

**Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation
Biennial Report
Presented to the
Oregon Transportation Commission**

September 15, 2009

The Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation (CWACT) received its charter from the Oregon Transportation Commission in October 1998. For nearly a decade prior to this date, the Transportation Advisory Committee of Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments served in many respects as an Area Commission on Transportation; providing a forum for regional transportation dialogue, coordination and decision-making. The CWACT continues to serve as a standing committee of Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments.

The Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation operates under the following mission statement:

The concerns of the Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation (CWACT) shall include issues that affect the regional transportation system and its links to areas beyond the region. The Commission recognizes that developing and improving the transportation system is a long-term process. Therefore, CWACT strives to build and sustain the consensus and support for project priorities, plans and policies that benefit the region's transportation system.

This report summarizes the structure and recent activities of the CWACT in the fulfillment of its mission.

Membership and Organization

The CWACT boundary encompasses Linn, Benton and Lincoln Counties. Each public jurisdiction within those counties is eligible to participate as a CWACT member. The current voting membership includes nineteen cities, three counties, two port districts, one tribe, three private sector members (appointed by County Commissioners) and the ODOT Area Manager. Representatives of jurisdictions are elected officials and alternates may be staff members. Ex officio (non-voting) members include all state legislators that represent portions of the three counties, neighboring ACTs, the Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association (OCZMA), the director of the Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), and the Chairs of the Cascades West Senior Services Advisory Council and the Cascades West Disability Services Council. The Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG) Board of Directors formally appoints the members and alternates of the CWACT. The ODOT Area Manager is considered a member without the necessity of formal appointment.

Although the membership is large, the group has generally been effective at reaching consensus for major decisions. For those instances when it is not possible to reach consensus, a motion must receive 75 percent of the votes for passage.

The organizational structure is outlined in the Bylaws (Attachment 1) that were adopted in April, 1999, and amended in 2001 and January 2005. The Bylaws serve as the Operating Agreement for the CWACT, under the Oregon Transportation Commission's 2003 Policy on Formation and Operation of Area Commissions on Transportation. The January 2005 amendment incorporated the provisions outlined in the 2003 OTC Policy, including the public involvement requirements. The January 2005 Bylaws have served the CWACT very well during the past four years. The CWACT members have recently once again reviewed the Bylaws and determined that no changes were needed.

The CWACT structure includes a seven member Executive Committee: one Commissioner from each county, one city representative from each of the three counties (selected by a caucus of members from each of the counties) and a Technical Committee (including public works directors, engineers and planners).

The Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation uses videoconferencing technology for several of its bimonthly meetings. The videoconference connects members at the OCWCOG office in Albany with members attending at the Toledo office of OCWCOG. Meetings are also sometimes held at other locations, including meetings in the past year in Newport and Corvallis.

The CWACT meetings are very well attended. Typically, 18-20 voting members attend meetings with an additional ten to twelve other people including alternates, staff and guests. This is a strong record of attendance for a region that encompasses a large geographic area, with long distances for some members to travel to meetings.

The Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments provides staff and technical support to the CWACT with funding provided through an Intergovernmental Agreement between ODOT and OCWCOG.

Geographic Boundary

Extending from the crest of the Cascades to the central coast, the communities of Linn, Benton and Lincoln Counties are linked by several important transportation infrastructures. Interstate 5, Highway 101 and Highway 99 provide north-south connections not only between communities and between regions, but also between the CWACT region and Washington, California, Canada and Mexico. Highway 20 (and its connections with Highway 34) stretches from the eastern CWACT boundary of the crest of the Cascades to the western boundary of the coast; connecting every CWACT community with a population of more than 5,000 with the exception of Lincoln City. The CWACT area is served by the Union Pacific mainline which, together with two connecting short line freight rail systems, is an important economic factor for many local communities. Two port districts, The Port of Newport and the Port of Toledo, serve the

CWACT area. It is important to note the significant role the ports play in the local and regional economy, including the economic impact of the recent decision by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to relocate its Marine Operations Pacific Center to Newport. Six general aviation airports serve the CWACT area: Newport (state), Albany, Lebanon (state), Toledo (state), Corvallis and Siletz Bay (state).

The CWACT area corresponds to ODOT's (Region 2) Area 4 and Maintenance District 4.

