Today, a third of the Oregon coast's 200,000 residents are one paycheck away from financial disaster.

Having a functional U.S. Highway 101 and connector routes to the I-5 Corridor are cornerstones of a larger strategy to improve the coastal economy. This is not just about highways. The four rail corridors to the Oregon coast from the Willamette Valley are also terribly important. Regional air service for the Oregon coast is vitally important. Over time, if U.S. Highway 101 and the connector routes to the I-5 Corridor become less functional because of seasonal congestion, regional air service and rail service may play a greater role. And, our coastal ports could serve as gateways for specialized barge traffic which can take pressure off the highway system. Increasing usage of advanced telecommunication technologies should diversify the coastal economy and maybe reduce the need for commuting. At present, bus transit on the Oregon coast is segmented into local districts, largely serving the senior population. Future strategies for U.S. Highway 101 are likely to include a greater integration of local transit facilities to provide workable north-to-south transit options for residents and visitors to the Oregon coast. And, the development of arterial routes within coastal cities, called for in many local TSPs, could keep some local traffic off the main highway.

Placed in this larger context, the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* takes on great significance. It will help us understand the true nature of these challenges. The *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* won't provide answers to these challenges—it's just a report that will define our understanding of the nature and magnitude of these challenges. After the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report* is completed, its results will be shared with coastal communities and the ACTs. At that time the task before us will be to: (1) review and digest the facts presented by the *U.S. Highway 101 Transportation Conditions Report*, (2) renew the discussion about what we want Highway 101 to be, and (3) determine how to apply new policies codified in the OTP, the Oregon Highway Plan, and ODOT's other modal plans (rail, bicycle, transit, etc.) to U.S. Highway 101.



McCullough Bridge—Gold Beach, Oregon