



# Oregon Coastal Notes

Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association

June 2010

## *Solving Big Problems in Tillamook County: A Case Study of the Intersection of U.S. Highway 101/Route 6 & Other Successes* *Onno Husing, Director, OCZMA*



Most of the time U.S. Highway 101 functions well. Bottlenecks, though, are popping up in some coastal communities that have an impact on large sections of the corridor. The bottlenecks are happening because the highway serves as the *main street* and the major *north-to-south* route, and, it was built when cars and trucks were smaller and traffic counts were lower.

Looking ahead, we should be deeply concerned. You don't need to have a transportation planning degree to understand we've *got* to make strategic "improvements" to U.S. Highway 101—*especially* within cities.

The modernization of the highway is not a new thing. In many places the original highway was replaced with a *bypass*. However, when it came to the coastal cities, the business community often spearheaded opposition to bypasses. Today, only one city along the U.S. Highway 101 corridor on the Oregon Coast has a bypass—the City of Cannon Beach, and, most love it.

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) no longer has the resources to build bypasses around coastal cities. Consider these sobering facts. Bypasses cost between \$40 million to \$50 million *a mile*. That cost estimate comes from the Newberg-Dundee Bypass discussions. Why does it cost so much? Permitting, legal fees, public process, engineering, right-of way-purchases, construction materials, labor, and two new interchanges. A bypass around a coastal city will probably need to be five or six miles long. Do the arithmetic. *Conservatively*, a five-mile long bypass will cost between \$200 million and \$300 million (probably more).

Even if ODOT had funds for bypasses, the environmental, engineering, permitting and political issues facing bypass projects on the Oregon Coast would be daunting.

The implications are clear. To keep U.S. Highway 101 functional, as population increases, mobility must be maintained *through the downtowns*. At the same time, downtowns (main streets) need to be pedestrian and business friendly. Juggling those objectives will take leadership rooted in pragmatism.

*Download this Case Study at OCZMA's web site: [www.oczma.org](http://www.oczma.org)*

## Are Couplets One Answer?

One way to increase mobility in downtowns is by building a **couplet**. That's when **a highway is split up** into two **separate one-way routes**. Couplets can be built without tearing down large



numbers of buildings because a side street is converted into a one-way highway route. Couplets provide **two new lanes** of highway capacity. (*And, don't we wish Conde McCullough, the brilliant engineer who built the Oregon coastal bridges, made those structures four lanes instead of two?*)

On the Oregon Coast (along the U.S. Highway 101 corridor) three communities have couplets: (1) North Bend, (2) Coos Bay, and (3) the City of Tillamook. Astoria, which borders the Oregon Coast, also has a couplet through its downtown. In Brookings, a couplet has been under consideration for well over ten years. Another way to improve mobility, of course, is to **widen the highway** along the existing alignment to make more lanes.

Widening a highway or building a couplet is a wrenching experience for a community. It entails major impacts on select property owners/businesses. Impacts often include the loss of parking, access restrictions to the highway, exposure to more traffic or exposure to less

traffic, and, in some cases, the acquisition of property and the relocation of businesses. Impacted parties must be dealt with fairly through a transparent process, and, they must be adequately compensated. Angry property owners can put enormous pressure on local government officials. If a local government locks up, a project can get delayed for years or killed outright.

In this case study we describe how one city on the Oregon Coast—the City of Tillamook—may have figured out how to do this right. But, the City of Tillamook didn't go it alone. They got tremendous help from ODOT, the Tillamook County Commissioners, and their state senator, Betsy Johnson. It's been a **team effort**.

If things stay on track, what will be accomplished in Tillamook will benefit the entire region. The story is worth telling because it demonstrates how to get things done in this tough fiscal, regulatory, and political environment.

## U.S. Highway 101 and Route 6—A Gnarly Intersection



Decades ago, in Tillamook, a couplet was built to enhance mobility through the downtown. Please, though, don't confuse **downtown** Tillamook, the **older** part of town on high ground, with the low-lying flood-prone areas north of the downtown. Alas, over time, the couplet in Downtown Tillamook is rapidly becoming dysfunctional. Here's why.