The communities in the CWACT area have a long and very strong commitment to working together on challenging and complex public policy issues. In response to the periodic reporting item included in the ACT guidelines, the communities in the CWACT area believe the current CWACT boundary contains an area of long-standing common interest and has served the communities very well for more than a decade. There is no need or desire to change the CWACT boundary.

Coordination of Activities

The CWACT coordinates its activities with other regions and organizations on a variety of levels. On an official level, neighboring ACTs, the director of the Oregon Coastal Zone Management Association and the director of the Corvallis Area Metropolitan Planning Organization serve as ex-officio members of the CWACT. There are also overlapping memberships, including state and federal organizations, which strengthen coordination. For example, the current CWACT Vice Chair serves as the President of the Association of Oregon Counties, a member of the CWACT Executive Committee serves on the Transportation Committee of the National League of Cities, and the Vice Chair of the OCWCOG Board of Directors serves on the ODOT Public Transit Advisory Committee.

Although there are no transit districts in the CWACT region important public transit services and special transportation services are provided through several local programs, with limited regional connections. Several voting members of CWACT, in their city and county roles, are responsible for policy and fiscal decisions related to public transit; and they bring this important experience and perspective to the CWACT discussion and decision-making table.

Public Involvement

The communities in the Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation have a long history, dating back prior to the formal ODOT charter, of stakeholder participation and public involvement in regional transportation items. As indicated in its Bylaws, CWACT encourages and supports public involvement by implementing the methods outlined in Attachment A of the Policy on Formation and Operation of Area Commissions on Transportation, adopted by the Oregon Transportation Commission on June 13, 2003. Given the size of the CWACT region, it is important to note that videoconferencing

technology allows the public to be involved in CWACT meetings without the need to travel long distances.

Key Activities and Initiatives

The CWACT has been involved in the past few years in a wide variety of transportation activities and issues which includes the STIP, non-STIP Highway items, ConnectOregon, planning, legislation and administrative rules, and transit and alternative modes as listed below. (TC) identifies involvement of Technical Committee

STIP

- Develop prioritization process and factors/criteria (TC)
- Solicit proposals for consideration
- Review proposals/discuss with project proponents (TC)
- Hold public workshops
- Following a public hearing, prioritize projects (TC)

Non-STIP Highway items

- Review and prioritize transportation enhancement projects (TC)
- Comments to OTC regarding draft policy on earmarks (TC)
- Review and prioritize earmark proposals (TC)
- Identification of “large unfunded projects” (TC)
- Identification of “enhanced funding” projects (TC)

ConnectOregon

- Develop review process
- Develop project priorities
- Review applications
- Rank and prioritize projects

Planning

- Review and provide comments to OTC on Oregon Transportation Plan update (TC)
- Review and provide comments to ODOT on Transportation Enhancement Program policies and procedures (TC)
- Review and approve CWACT/Corvallis Area MPO Protocols
- Review and comment on Corvallis Area MPO Transportation Plan
- Review and comment on Corvallis Area MPO TIP
- Receive updates on the efforts of West Coast Corridor Coalition
- Support funding for a Highway 20 corridor study

Rail

- Formation of Rail Task Force
- Rail Task Force review of ConnectOregon rail projects
- Discussion with stakeholders regarding freight mobility
- Support of federal funding for Bailey Line
- Review and comment on ODOT Intercity Rail Study

Legislation and Administrative Rules

- Support continued Business Energy Tax Credit funding for small transit programs
- Discussion with Senator Metsger regarding transportation funding package
- Support of congressional funding for Lincoln City US 101 project
- Support increase in Small City Allotment program
- Support state Jobs and Transportation Act, with specific recommendations
- Review of Federal Recovery and Reinvestment Act and serve as a clearinghouse to share information with local agencies
- Review of re-authorization of SAFETEA-LU and serve as a clearinghouse to share information with local agencies

Transit and alternative modes

- Receive updates on public transportation and special transportation programs
- Discussion with ODOT Public Transit Administrator Michael Ward
- Review and comment on ODOT tolling and pricing policy study

The CWACT Technical Committee plays a key role in the activities of the organization. Composed primarily of public works staff from the member jurisdictions, the committee often reviews and comments on issues before they are presented to the CWACT. The Technical Committee's comments and recommendations are important considerations when the CWACT makes its decisions. The Technical Committee was particularly helpful, during the past nine months, in sharing complex information regarding the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) with local government staff members, particularly smaller cities which have limited technical staff. Members of the Technical Committee, together with CWACT staff, provided technical assistance to some communities regarding applications for ARRA funds.

