

**Mid-Columbia Economic Development District
Connect Mid-Columbia 2021 Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 17, 2021 via Zoom**

Attendance: Kevin Greenwood (Port of Hood River), Brad Dehart (ODOT), Lynn Burditt (Community Volunteer), Tammy Kaufman (Gorge Commission), Logan Cullums (WSDOT), David Griffith (Port of The Dalles), Dale McCabe (City of The Dalles), Lynn Ewing (Mayor of Maupin), Dale Robins (SW Wash RTC), Dave McClure (Klickitat County Economic Development), Mike Foreaker (City of Maupin), Terra Lingley (ODOT), Genevieve Scholl (Port of Hood River), Valerie Egon (ODOT), Patty Fink (CAT), Margie Ziegler (Port of Klickitat), Kathy Bostick

Staff: Jessica Metta (Executive Director), Kathy Fitzpatrick (Mobility Manager), Kate Drennan (Deputy Director Transportation), Jill Brandt (Admin Assistant)

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 am. A round of introductions took place.

Review Purpose; Last Meeting Highlights

Jessica Metta began with a brief overview of Connect Mid-Columbia's purpose, outlining the steps taken in each of the previous two meetings that have resulted in the priority list that will be reviewed and finalized at this session. This meeting will also determine where there is advocacy needed for the group to assist with.

2022 CEDS Transportation Infrastructure Projects Lists and Prioritization

Jessica put the project list tables up on screen for the group to consider and offer additions, corrections, updates. Criteria considered were connection to CEDS, ranking in the community, potential economic impact, regional significance, geographic disbursement, availability of funding source and readiness to proceed. The last two columns were left blank to be filled in at today's meeting. Jessica noted that projects that have funding currently available have been ranked higher if there is only a small remaining portion left to get funded, or if the project is ready to proceed. This list also incorporates the top projects from each of MCEDD's five counties and regional economic partners such as the Ports, ODOT, WSDOT, the Gorge Commission, etc. Jessica added that the projects further down the list are expected to move up further out in future as the top projects are completed and the available funding can be allocated to these projects. The group discussed the projects and adjusted the rankings in each criteria as needed.

Tammy Kaufman noted that the alternative fuels and electrification of bus fleets item in the top chart was marked with a single X designating lower priority. She proposed that this item be ranked higher for regional significance in light of the newly passed Infrastructure Bill and the focus on climate change as a high priority for both Federal and State legislatures. Kate Drennan clarified this item's presence on the list. She explained that it came as a recommendation made from the Klickitat Valley Health representative and is not a defined project per se as other items in the list are. Alternative fuels and bus electrification is a framework concept at this point, needing much more development before it can be classified as a specific project to be funded and completed within this document's time framework. However, it was noted that with the Infrastructure Bill's passing and the Climate Change focus, there is tremendous movement pushing progress forward on this concept. Dale Robins commented that the new

infrastructure bill is specifically giving money for the development of bus electrification and some other pieces that fall under this line item.

Kathy Fitzpatrick suggested adding a column that will refer to which plan a project is in. Jessica will add to the community ranking column. Kate noted that this column also identifies who has ranked this project as important.

Hood River/White Salmon Bridge: Jessica asked Kevin Greenwood where this project is in terms of availability of funding and physical progress. Kevin replied they have \$15 million. At the end of this spending, the project will be in position to go for design/ build bid for entire project. Kevin added that Senator King has 4 million for the project although it is unclear if there will be a transportation plan in WA state next year, and that Oregon may be further ahead as far as legislative priority for funding this project. Dale Robins refocused the discussion by suggesting listing the availability for funding as high, medium or low. Kevin replied that this project should be rated at medium because it already has some of the funding it needs, but not all.

Cascade Locks Bridge: Dale Robins noted that grant sources for this project should be identified as medium. This project is continuing the rehab of the Bridge and is not a new project. Jessica clarified for the group that this project includes adding the pedestrian and bike lane and is safety oriented. Dale added that this project is part of a 15-year Bridge plan that is already in progress.

Columbia Avenue realignment in Stevenson: Dale noted that this project has not started with formal design yet, and money has not yet been secured. He saw the classification as low due to these factors. Regarding the readiness to proceed, the environmental work and engineering work need to be completed.

Fuel farm upgrades at airport: David Griffith reported that this project is being worked on, that the Port has acquired some of the tanks needed. He was uncertain of the status of the funding or the readiness to proceed.

Hood River Anchor Way and North First Street: Genevieve Scholl reported on this project, giving background and what has been accomplished to date. Genevieve stated that this project is also tied to the development of Lot 1. Lot 1 is the large parcel located in the middle of Hood River's waterfront across from the Second Street Bridge. Construction of Anchor Way will address the ingress and egress concerns to meet ODOT's stipulation for the lot, regardless of usage. This project also involves the relocation of storm water, sewer, and utilities access. As planned, it will move North First St. west and provide more park space, as well as providing new commercially zoned properties for new businesses. The project design includes a new transit hub for large buses to be located on Anchor Way. For funding, this project has already received two grant awards to date- the Immediate Opportunity Fund and ARPA funds directed by Senator Thompson. The Port also plans to submit a grant application to the EDA. If awarded, this grant of \$2.8 million will move the project forward next year. Genevieve concluded that this rates as a high priority project. Genevieve said the Port currently has 50% of the needed funding secured, and the EDA grant award will complete the funding needed. She requested assistance with advocacy in the form of a letter of support to include in the grant application. She added that the environmental impact assessment is done and the decision-ready status for the site is done. She noted that the environmental statement may need to be refreshed as it was done a few years ago. The concept

design is done, with perhaps some additional architecture updates. Overall, this project is classified as ready to go.