Downtown Tillamook is *not* a large area. Three important roads converge in the downtown (see photo below: (1) **U.S. Highway 101**, (2) **Route 6** (an east-west corridor connecting Tillamook County to Portland, and (3) **Route 131** (from the west, the “Netarts Highway” which terminates at 3rd Street). In Downtown Tillamook, there are four signalized intersections with one-way streets spaced a short distance from each other with narrow travel lanes (only ten feet wide).



*Photo courtesy of ODOT/CH2M Hill*

As a result, motorists have to zigzag in different directions, negotiate narrow lanes alongside trucks, and make sharp turns with little time to get their bearings. No wonder accident rates in and around these intersections are among the highest in the state.

### ***Senator Johnson Brings Home the Bacon***

In the State of Oregon, Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) serve as stakeholder committees where local officials and ODOT staff hammer out regional priorities for transportation funding. The recommendations ACTs develop carry great weight with the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) and legislators. On the North Coast, NWACT (the Northwest Area Commission on Transportation) has responsibility for Tillamook, Clatsop, and Columbia counties and Western Washington County.



*Shirley Kalkhoven*

To get the history of the intersection project in Tillamook, I called the Mayor of Nehalem, Shirley Kalkhoven and Chair of NWACT. Shirley’s been active with NWACT since it was founded in 1999. Shirley said, “At NWACT, for Clatsop and Tillamook counties, the first priority was fixing the bottleneck in Seaside—the Pac-Dooley project.” She continued, “Priority #2 was improving the intersection of U.S. Highway 101 and Route 6 in Tillamook.” Shirley sighed, “When the voters in Seaside rejected Pac-Dooley, fixing downtown Tillamook became Priority #1.”

Here’s where the story gets *really* fascinating. Shirley recalled, “During the 2009 Legislative Session, a transportation funding package was in the works in Salem.” Shirley chuckled, “I will never forget it. I got an urgent call from Betsy (State Senator Betsy Johnson). She told me this time around the Legislature is going to earmark projects, you know, like they do in Washington State.” Shirley explained, “Betsy needed to know, *right away*, which project should go in the

bill. It was an easy call. It was the intersection in Tillamook.” In HB 2001, \$27 million dollars was set aside for that project.



Later, I spoke to Senator Johnson (photo to left) about HB 2001. Senator Johnson explained, “HB 2001 was *rife* with earmarks. But, it was the *only* way to get a bill. Look, we had to do something. Each year these projects get more expensive.” I asked Senator Johnson if, in hindsight, she had reservations about the earmarking process. Betsy replied, “No, absolutely not. Again, it was the only way to get a bill. Each project came from a list of well-known vetted local/regional priorities. All the projects address mobility and safety.”

### ***Working Towards Consensus—Getting People Involved***

By 2009, a lot of foundational work on that intersection in Tillamook had already been accomplished by the City of Tillamook.



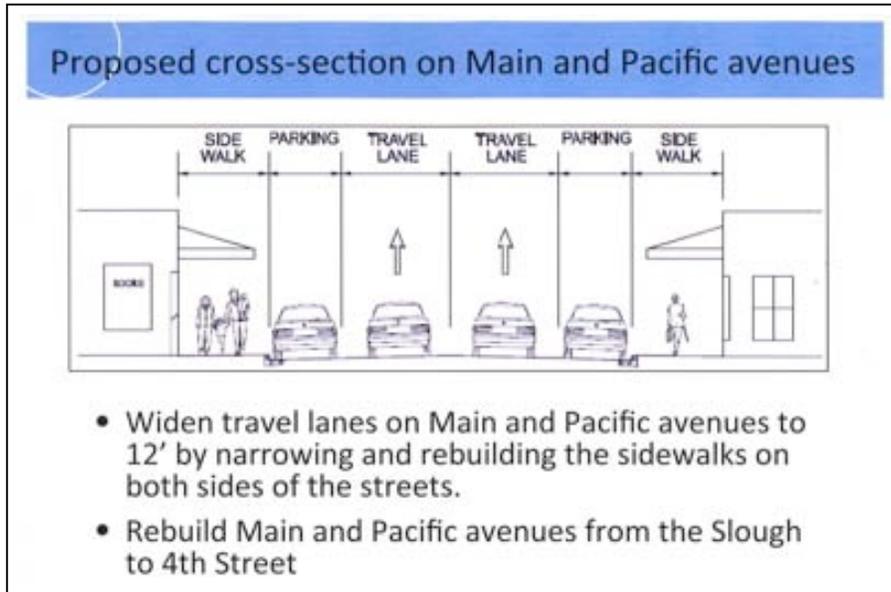
The first milestone was reached in 2003. That’s when the City of Tillamook completed its Transportation System Plan (TSP). In Oregon, from a procedural perspective, to move transportation projects forward, you’ve got to be in conformance with the Transportation Planning Rule (TPR). The TPR, adopted in 1991, integrates land use decisions and transportation. The surest path to conformance with the TPR runs through a local TSP. For Tillamook, the TSP identified safety and operational issues at these intersections (including safety for people driving or walking and traffic congestion).

