



Oregon Coastal Notes

Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association

April 2009

Modernizing U.S. Highway 20: Overcoming Adversity in the Coast Range — Onno Husing, Director, OCZMA

After decades of advocacy, the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville highway modernization project on U.S. Highway 20 is tentatively scheduled to ***open for traffic*** in the late summer of 2011.



ODOT Highway 20 Modernization Tour March 3, 2009

The highway improvements will knock 10 to 15 minutes off the travel time between Corvallis to Newport. ***That's a lot!*** Currently, it takes about an hour.

The new alignment will replace a murderous, winding 11-mile stretch of highway with a new, safe 6-mile segment of highway with numerous passing lanes. When completed, on a rainy night, people traveling on U.S. Highway 20 won't have to dodge motor homes, chip trucks and log trucks. As a bonus, the new stretch of U.S. Highway 20 will have breathtaking high elevation views of the Coast Range.

Getting an amazing asset like this built in an age of limited resources was ***not*** easy. Plenty of people clamor for major highway improvements. Often, they will go to a meeting or two, vent, and think that's enough. Well, it's not. The story of U.S. Highway 20 gives people a playbook for what it takes to make big projects happen.

A Tree Falls in the Forest

40,000 years ago a large Western Red Cedar sat perched on a steep hillside in the Coast Range about 10 miles inland from Newport, Oregon. Suddenly, probably during a heavy rainstorm, 2 million cubic yards of earth broke loose and cascaded down the hill. When the avalanche was over, the cedar lay buried under tons of clay and soil.

In 2006, the new alignment of the Pioneer Mountain to Eddyville section of U.S. Highway 20 was under construction. There are good reasons why the modernization of ***this part*** of U.S. Highway 20 was deferred for so many years. The terrain between Pioneer Mountain and Eddyville is ***unbelievably*** challenging.



Photo of Buried Cedar Tree at Highway 20 Crystal Creek Drainage Site (Photo Courtesy of ODOT)

Download this newsletter at www.oczma.org

One day at the project site, at the Crystal Creek drainage, crews cleared the dense vegetation. Cuts were made into the hillside. That's when they made an awful discovery. In the exposed embankment the geotechs could see, in three dimensions, thin layers of buried soil known as "slip planes". It was unmistakable evidence of a large ancient landslide. The geological feature turned out to be far larger than anyone anticipated. During the excavation, the buried cedar tree was unearthed. Remarkably, it was perfectly preserved! Samples of wood were sent to Beta Analytic Inc. in Florida (a company specializing in carbon 14 dating) for analysis. Tests determined the cedar was 40,000 years old.

"Houston, We Have a Problem!"

Of course, the discovery of the ancient landslide at Crystal Creek, and, three other large landslides, threw a monkey wrench at the project. ODOT didn't have a choice; the slides had to be dealt with. That meant a lot more excavation would be needed. In addition, a buttress would have to be built at the toe of the slope at Crystal Creek for stabilization. As a result, the U.S. Highway 20 project was put on hold through 2007.

When construction began, *before* the landslides were discovered, the original projected cost of re-aligning U.S. Highway 20 from Pioneer Mountain to Eddyville was projected to be \$130 million. Because of the landslides, project costs escalated to \$172 million.



Crystal Creek Drainage Landslide
(Photo Courtesy of ODOT)

As soon as the news of the work stoppage was released some people wanted to blame someone, *anyone*. They thought—how could something like this at this scale go undetected?



Well, have *you* ever hiked in the Coast Range off the beaten path? There are impossibly steep sided ravines and drainages. Winding hillsides rise steeply 400 feet to narrow summits. In most places, especially deep in the draws, the vegetation is virtually impenetrable. That's why many coastal residents do their elk hunting in Eastern Oregon where you have open terrain.

