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November 23, 2021

Metropolitan Policy Committee
c/o Paul Thompson

Re: Updating the Central Lane Regional Transportation Plan

A Metaphor: The Transportation System Is Our House

The transportation system for the Central Lane (Eugene-Springfield-Coburg) metropolitan region is a large house still under construction. The regional transportation plan (RTP) is its blueprint. The metropolitan transportation improvement program (MTIP) is a set of orders for general contractors to work on different rooms of the house. Members of the Metropolitan Policy Committee (MPC) are the heads of the household, responsible for the welfare of everyone who lives here.

Now the federal government is requiring us to resubmit our blueprint, even though it is out of date and has not kept up with our changing needs. If we don't, they will prevent us from hiring any new contractors. Fortunately, the solution is simple. We can submit an out-of-date blueprint now and commit to bringing it up to date as soon as possible. In the interim, we just shouldn't hire any new contractors to build questionable elements of the outdated blueprint.

Moreover, the house includes "BEST friends" who are committed to helping rethink the blueprint to ensure that future work will address future needs.

Executive Summary

The draft RTP has good goals and objectives related to transportation choices, safety, equity, and climate change. But it is unclear how planned projects advance those goals. Scores for performance measures are mixed at best. To satisfy federal requirements, provisionally adopt the draft RTP. Restrain the MTIP by declining to adopt amendments for any questionable projects in the provisional plan. Policy makers and stakeholders, with the support of staff, should work together in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process to rethink the RTP, determine what projects and programs will do the most to advance regional goals, and re-adopt a revised RTP as soon as practical. BEST and our partners are exploring hosting a community workshop to assist in this effort.

Building a successful community by bringing people together
to promote transportation options, safe streets, and walkable neighborhoods.

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Draft RTP has good goals and objectives

On September 3, 2020, MPC heard a response from staff to issues raised in a July 7, 2020, letter from 24 co-signers on the “need to act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.”¹

On October 1, 2020, and again on November 5, 2020, MPC discussed goals for the RTP.^{2, 3}

On December 3, 2020, MPC discussed objectives for the RTP.⁴

On November 4, 2021, MPC held a public hearing on the draft RTP.⁵

Overall, the draft RTP⁶ has good goals and objectives reflecting regional needs:⁷

Goal 1: Transportation Choices—People throughout the region have access to affordable, healthy, active, and shared transportation options that safely and conveniently connect them with their destinations while reducing reliance on driving alone and minimizing transportation related pollution.

Goal 2: Safety, Security and Resiliency—The transportation system is resilient, safe, and secure for people and goods.

Goal 3: Healthy People and Environment—The regional transportation system provides safe and comfortable travel options that support active and healthy living and protect and preserve biological, water, cultural, and historic resources. Lower-polluting transportation options are encouraged, and transportation greenhouse gas emissions are reduced.

Goal 4: Equity—The regional transportation system eliminates transportation-related disparities and barriers and ensures equitable access to destinations.

Goal 5: Economic Vitality—The transportation system is reliable, affordable, and efficient. It supports the prosperity of people and businesses by connecting them to destinations throughout the region and beyond.

Goal 6: Reliability and Efficiency—The region prioritizes a range of travel options to manage and optimize the transportation system and ease congestion so people and goods can reliably and efficiently reach their destinations.

Goal 7: System Asset Preservation—Strategically preserve, maintain, operate, and plan for current and future system assets to maximize transportation investments.

¹ [MPC September 3, 2020, packet](#), item 7.f: Staff Response to Public Comments on Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

² [MPC October 1, 2020, packet](#), item 6.c: 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Draft Goals.

³ [MPC November 5, 2020, packet](#), item 6.b: 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Draft Goals.

⁴ [MPC December 3, 2020, packet](#), item 6.a: 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Draft Objectives.

⁵ [MPC November 4, 2021, packet](#), item 6.b: Draft Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) & Congestion Management Process (CMP).

⁶ See the draft RTP and its appendices presented in [Public Comment Opportunities](#).

⁷ See Chapter 2: Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures.

It is unclear how projects advance those goals

The plan lists numerous projects totaling \$1.65 billion in the financially constrained list anticipated to be built over the next 20 years and another \$1.28 billion in the illustrative list not expected to be built until beyond that time.^{8, 9, 10}

It is unclear why these specific projects are included in the plan and others are not. The plan doesn't explicitly link projects to goals, forcing policy makers and the public alike to guess the justifications for each.