Mark Gervasi, City Manager of Tillamook, explained how this came together. Mark noted, “The City Council understood we should try to do the downtown improvements at the same time the intersection was getting fixed.” Mark underscored the importance of a \$20,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Land Conservation & Development (DLCD). The City used that money in 2006 to hire a consultant to pull together an Urban Renewal District (URD) proposal. Mark noted, “The consultant pulled together the documents and interacted with other taxing entities. As a result, the other taxing entities understood the impacts on their revenues. By the fall of 2006, there was almost *no* opposition. The City Council adopted the urban renewal district by ordinance.”

That’s impressive. Sometime, efforts to establish urban renewal districts can spark *ugly* local battles. Here’s why. Taxes are involved and people in the community may disagree with what the city plans to do with the money.

Mark Gervasi continued, “Because of the urban renewal district, we now have a wonderful tool to do the financing to get the downtown improvements done. Eventually, the City will be in a

position to fund the integrated traffic improvements identified in 2006 in the TTRP (Tillamook Transportation Refinement Plan); things like re-configuring sidewalks, curb extensions, creating off street parking.” The City of Tillamook will also be in a strong position to pursue other grant sources (like Enhancement Grants) to purchase street furniture and other amenities to make attractive streetscapes in the downtown.



Positive outcomes in Downtown Tillamook are already happening. A private developer is busy remodeling the Oddfellows Building. Recently, I was given a quick tour of the building. On the first floor they were putting the finishing touches on an attractive public market (opened officially on June 14, 2010). The second floor, which also has tremendous potential, will be converted into office space and a banquet facility.

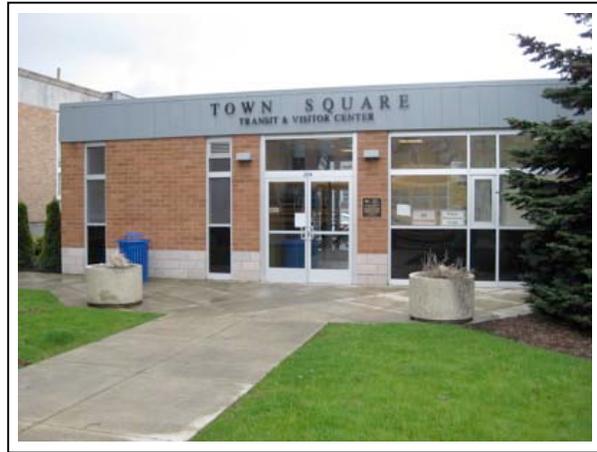
This investment in the downtown makes sense. Consider this. The City of Tillamook is located only **74 miles from Portland**—a short drive (much of it through the Tillamook Forest). Mark Gervasi and I talked about OCZMA’s effort to brand the Oregon Coast as an ideal place for “***lifestyle entrepreneurs.***” The concept is based on the premise that, because of broadband, people can live and work anywhere. And, today, entrepreneurs are searching out high-amenity rural communities like the Oregon Coast. Mark commented, “That idea really fits into where this community would like to see itself going. Let’s talk to the City Council about doing a workshop to get those ideas circulating in the community.”