Early on, of course, many core samples were drilled into the project right-of-way to assess the geology. That's standard practice. But, only a limited understanding of the subsurface features can be gleaned from that

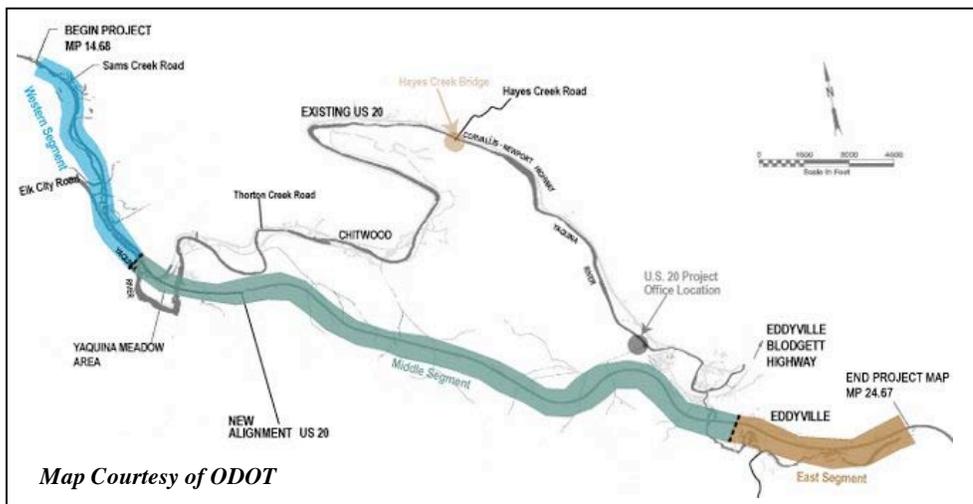
information. The bottom line is, at that early stage in the process, it's easy to miss subterranean features; even large features like the ancient landslide at Crystal Creek. Before the contractors (Yaquina River Constructors—YRC) bid on the project, they did their homework. YRC

commissioned their own LIDAR (Light Detection & Ranging) aerial images of the proposed right-of-way. LIDAR provides highly accurate topographic maps. Even with the LIDAR images in hand, no one picked up the ancient landslides.

Conspiracy theorists would have us believe ODOT or YRC suppressed evidence of the ancient landslides. I think those people are *way* off base. The opposite is true. Can you imagine what a nightmare it was for ODOT and the contractor? Here you are, deeply invested in a major project, and then, suddenly, you discover what you are *really* up against.

Tour of the Construction Site

On March 3, 2009 I joined a tour of the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville improvement project. Today, when you drive U.S. Highway 20, you only see the east and west ends of the project. Most of the new alignment is hidden behind several large hillsides. So, it was great to put on a hard hat, climb into an ODOT van, and visit the site with Joe Squire P.E., ODOT’s Project Manager.



Before the tour began, we met at the YRC Construction Offices in Eddyville for a briefing. In attendance were: Oregon Transportation Commissioner (OTC) Alan Brown; Vivian Payne ODOT Area Manager; Tom Picciano, Georgia Pacific; Lori Tobias, reporter, *The Oregonian*; Dave Miller, owner/operator, KYTE radio in Newport; and Shirley Kalkhoven, Mayor of Nehalem, OCZMA Board, President of the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) and Chair of the Northwest Area Commission on Transportation (NWACT).

We went over the project from soup to nuts. A fair number of people—even knowledgeable individuals—characterize the project as a “failed project”. That made me eager to understand the details of the work stoppage. I pressed for information about the “standard of care” used for geological investigations for large scale projects. Joe Squire (in photo to the right), who has experience in the mining industry, answered *all* my questions. On the whiteboard, Joe diagrammed the ancient landslide at Crystal Creek. He talked



about the core samples taken, the interpretation of the LIDAR images, and, the events leading to the discovery of the ancient landslides.

Joe offered, “With a design build project like this, the contractor (YRC) and ODOT share the risks and benefits.” Joe explained that early in the project, ODOT out-sourced the role of project manager to a private sector firm. He commented, “Later, after the work stoppage, ODOT came back into the project. ODOT took over the project management responsibilities. I think that’s when things started to come together. Both ODOT and YRC had new teams in place.”