The projects include ones that are good, bad and ugly. Some of these projects do appear to advance goals. Others that have been planned since the 1990s might have made sense then but no longer do today. Below we call attention to some of the more questionable projects.

Given federal requirements for adopting an updated RTP, realistically we don't have time just now to sort out which projects make sense in light of the goals.

Scores for performance measures are mixed at best

On February 4, 2021, and again on April 1, 2021, MPC discussed performance measures.^{11, 12}

The draft plan attempts to estimate how well constructing projects will advance the listed goals. But it is not clear how much implementing the draft plan would benefit our region.¹³

By its own admission, the draft plan fails for (“plan doesn't meet intent” of) five regionally important performance measures:

- **PM 1: Miles Traveled.** Vehicle miles traveled *per person* is projected to *increase* by 6%.
- **PM 2: Travel Time.** Travel times are projected to increase by:
 - 25% for I-5,
 - 16% for Northwest Expressway,
 - 15% for Highway 126 / Interstate-105,
 - 9% for Highway 99 / West 6th & 7th / Franklin Boulevard,
 - 9% for Coburg Road,
 - 7% for Pioneer Parkway,
 - 6% for Beltline, and
 - 6% for West 11th.
- **PM 3: Congested Miles of Travel Network.** Number of miles of several congested roads is projected to increase 69% from 13 miles to 22 miles.

⁸ For totals, see “Revenue Forecast Estimate for RTP Projects and Program Investments 2020 to 2045” on pages 99–100 of the draft RTP.

⁹ For projects in the financially constrained list, see Chapter 5: Regional Projects.

¹⁰ For projects in the illustrative list, see [Appendix J: Illustrative Project List](#).

¹¹ [MPC February 4, 2021, packet](#), item 7.d: Draft Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Performance Measures (PMs).

¹² [MPC April 1, 2021, packet](#), item 6.a: Regional Transportation Plan Performance Measures Update.

¹³ See Chapter 6: Measuring Plan Outcomes.

- **PM 4: Vehicle Hours of Delay (VHD).** VHD during peak afternoon travel times is projected to increase 77% for all vehicles.
- **PM 5: Congestion.** Congestion is predicted to increase in several places throughout the region, notably:
 - I-5 between Coburg and Eugene/Springfield,
 - Beltline Highway between Coburg Road and Delta Highway,
 - Highway 99 and surrounding roadways near the Eugene Airport,
 - Highway 126 near the intersection with Beltline Highway,
 - The western end of downtown Eugene, specifically where Highway 99 transitions to the West 6th/7th Avenue couplet, and
 - I-5 and Franklin Boulevard east of the Glenwood area and south of Lane Community College (East 30th Avenue).

Although the plan claims to succeed for (“plan meets intent” of) eight other measures, we question some of these estimates:

- **PM 6: Mode Share.** The percentage of trips with a single-occupant vehicle, a shared vehicle, by public transit, on a bicycle, or walking are essentially unchanged over the life of the plan.
- **PM 7: System Completeness.** Due to data limitations, a quantitative estimate of the completeness of regional sidewalks and bikeways is not provided.
- **PM 8: Access to Jobs.** The draft plan indicates a significant increase in the percentage of jobs accessible within 20 minutes by transit, from 82% to 92%, but we have questions about what these figures actually mean. For people bicycling or walking, there is no significant increase in access to jobs, but we suggest that a more useful measure is *safe* access.
- **PM 9: Access to Services.** Results for access to services are comparable to access to jobs.
- **PM 10: Access to Transit.** Due to data limitations, a quantitative estimate of access to transit is not provided.
- **PM 11: Access to High-Capacity Transit.** Again, due to data limitations, a quantitative estimate of access to high-capacity transit is not provided.
- **PM 12: Safety.** The draft plan indicates that future safety is difficult to project.
- **PM 13: Transportation Related Greenhouse Gas Emissions.** Although the draft plan claims to meet the intent of this performance measure, as noted above vehicle miles traveled are projected to increase and no significant change in mode share is expected.

Overall, we deem the draft RTP as failing to advance regional goals.

To satisfy Feds, provisionally adopt RTP—but restrain MTIP and rethink RTP

Although the draft plan is not the one that advances regional goals, the federal government is requiring us to adopt some plan—or else be barred from seeking federal funding for some new projects.