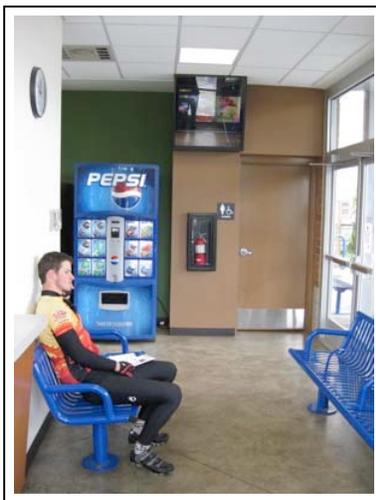
Doug Henson in Oddfellows Building

As Mark and I talked it became clear to me the City of Tillamook has had ***a string of successes.*** For example, the City worked with ODOT and the Safeway Corporation to relocate Safeway’s store out of the flood-prone area. That new store opened in 2006. Nearby, there’s a beautiful new library building, new bank and new credit union.

**Tillamook US 101/OR 6 Alternatives Study Web Site:** <http://www.tillamooktraffic.com>



And, in 2006, the Tillamook County Transit & Visitor District secured a \$550,000 *ConnectOregon* grant to build an impressive new transit center (photos above) in downtown Tillamook. The total cost of the project was \$780,819. The City of Tillamook and the Tillamook County Transit & Visitor District provided the remainder of the funding.



The City donated the land next to Town Hall. The Transit Facility (photo at left) has a public restroom and a dry/warm terminal.

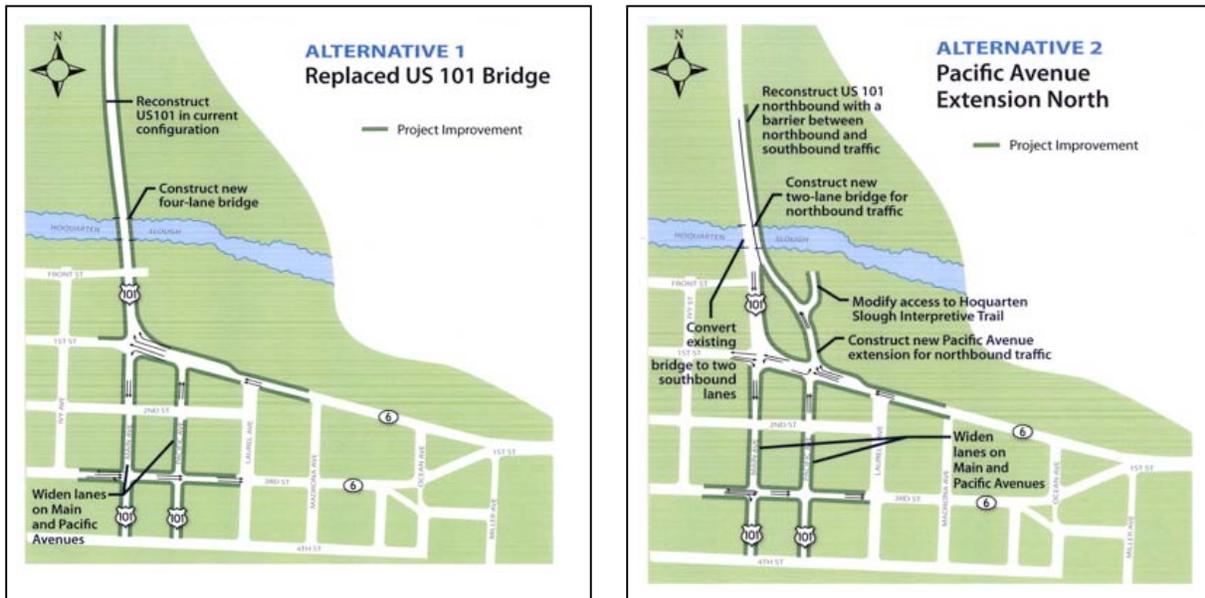
Mark Gervasi said, “With all these things happening, you get the sense the cosmic tumblers are ticking into place.”

I called Tony Snyder, ODOT’s Project Manager for the intersection improvements. Tony said, “The people on the 29 member Stakeholder Committee have done their homework. And, local leaders like Commissioner Mark Labhart, Mark Gervasi, and Senator Johnson; they stepped up. ODOT’s Larry McKinley, the Area Manager, also did a great job.”