After Joe finished his presentation I said, “The fact that ODOT sat down with the contractors and worked something out tells me standard professional practices were observed.” Joe agreed. He then sighed and said, “You know, at the end of the day, there could have been litigation, and both parties could have ended up being 100% wrong. It was *not* about determining winners and losers. If the project got shut down indefinitely, we’d *all* be losers. For everyone there was *way* too much at stake.”

I admire Joe Squire’s pragmatism. *That’s* how projects get done. Highways don’t get built by taking depositions and delivering clever arguments in courtrooms. And, all contractors know once you start digging, anything can pop up.

Taking It All In

At the first stop we visited a bridge being constructed over the railroad. Then we drove east through the first big cut in a hillside. What we saw was breathtaking! Joe Squire said a



project like this, with such huge cut and fills, may *not* have been possible a few years ago. Recent technical advances in the efficacy of earthmoving equipment made the U.S. Highway 20 project doable. At the end of the tour, we stood before an enormous D-11 CAT and posed for photos. That one bulldozer cost \$1 million.

How the Project Began

Like all highways in Oregon, from the beginning, U.S. Highway 20 has been a work in progress.

During the tour, Joe Squire pointed to a logging road that veered off into the forest. Joe said, “That’s the right-of-way of the original wagon road to the Oregon Coast.” I was surprised to hear that because we were near the top of a large hill. I thought the original roadway, like the

railroad built in the 1880s, followed lower elevation areas near the Yaquina River. I was mistaken. But, when I thought about it, it made total sense. Higher elevation areas are the driest/best-drained places in the Coast Range. In the old days, *mud* was the biggest enemy.

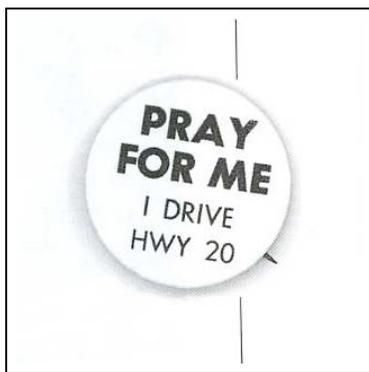
The first wagon road, completed in 1866, to the Central Oregon Coast was a toll road. The road connected Corvallis to Elk City (a small community located at the head of tide on the Upper Yaquina River). During the 1880s, Benton County assumed responsibility for maintenance of the wagon road. Benton County's goal was to maintain the road so a "good team of horses" could travel from one end to the other in ten hours.



According to *Adventures in Motoring: The Highway 20 Story*, (by Steve Wyatt, published in the *Bayfront Book*, the Lincoln County Historical Society, 1999), the Benton County Commission published a list of citizens required to work on the roadway. As an alternative, people could elect to "donate" money or supplies such as flour, bacon, beans or coffee to sustain the work crews.

In 1892, coastal leaders, led by Ben Jones (the father of U.S. Highway 101), petitioned the Benton County Commissioners for additional resources for road improvements. The Benton County Commissioners summarily turned down their request. In response, Ben Jones and others seceded from Benton County and formed Lincoln County (Lincoln County was established by the Oregon Legislature in 1893).

In 1917, a new route for automobile traffic on U.S. Highway 20 was chosen. According to Steve Wyatt, a bond measure passed in 1919, provided resources to make it an all-weather road. Benton County and Lincoln County agreed to carry out the grading work. The Oregon Highway Commission (OHC) supplied the rock to surface the roadway. The first "auto-stage" service to Newport from the Willamette Valley began in May 1921.



Before long, of course, the speed of motor vehicles increased. In turn, the number of bad accidents increased dramatically. People began to petition for additional safety improvements. In 1947, the "Oregon U.S. Highway 20 Association" was formed to galvanize that effort.