Importance of the CWACT to Local Communities

The public and private policy makers serving the communities in Linn, Benton and Lincoln Counties continue to express their strong support for the Cascades West Area on Transportation. Specific items which are frequently mentioned include:

- Regional System Improvements
- Greater Knowledge about Transportation
- Stronger Regional Ties
- Integration of Transportation Systems

Regional System Improvements

An important example of regional system improvements over a long period of time is the significant partnership effort related to Highway 20 improvements throughout the CWACT region. When the CWACT was formed in 1998, the major transportation issue for the group was the need for improvements on Highway 20, with an emphasis on safety

and regional economic benefits. In the past decade most of the major improvements have been completed or are in progress. The CWACT consistently maintained Highway 20 as a regional priority and ODOT and the OTC have provided substantial fiscal support to address the highway challenges. The projects have included the Albany couplet, the Philomath couplet, the Cline Hill project and the current Pioneer Mountain-Eddyville project. The cost of the current project, with the recently approved ARRA-funded project on the western edge, is approaching \$200 million and represents a remarkably successful partnership, between the CWACT communities, ODOT, the federal government and many others, over a long period of time.

Greater Knowledge about Transportation

Regional and state transportation items, the STIP process, OTC policies and ODOT operations, are complex. A decade ago many local officials did not have extensive knowledge about regional transportation issues. With the formation of the CWACT, local officials have become very familiar with transportation challenges and opportunities and have a much better understanding of the complex and integrated elements of transportation planning, construction and operation. Many CWACT members have served five years or more and indicate their participation has been particularly helpful in understanding and addressing integrated and multi-modal transportation challenges.

Stronger Regional Ties

Supported and encouraged by their years of service on the CWACT, many CWACT members have developed and improved working relationships with other members from throughout the three counties and other parts of the state. For example, CWACT members serve on boards and committees of the Association of Oregon Counties, the League of Oregon Cities, the Oregon Metropolitan Planning Organization Consortium, the West Coast Corridor Coalition, the Oregon Freight Advisory Committee, the Oregon Transit Association and the Oregon Local Program Committee. Representatives from the Linn-Benton-Lincoln region bring their CWACT background and experience to these important groups; and, in return, bring back to the CWACT important information and perspectives from other regions. In addition to addressing statewide issues, participation in these groups offers an opportunity for CWACT members to work with other leaders on issues and opportunities that cross regional boundaries.

Integration of Transportation Systems

Although highways continue to be the largest component of the CWACT regional transportation system effort, the CWACT has also clearly been involved in a variety of non-highways efforts including rail, ports, public transit and transportation demand management (transportation options). For example, the CWACT was involved in the ConnectOregon II decisions; and it looks forward to the recently approved ConnectOregon III funding.

Observations and Concerns

In line with the roles and responsibilities in the CWACT Bylaws, the CWACT wishes to share the following observations and concerns with the Oregon Transportation Commission and to offer its commitment to work with the OTC, ODOT and other transportation partners in addressing these challenges.

- The impact of the State transportation system on local systems
- Limited resources and collective decisions to best use the resources
- Transportation alternatives and connections
- The importance of integrated and coordinated planning

The impact of the State transportation system on local systems

Many communities in the CWACT region share the same challenge as communities throughout the state: the state highway also serves as “Main Street”. In those towns, the design and function of the state facility has a major influence on the character of the downtown area, the availability of parking and pedestrian safety. For example, in Lincoln County, Highway 101 carries the “Main Street” traffic in five communities, but it also carries all of the north-south freight traffic, tourist traffic and commuters.

In other communities state highways divide communities and limit the connections of the local system. For example, in Albany Interstate 5 bisects the city and allows only three connections between the east and west sides of town.

ODOT and local governments are challenged to balance the conflicting functions of a city transportation network with the need to move highway traffic efficiently.

The Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation wishes to acknowledge the very important efforts of ODOT to address these challenges in the past several years. Although not every community member may agree, the construction of the Philomath Couplet (and the Albany Couplet which is a different type of “Main Street”) have significantly improved local traffic congestion. The CWACT also acknowledges the very helpful efforts of the Region 2, Area 4 Manager and her staff in working with Lincoln City and the City of Corvallis in a mutual effort to address the “Main Street” and highway (and, in Corvallis, a major bridge) challenges. The CWACT also very much appreciates the effort of the Area Manager in working with local communities and potential developers; helping to bring forward all issues, in a timely manner, to assist partners in their collective efforts to resolve challenges.

Other ODOT efforts, including Transportation Enhancement funds to assist Waldport, Brownsville, Philomath and Corvallis in their “Main Street” efforts are recognized and appreciated by the CWACT.

Limited resources and collective decisions to best use the resources

The CWACT is well aware that, even with the approval of the 2009 Jobs and Transportation Act, transportation resources are limited. The ODOT Director's office recently reported that the projected 2010-2013 revenues for preservation, bridge, operations and maintenance will be \$247 million less than the original 2010-2013 STIP estimate, which is about 25% less than the original estimate.

The Jobs and Transportation Act will provide an important revenue increase of about 50% to cities and counties, and the CWACT communities very much appreciate this assistance. But the revenue available for state modernization projects (not earmarked in the bill) is estimated at a total of \$72 million in 2010-2013. Combined with the original 2010-2013 STIP estimate of \$117 million, a total of about \$47 million will be available each year for modernization projects in the state. To place this in perspective, the estimated cost of the long-standing and highest priorities in the CWACT area are: \$30 million for Highway 101 improvements in Lincoln City; \$50 million for improvements on Highway 20/34 between Philomath and Corvallis improvements; and \$5 million for widening Highway 99 in Corvallis. Although specific cost estimates have not yet been made, the I-5 project in the Albany area and the Corvallis/Willamette River crossing projects will each likely cost more than \$200 million.

CWACT members have joined in the chorus of people expressing concern about the legislative decision to fund specific projects rather than using the long-standing project selection process with its partnership of local public involvement, Area Commissions on Transportation and the Oregon Transportation Commission. In simple terms, legislation that bypasses ACTs and advisory committees limits opportunities for public involvement and discussion. It also reduces the commitment of members to stay involved in the activities of ACTs and other transportation planning groups.

Transportation alternatives and connections

Autos and trucks are the primary modes of transportation in our region and will continue to be in the foreseeable future. But, with limited funding for increasing highway capacity and an increase in the volume of traffic, transportation stakeholders need to take advantage of alternatives. In the CWACT region, that includes freight alternatives related to rail and ports; and passenger alternatives including public transit, carpool/vanpool options, and bike/ped programs. Additionally, with a growing senior population, transportation programs serving seniors and people with disabilities are more important than ever.

The CWACT appreciates the significant financial resources provided to local transit programs by the federal government during the past few years. We know that some members of the Oregon Transportation Commission have used transportation services provided by Lincoln County Transit and Corvallis Transit; and all OTC members are invited to join us for a tour of the transit programs in our region.

OCWCOG and the City of Corvallis have been involved in carpool and vanpool programs for more than a decade. The CWACT appreciates the annual ODOT Region 2 funding of \$110,000 (and statewide vanpool start up grants in 2005-2009). But the needs far outstrip the resources. Additional and sustainable support from ODOT is needed for local staffing, in addition to support for a statewide carpool match program that could provide employment-related transportation options (particularly in small cities and rural areas that have no public transit options), reduce congestion in larger communities, and reduce air emissions throughout the state.

The importance of integrated and coordinated planning

CWACT shares the belief that “we cannot simply build our way out of our transportation challenges” and that integrated, coordinated planning is required. An important element of this is the comprehensive review of the function and characteristics of transportation facilities and services; particularly a review at the regional level. More than a decade ago the CWACT developed, in partnership with ODOT, an interim corridor strategy for a 115 mile segment of Highway 20/34. The strategy reviewed highway, rail, airport, transit and bike/ped programs in relationship to transportation balance, regional connectivity, congestion, and safety; in addition to reviewing transportation issues in relation to economic, social, environmental and energy impacts.

CWACT suggests it is time for ODOT to once again participate, with local and regional partners, in corridor planning efforts including Highway 20 between Albany-Corvallis-Philomath.

Attachment: Bylaws
CWACT Membership