<http://www.tillamooktraffic.org>

At present two serious “Preferred Alternatives” (see alternatives below) are on the table for further discussion. One of these two Preferred Alternatives will be selected in the Fall of 2010.



Then, mitigation plans will be prepared and the alternatives will be refined. A lot of work needed for the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) process has been frontloaded into this process. That’s an outstanding efficiency which, to me, absolutely needs be replicated elsewhere with other projects. In 2011, work will begin in earnest in nailing down the design footprint, the environmental permitting, the right-of-way acquisition, and the relocation/utilities relocation. Construction of the new intersection will begin in 2015.

### Getting to Yes

I called Kristen Hull from CH2M Hill because Kristen developed the successful community-outreach plan. Kristen said, “It probably helped I wasn’t an engineer or a technical planner. I have a masters in Public Policy, and, ten years of experience working major transportation projects. ODOT deserves *a lot* of credit. They came to the table and they were flexible. They explored options with an open mind.” And, Kristen extolled the virtues of “context-sensitive solutions” approaches.

Kristen recalled, “We had many one-on-one discussions with impacted property owners. We got on a first name basis with them. It’s *so* important people understand what’s going on, and what the goals are. Everyone needs to work through the process step-by-step. It helps when people believe the local government officials and ODOT are open to ideas.” Kristen also praised contributions of the local paper, *The Headlight Herald*. She said, “The paper didn’t always support what was going on. But, they were *accurate*.”

Kristen remarked, “We didn’t strive for consensus. We strived for *informed consent*.” Indeed, not everybody in Tillamook is over the moon about the intersection improvements. I spoke with Doug Henson about the project. Doug is a former member of the Tillamook City Council, and a member of the 29 member Stakeholder Committee. Doug is also involved with the re-development of the Oddfellows Building in the downtown area. Doug said, “I’m not sure the intersection improvements will make that much of a difference. I see it as a band-aid. We need to think about getting truck traffic routed *around* the city.” I appreciate that Doug Henson is thinking about a bypass. After all, in twenty years, if a million new people move to the Portland-Metro area as some predict, all bets are off.

## *Doing Something About Flooding: Project Exodus*



The word “Tillamook” translated from its Native American origins means, “Land of Many Waters.” Five major river systems converge and spill their contents into Tillamook Bay.

So, when winter rains drench the Oregon Coast, and, as tidal waters rise, water backs up and causes flooding. Before leaving home, coastal residents know to check weather reports, *and their tide books*, and ODOT’s web site, to see if U.S. Highway 101 will be open. Up in Clatsop County, the same

kind of seasonal flooding (the Necanicum River) shuts down U.S. Highway 101 just south of Seaside from time to time. It’s a *huge* inconvenience for people in Seaside and in Cannon Beach because many folks who live in Cannon Beach or visit Cannon Beach make frequent trips to Seaside.

And, as we all know, in recent years, there have been major flooding events in Tillamook County (six Presidential flood disaster declarations since 1996).

Since the mid-1990s there have been several high profile efforts to “model” the flooding in Tillamook. Today, we know there are 33 separate “flood cells” in the valley where water backs up. To make progress on flood mitigation, measures need to be taken to improve the hydro-dynamics within and among these many cells in the valley to get floodwaters to the bay. At last, remedies may be at hand. The same group of respected leaders enumerated above, and several leaders of Tillamook’s agricultural community, invested huge amounts of time and energy in something called, “Project Exodus.”

Senator Betsy Johnson, once again, has been the driving force. Senator Johnson saw the effectiveness of the “Oregon Solutions” process during the “Fort to Sea Trail Project” in Clatsop County. Oregon Solutions is a program at Portland State University (PSU) within the National Policy Consensus Center (NPCC). Oregon Solutions facilitates communication/coordination among state and federal agencies and local entities (<http://www.orsolutions.org/>). At the web link below, you can watch a 10-minute video describing the Oregon Solutions process in Tillamook County. It features Senator Johnson and Commissioner Labhart (the co-conveners of process).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CC57P2oXPGs>