Fortunately, the solution is simple:

1. **Provisionally Adopt RTP:** MPC should adopt the draft RTP now in order to satisfy the letter of federal requirements and to be eligible for new federal funding.
2. **Restrain MTIP:** Nevertheless, MPC should also commit to waiting to pursue funding for any questionable projects until such time as these are clearly deemed to advance regional goals. MPC can do so simply by declining to approve any MTIP amendments for such projects.
3. **Rethink RTP:** Policy makers and stakeholders, with the support of staff, should work together in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process to determine what projects and programs will do the most to advance regional goals.
4. **Community Workshop:** To help start rethinking the plan, BEST and our partners are exploring hosting a community workshop.

1. Provisionally Adopt RTP

As it is just a blueprint, MPC should go ahead and adopt a version of the draft RTP.

2. Restrain MTIP

But where the rubber meets the road is not in what we plan but in how we actually invest (program).

Until we have a rethought and revised RTP aligned with our region's goals, MPC should decline to approve any MTIP amendments to fund major new projects in these categories:

- **Roadway: New Arterial Link or Interchange** (\$209 million). Put on hold projects not planned until 2025, including a new local arterial bridge over the Willamette River parallel to Beltline in Eugene, and new interchanges on Highway 126 at 52nd Street and Main Street in Springfield.
- **Roadway: Added Freeway Lanes or Major Interchange Improvements** (\$50 million). Proceed with safety improvements already underway for the Beltline / Delta Highway interchange in Eugene. Put on hold projects not planned until 2030, including adding lanes to Beltline in Eugene and Highway 126 in Springfield.
- **Roadway: Arterial Capacity Improvements** (\$193 million). Proceed with three projects along 42nd Street in Springfield planned for construction in the next five years. But put on hold other projects not planned for construction until 2025.
- **Transit: Frequent Transit Network** (\$360 million). No EmX or Enhanced Corridor projects should advance to funding until the region's plans for frequent transit are better defined, in particular, until the completion of the MovingAhead effort.

But smaller projects in these other categories can proceed on a case-by-case basis:

- **Roadway: New Collectors** (\$239 million).
- **Roadway: Urban Standards** (\$136 million).
- **Roadway: Study** (\$10 million).
- **Roadway: Transit Oriented Development Implementation** (\$6 million).

- **Transit: Bus and Bus Maintenance** (\$264 million).
- **Transit: General Stops and Stations** (\$83 million).
- **Bike / Ped: Multi-Use Paths Without Road Project** (\$70 million).
- **Bike / Ped: Multi-Use Paths With Road Project** (\$9 million).
- **Bike / Ped: On-street Lanes or Routes With Road Project** (parts of larger projects).
- **Bike / Ped: On-street Lanes or Routes Without Road Project** (\$30 million).

3. Rethink RTP

As soon as possible (starting in January 2022), policy makers and stakeholders, with the support of staff, should work together in a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive process to determine what projects and programs will do the most to advance regional goals, and re-adopt a revised RTP as soon as practical:¹⁴

- **Continuing:** A plan is never finished but always a work in progress, evolving in response to changing challenges and opportunities.
- **Cooperative:** MPC is the policy body for the Central Lane MPO. Above you, federal requirements generally mandate a process but not decisions, whereas state requirements such as Oregon's land use planning laws do require advancing state goals. Below you, each of you represents your own jurisdictions, which have their own transportation system plans, comprehensive plans, long-range transit plans, highway facility plans, etc. But collectively you are in charge and have the power to decide what is in the best interests of the region. The federal requirement is for you to cooperate with each other, with other partners, and with the public to do so.
- **Comprehensive:** The federal requirement is to think not only regionally but also comprehensively. Transportation is not something separate from concerns around economic development, housing, health, equity, or climate change. In planning to spend an estimated \$1.65 billion on transportation, you need to also bring to the table your other priorities and knowledge.

4. Community Workshop

To assist in rethinking the RTP, BEST is exploring hosting a community workshop in early 2022 for policy makers and other key stakeholders. We are thinking that this could be a half-day virtual event, say, on a Saturday, aimed at better understanding desired goals, planned projects, and the connections between them. Using Zoom breakout groups, we hope to connect policy makers with their own constituents to look more closely at planned projects in their areas. BEST and our partners would look to your staff to provide technical support, and ideally to the University of Oregon to help design and facilitate the workshop.

¹⁴ By federal statute, the process to develop RTPs and MTIPs "shall provide for consideration of all modes of transportation and shall be continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive to the degree appropriate." [23 U.S. Code § 134: Metropolitan transportation planning](#).