The Oregon U.S. Highway 20 Association included leaders from Lincoln, Benton, and Linn counties. They understood that by working together and pooling their clout they could boost their chances of attracting resources. In addition, they understood improvements to one part of the corridor helps communities along the entire corridor. Gradually, over several decades, in stages, additional segments of U.S. Highway 20 were modernized. In the late 1990s, the Eddyville-Cline Hill section of U.S. Highway 20 was completed. That left one last, big, unimproved section remaining—Pioneer Mountain to Eddyville. *(Photo above to the left scanned from The Bayfront Book by Steve Wyatt, 1999)*

Recent History: Teamwork & Patience Pays Off

About 15 years ago, the torch was passed from the U.S. Highway 20 Association to the Transportation Committee organized by the Cascades West Council of Governments (CWCOG). By all accounts, the CWCOG's Transportation Committee was an effective group.

Then, in 1996, the CWCOG's Transportation Committee transitioned into the Cascade West



Area Commission on Transportation (CWACT). The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) established Area Commissions on Transportation (ACTs) to prioritize local highway projects under the STIP (State Transportation Improvement Program).

A key figure in the story of U.S. Highway 20 is Lincoln County Commissioner Don Lindly. Like many other elected officials on the Center Oregon Coast, Don Lindly made the modernization of U.S. Highway 20 a top priority. Don's central motivations were: (1) safety, and, (2) the economic viability of the paper mill in Toledo (owned and operated by Georgia

Pacific Corporation, a major employer in Lincoln County). The fate of the mill hung in the balance because large trucks delivering chips and recyclable products to Toledo were prohibited from using U.S. Highway 20. As a result, trucks were being re-routed over Highway 18 through Lincoln City and Newport, then over to Toledo. *(Photo above taken at Cook's Chasm Bridge, Lincoln County, Oregon on September 14, 2005; Left to Right: Commissioner Don Lindly, Lincoln County, Oregon Transportation Commissioner Gail Achterman, and Yachats Mayor Suzanne Smith)*

But, for Don Lindly, the catalytic event took place on June 28, 1994. At about 9:00 a.m., 17-year-old Jamie Osborn of Lincoln City was riding in a car driven by his friend. They were heading west on U.S. Highway 20. At about Milepost 18, the two young men entered a difficult 90-degree turn. They collided head-on with a double fuel tanker truck. Jamie died at the scene (see Newport News Times front page article to the right dated June 29, 1994).

Don Lindly didn't know Jamie or his family. Still, for Don, Jamie's death was *the last straw*. So many people had been killed and injured on that stretch of highway. Don sent newspaper clippings of the accident to the OTC and stepped up his advocacy. In 1994, Don invited Henry Hewett, who had just been appointed to the OTC, to join local leaders in Newport for a dinner. Don recalls, "We met Henry in Corvallis so we could drive U.S. Highway 20 with him and talk about the highway. Lincoln County Sheriff, John O'Brien, came along. As we drove to Newport, Sheriff O'Brien pointed out all the places where fatal



accidents had happened. By the time Henry got to Newport he was white-knuckled. I think it was an effective way to let Henry know how serious the situation was.”

In 2002, Don Lindly worked to raise funds to prepare a professional video to tell the U.S. Highway 20 story (title of the video was *Highway 20-Toledo to Eddyville—The Final Link*). He remembered, “We invited Randy Papé, who just joined the OTC, to the annual meeting of the Yaquina Bay Economic Foundation (YBEF). It was the premier showing of the video. That night, Randy became a champion for the project. We also had strong support from Stuart Foster who was on the OTC.” Later, when Mike Nelson from Eastern Oregon joined the OTC, Don drove all the way across the state to Baker to pitch the project to Commissioner Nelson. Now *that’s* dedication!



Looking back, Don reflected, “What made the difference, over time, was we built a lot of relationships with the OTC, ODOT, and other local government officials. Trashing people gets you nowhere. For instance, we supported the Highway 20/34 downtown Corvallis Bypass that crosses the Willamette River. That was a huge deal. And, we supported funding for the couplet in Philomath. As traffic increased on U.S. Highway 20, we needed to make sure Philomath didn’t become a bottleneck.”

The other key factor was, on the Central Oregon Coast, virtually *everyone* was totally in favor of the project. Indeed, community leaders were *united and stayed united* in support for the project. In contrast, the *lack* of unity at the local level over the Newberg-Dundee By-Pass project has been cited by many as the major reason that important project has been stalled for years.