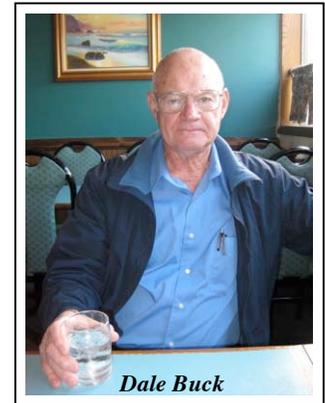
Looking at the video, you see the strong ties between Commissioner Mark Labhart and Senator Betsy Johnson. That genuine personal-political connection between a legislator (state or federal) and a local government official (city or county) can move mountains.

Here's the other key ingredient. **MONEY**. Senator Johnson arranged \$1 million dollars in "seed money" for the Oregon Solutions process (in effect, a block grant to Tillamook County to work that process). The Tillamook County Commissioners serve as the administrative-contracting entity. Northwest Hydrological Consultants (NHC), a Seattle firm, was hired to develop a hydrological model that built upon previous efforts. Having resources *in hand* and the discretion to determine how they will be spent, expedited the hiring of companies to carry out the myriad of tasks (fact-finding, documentation) needed for state and federal permit processes.

I attended an Oregon Solutions meeting in Tillamook on May 3, 2010. Before the meeting, Dale Buck, a well-known dairy farmer in



Tillamook (now retired), who's involved with the Oregon Solutions process, gave me a tour of flood prone areas. Dale brought along a packet of diagrams and aerial photos of previous flood events. One image, in particular, captures the intensity of forces at work. It looked like a photo of the blast zone after the eruption of Mount St. Helens.



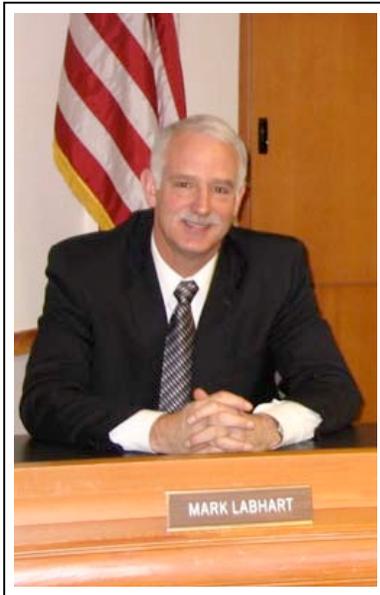
Dale Buck

Later, we attended the Oregon Solutions meeting (photo below left). The key players were all there. Tillamook County's Paul Levesque, Oregon Solutions Project Manager, displayed a command of the details. Rapid exchanges of information took place and synergies were being achieved. Votes were taken, next steps delineated, and responsibilities assigned.