An Important Willamette Valley Perspective



I contacted Benton Commissioner Linda Modrell (photo to the left) to seek her views on the project. Commissioner Modrell recalled, “I became a County Commissioner in 1999. Right away, I got hit by Don Lindly about U.S. Highway 20.” She noted, “Don explained the long-standing regional commitments made to complete U.S. Highway 20. I said, ‘Well sure, I’ll support it.’”

Commissioner Modrell continued, “But, when I made the initial commitment, I didn’t know how big *and expensive* the project would be. At first it was a \$40 million project. The big selling point, in my mind, was it would complete a multi-phased project to upgrade U.S. Highway 20.” Commissioner Modrell said, “Then, the price tag began to rise from 40 to 50 to 60 to 70 million dollars and counting. I grew concerned about where the cost escalation would stop; but I gave my word. I honor my commitments and the coalition hung together.”

From our discussion it was clear Commissioner Modrell has misgivings about the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville project. I asked her to elaborate why. She said, “Well, it’s a great deal of money for just six miles of highway!” Commissioner Modrell continued, “I understand the safety concerns. But, we’ve got safety issues all over the State of Oregon; were these greater?” She then said, “And, with regard to freight; maybe a better choice would have been an upgraded railroad for the Georgia Pacific issues; I don’t know because the cost comparison was not done and didn’t seem necessary when it was a \$50 million project.” Commissioner Modrell stressed, “Don’t get me wrong. Despite all the problems with the project and the high cost, I am *very* impressed by the beauty and scale of the project. When I thought about whether this project was the most worthy project of statewide significance, I had to remember this project was ready to go unlike many other large projects.” She concluded, “The expense? I had nothing to compare the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville project to.”



I believe Commissioner Modrell’s last comment hit the nail on the head. Because it’s been so long since large-scale transportation projects have been funded in Oregon, decision makers get sticker shock when presented with a big transportation improvement. And, in this resource-starved environment, there’s a tendency to just spread the money around. Under that scenario, only marginal improvements are possible. So, in every respect, the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville project is a huge departure from the status quo.

For transportation advocates, several take home messages seem obvious: (1) think long term, (2) get and keep your community united behind the project, (3) leave no stones unturned to create allies, and, (4) be patient and be prepared to wait your turn.

Lining Up the Resources

To make the project like this reality, major new revenue needed to be raised. I interviewed OTC Commissioner Alan Brown (see photo at right) because Alan served in the Oregon Legislature and helped raise the revenue for the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville Modernization Project.



Commissioner Brown recalled, “I Chaired the House Transportation Committee in 2003. In 2001, the Oregon Legislature enacted OTIA 1 and OTIA 2 (OTIA stands for Oregon Transportation and Investment Act). ODOT did a good job getting projects built under those packages. So, we were confident ODOT could deliver the projects if we enacted an even bigger transportation package.” Alan Brown continued, “And remember, the last recession was 2003. OTIA 3, a **\$3.5 billion package**, enacted in 2003 was sold as a jobs program.”

Alan talked about his close relationship with Pat Egan from Governor Kulongoski’s Office and Bruce Warner, who served as ODOT’s Director at the time. Alan remembered, “We kept everyone involved. The lobby and other legislators trusted us that

we would do the right thing. I think that's why we ended up with so many Republican votes from my Caucus."

I asked him, "Alan, as you know, in Oregon, we don't do legislative earmarking of transportation projects. So, how did that work? You must have been confident the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville Modernization Project would get funded." He replied, "Oh yeah, I was. The OTC named U.S. Highway 20 as a project of Statewide Concern along with six other projects. So, I knew, if we passed OTIA 3, Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville Modernization Project would get built. Randy Papé had a big hand in getting U.S. Highway 20 on that list. He tucked the Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville Modernization Project under his wing."

Everyone interviewed, without any prodding from me, brought up Randy Papé's name as a key player in the process. While it took many people to make the completion of U.S. Highway 20 possible, Randy Papé's contribution to the effort cannot be overstated.

Looking Ahead: A Different Future for the Oregon Coast

The completion of U.S. Highway 20 will, of course, improve safety and facilitate the movement of freight to the paper mill in Toledo.

I believe, though, we only dimly comprehend the long-term impact that the modernization of U.S. Highway 20 will have on the Oregon Coast. At a minimum, U.S. Highway 20 is bound to become a preferred route to the Oregon Coast. As Oregon's population grows, especially in the Portland-Metro area, some roads leading to the Oregon Coast will become jammed with traffic (especially in communities like Newberg and Dundee). People will learn to take I-5 to Corvallis and cross over to the Oregon Coast on U.S. Highway 20.

Plus, let's face it. The Oregon Coast, as a region, is evolving rapidly. Today, because of broadband communications, people can live and work anywhere. Many life-style entrepreneurs and retirees are choosing high amenity/scenic places like the Oregon Coast to *live* and *not* just visit. Plus, consider this. Large portions of the Oregon Coast are a relatively short distance from the 1-5 Corridor and the Silicon Forest. That opens up a world of possibilities.



For all these reasons, communities on the Oregon Coast like Newport are becoming trendy. After all, Newport has assets like the Hatfield Marine Science Center (HMSC), major new investments in the Oregon Coast Community College (OCCC), a thriving arts community, and, commercial air service has just been re-established. The good/safe highway connection to the Willamette Valley, scheduled for completion in 2011, is icing on the cake. We will need our land use planning system to preserve our quality of life as population on the Oregon Coast increases. *(Photo of the new Oregon Coast Community College under construction)*

Indeed, the Oregon Coast has a bright future. I'm glad, though, I moved to the Oregon Coast in the fall of 1989. I got to experience the Oregon Coast when fishing and forest products drove the economy and culture of the region. My coastal mentors taught me life is *not* just making money and accumulating material things. It's about enjoying this truly special place with family and friends.

We are proud to dedicate this newsletter to the memory of Randy Papé.

Alas, on November 6, 2008, at the age of 58, Randy suffered a heart attack and died. He had battled cancer for 11 years. Randy was president and CEO of The Papé Group, a network of heavy equipment dealerships located in Eugene, Oregon. Randy Papé was also a great supporter of the University of Oregon and an avid Duck fan.



Oregon Transportation Commissioner Randy Papé at the Spencer Creek Groundbreaking Ceremony on March 13, 2007

Information about OCZMA

The Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association (OCZMA), formed in 1976, 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

Tim Josi • Chair (Tillamook County)

Jack Brown • Vice Chair (City of Depoe Bay)

T.V. Skinner • Secretary-Treasurer (Curry SWCD)

FY 2008-09

Association Staff

Onno Husing • Executive Director

Georgia York • Executive Assistant

Telephone: (541) 265-8918

Fax: (541) 265-5241

E-mail: onno_husing@class.orednet.org

georgia_york@class.oregonvos.net

Web Site: www.oczma.org



P.O. Box 1033; 313 SW 2nd, Suite C
Newport, Oregon 97365

Association Membership

Clatsop County

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

City of Florence

City of Garibaldi

City of Lakeside

City of Lincoln City

City of Manzanita

City of Nehalem

City of Newport

City of North Bend

City of Port Orford

City of Reedsport

City of Rockaway Beach

City of Tillamook

City of Toledo

City of Yachats

Port of Alsea

Port of Astoria

Port of Bandon

Port of Brookings Harbor

Oregon International Port
of Coos Bay

Port of Garibaldi

Port of Gold Beach

Port of Nehalem

Port of Newport

Port of Port Orford

Port of Siuslaw

Port of Tillamook Bay

Port of Toledo

Port of Umpqua

Clatsop SWCD

Coos SWCD

Curry SWCD

Lincoln SWCD

Siuslaw SWCD

Tillamook SWCD

Umpqua SWCD

Coquille Indian Tribe