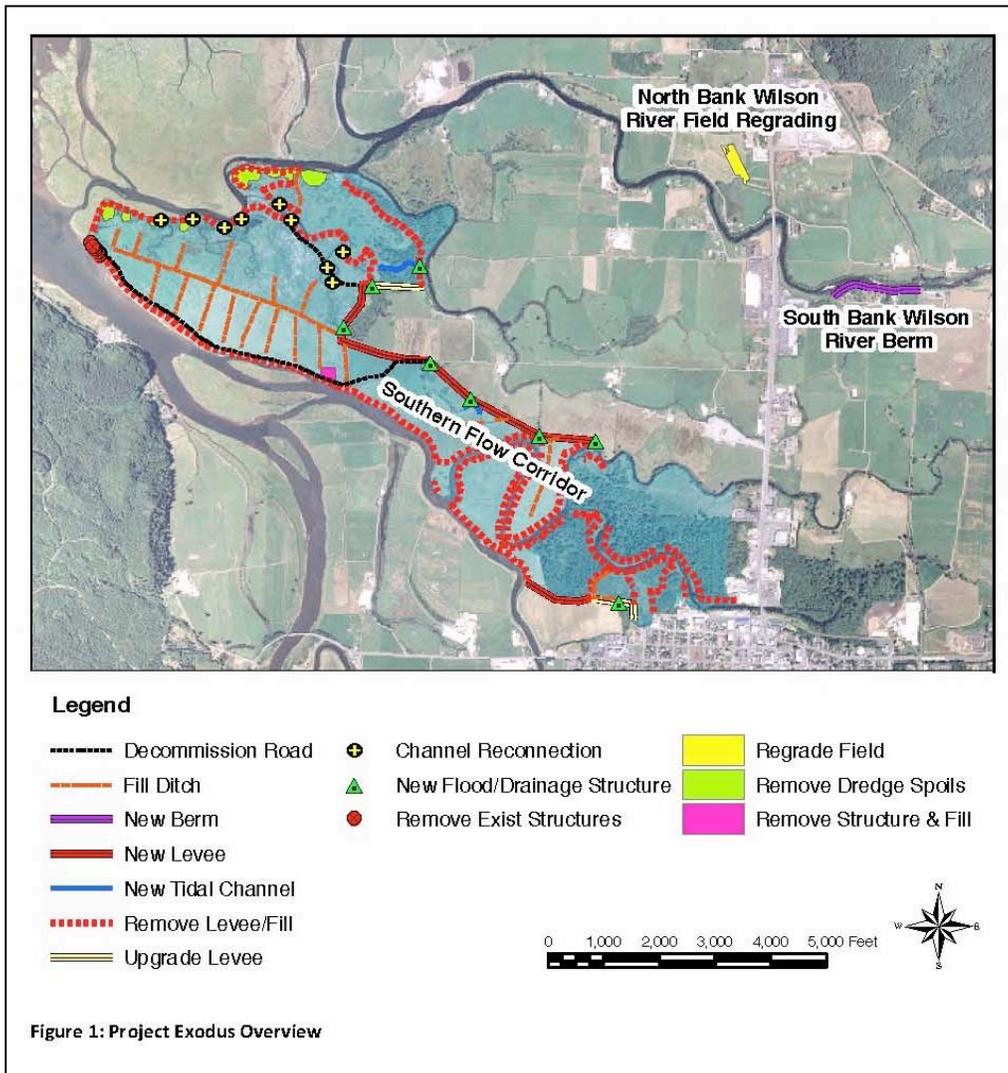


Afterwards I asked Commissioner Mark Labhart why he believes the process is *so* effective. Mark said, "In the past, these big issues were tackled piecemeal. We'd go through the process all the way through the permitting process and then we would run out of money. The process would stall. People would get frustrated." He continued, "Now, though, with *this* process, and help from the Legislature's seed money, we've

implemented some projects and we are showing to the community we could get results on the ground." Mark noted, "We removed the 12,000 cubic yards of material, the Dean Dirt Pile, out of the floodway. We've built two \$300,000 spillways in the lower reaches of the system to drain flood waters quicker."



And, now, a really *major* initiative, the *Southern Flow Corridor*, is almost ready to go. If implemented, the Southern Flow Corridor will channel and accelerate water flows through the valley. Some old dilapidated levees would need to be removed and some salt marshes in the lower reaches of the watershed would be restored. *Approximately 300 acres* may need to be purchased (within that, 116 acres of farmland). Taking farmland out of production in Tillamook County is a tough sell because every acre is deemed precious (especially with today's silage costs). That's why the Oregon Solutions Team is taking a second look at another alternative that does not take farmland out of production, but still provides significant flood relief.



But, the hydrological model projects the *Southern Flow Corridor* project would lower flooding in the valley by a **foot and a half**. That's a lot of flood reduction. During major events, some places the valley floods four to five feet. So, some properties, of course, will continue to flood. But, many other properties will experience substantially less flooding **if** the *Southern Flow Corridor* project happens.

Back to transportation, during big flooding events, with the implementation of the *Southern Flow Corridor*, U.S. Highway 101 will be closed far less often.

Rick Klumph, ODFW's (Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife) District Fish Biologist pulled me aside and said, "I'm not sure people fully appreciate the fish and wildlife benefits of the project. The restored salt marsh, at that scale, will **really** help juvenile salmon." The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is signaling they will provide resources for the land acquisition for the *Southern Flow Corridor*. Other resources have been identified to carry out some construction activities related to the *Southern Flow Corridor*.



This progress is timely. The new FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) flood map for Tillamook have just become public (May 12, 2010). The new FEMA map classifies large swaths (1,500 acres in the previous map to over 10,000 acres in the new proposed map) of the valley "floodway" (a **very** restrictive classification). People at the local level believe the new FEMA map goes too far and includes properties that are **not** flood-prone. Tillamook County has asked NHC (Northwest Hydraulics Consultants) to run the hydrological model with the *Southern Flow Corridor* improvements in place. And, Tillamook

County officials plan to file an appeal with FEMA about FEMA's map with that new information in hand. The stakes are high because of the impacts on flood insurance rates and future development in Tillamook would be profound.

### ***A Recipe For Success***

The deeper I got into this case study several themes emerged:

- There is a really **strong dedicated leadership** team (state, local, federal) in place.
- There is **agreement on objectives** (fix the intersection and improve the downtown, and mitigate flooding) but **flexibility** about how to achieve outcomes.
- There are **sufficient resources in place** to get work on tasks going **concurrently** (not sequentially). Successes led to other successes. Confidence in the process grew which kept people at the table.
- The processes are moving along relatively swiftly (the **timing**).

ODOT's Larry McKinley stressed the importance of timing. Larry noted, "In the past, with some of our transportation projects, the process went on so long you'd have turnover in local government officials property owners. Then you find yourselves having to start all over."

Larry McKinley described how the approaches used to mitigate flooding in Tillamook are about to be applied to fixing the flooding in Seaside. ODOT recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Clatsop County. NHC has been hired to start the modeling process.



*U.S. Highway 101 & U.S. Highway 26 in Seaside, Oregon (looking south) Photo courtesy of ODOT*

The first public meeting was held recently. Kevin Cupples, Seaside Planning Director, is excited. The frequent closure of the highway south of Seaside is a real burden. Kevin reported the City of Seaside is also making progress on preparing a TSP for the City of Seaside. Kevin is grateful ODOT is willing to re-evaluate the mobility standards for U.S. Highway 101 through Seaside. The City of Seaside is now on a path to develop a main-street mobility solution that can attract strong community support and improve mobility on U.S. Highway 101.

I also spoke with NHC’s Vaughn Collins to learn more about the Seaside flooding mitigation project. Vaughn said, “Compared to the flooding issues in Tillamook, dealing with Seaside’s flooding is going to be simple.” I asked Vaughn about his experience with the Oregon Solutions process in Tillamook County. Vaughn remarked, “In all my years in local government and the private sector, I have *never* seen a more effective group. They are amazing.”

### ***Closing Thoughts: The Secret Sauce***

Permit me to editorialize.

I grow weary when people bang their fists on a table and declare, by golly, we’re *finally* going to get serious about “regulatory streamlining.” It never seems to happen.

To me, a great way *to cut red tape* is to have adequate **grant programs**. That way, local governments/ports can expedite infrastructure projects. Take for instance the \$20,000 DLCD grant provided to the City of Tillamook to do the urban renewal district—that was key. And, take the block grant Tillamook County received to fund the Oregon Solutions process—that was key.

Another example is the Ports Planning & Marketing Grant program at the Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD). For years, it has been a super-effective grant program. Time after time, those grants (\$25,000 or less) helped small ports in Oregon get significant projects off the ground.

Of course, local and state leadership—constructive **people** with good listening skills exercising flexibility—is still the key factor. But, timely grant money may also be the secret sauce. It’s a squirt of WD-40 in the gears that makes projects take flight—projects that **create jobs**.

## Information about OCZMA

The Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association (OCZMA), formed in 1976 under ORS Chapter 190, is a voluntary association of coastal counties, cities, ports, soil & water conservation districts, and the Coquille Indian Tribe on the Oregon Coast established to provide a forum for the resolution of issues of particular concern to the local governments of the coast and the people they represent.

### Association Officers

**Jack Brown** • Chair (City of Depoe Bay)

**Jeff Hazen** • Vice Chair (Clatsop County)

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FY 2009-10

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## Association Membership

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Coos County

Curry County

Douglas County

Lane County

Lincoln County

Tillamook County

City of Brookings

City of Cannon Beach

City of Coos Bay

City of Depoe Bay

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