Region 1 ODOT project – Wasco County Paving: Brad DeHart spoke about the status of this project, stating that the Moro to Grass Valley paving is moving forward. The design is complete, and surveying is underway. Brad added that the scope of this project is up in the air due to some portions needing additional development. He explained that the pavement resurfacing needs to be done sooner to preserve the existing roads. There are right of way issues for the projected passing lanes that may cause delay and require redesign of the road with separated lanes. He added that this project will be moving forward faster than was expected originally, at least the pavement preservation part of it. The contract may go forward as soon as next year.

Brad Dehart added that the US 26 pavement preservation job is more likely to move forward with the passing of the infrastructure bill. He expressed optimism that it will be in construction in 2023, 2024 at the latest. He rated this project with a high likelihood of moving forward.

SR14 Curves Realignment near Cape Horn: Dale Robins reported this project at level one for readiness and funding; both are at beginning stage only.

Mosier Streetscape: Kathy Fitzpatrick clarified that this project was submitted as a FLAP application for funding and that it may be listed in ODOT's 2024-2027 STIP cycle plan.

Historic Highway State Trail Completion: Terra Lingley from ODOT reported that this project is currently underway with one segment under construction from Viento to Mitchell. She added that ODOT is currently writing the grant application for the eastern segment of the trail that goes to Hood River. She rated this project at Level Two. Some pieces of it are already happening, some need additional funding, and some haven't started yet.

Comments then moved down to the projects listed in the second table.

SR14 Bingen project: Dale Robins noted that the radar speed signs have already been installed, so the radar speed signs can come off of this list, marked as complete. The other pieces of this project the pedestrian crossing and sidewalks improvements, still need to be done.

Rockfall projects: Dale explained that this project is funded on an ongoing basis. He gave the project a medium ranking and added that it will be on the list forever.

STIP enhanced projects: Terra Lingley reported that the WaNaPa toll bridge lane is not yet funded, but it is on the list and may or may not receive funding. In Hood River, the Cascade Ave exit (#62) and Mt Adams are on the plan to add an eastbound vehicle lane and multiuse path on east side of Cascade Ave. There is no funding yet.

Maple Street Improvement to Bingen Industrial Park: Dale gave the update for this project as fully funded and planned to go to construction soon.

Dale suggested a requirement that items on the lower list need two X's before they can be moved up to the first list. If readiness and availability of funding is at least 2X, a project should be prioritized up to the top list. Terra noted that many projects require that they be shovel ready before funding will be awarded. She added that this is a chicken and egg problem because without funding, there is no way to get the project to shovel ready status. Match opportunities are a big lift to get these projects moving along. Jessica explained that the top project for each county and top project for each partner is on this list to recognize the importance to each county. This is why some are here even though there is no funding, in recognition of the project's importance to the community. Dale suggested that twenty projects on the list was not unreasonable given the large geographic area.

Brad reported that the Cascade Avenue at Rand project is fully funded and going to construction next fall.

Jessica reported that CAT and LINK are finishing up their agency master plans, and that there may potentially be transit projects that will be identified but are not available at this time. She added that annual updates would ensure that all priority projects will get included.

Update on Active Funding and Policy Proposals

The group brainstormed a list of funding opportunities for transportation projects, such as the STIP list, FLAP grants, Connect Oregon, the Consolidated Grant Program for Transit in Washington, FHWA grant programs, Bike and Pedestrian projects that fall under available statewide funding. Terra put the website for state funding for pedestrian projects in the chat. She explained that this funding requires that local communities apply for it, ODOT cannot.

Genevieve Scholl noted that the Port of Hood River's East Anchor Way project will be applying to EDA. The Port of Hood River plans to complete their funding application by the end of December. She agreed to send Jessica a template of the letter of support for sharing that the Port plans to add to the application.

Jessica commented that ODOT is sending out plans for infrastructure bill spending, and that WSDOT is not as far along. Logan offered to check into what is available. Dale added that the Washington legislature has had an infrastructure bill for the past three years that has not been approved. He was cautiously optimistic that the state will pass a bill that can provide match money for the new federal grants.

Terra Lingley said ODOT is looking to submit an application for EDA funding to help finish the Viento to Mitchell project. She specified that the ask would be for \$800,000 to finish the campgrounds.

2022 CEDS Draft Transportation Action Plan

Jessica directed the group to the CEDS draft that was provided in the materials for the meeting, and asked for any final comments on the language. She reminded the group that the goal was to ensure that this list will include all of the work planned to move forward over the next five years.

There were no comments. Jessica then asked if it would be beneficial to gather this group together to coordinate transportation priorities once per year, every two years, or remain at five years with the major

CEDS updates. Kevin Greenwood commented that he felt that the annual CEDS project list update was a good practice, with an in-depth review every five years.

Kate Drennan noted that one possible idea to assist projects to move forward might be to create a brochure laid out with our projects that shows photos and lists the funding that has been secured for each one. This could be used on grant applications as an advocacy tool to present to legislators or granting institutions. Kate offered to lead in this project if the group has interest. Dale Robins endorsed this idea by relating that Clark County produces a projects brochure similar to what Kate suggested. He explained that each year Clark County forwards the brochure to the legislature, and that it has been a successful way to present the county's projects there.

Kathy Fitzpatrick added that MCEDD and all of the transportation agencies need to be nimble with projects that were not in the top ten but may be ideal for a certain kind of funding program may open up, and that projects listed at the top do not qualify for. This requires keeping an eye on programs as they unfold. Lynn Burditt agreed that agencies need to be able to shift to where funding is available. Tammy Kaufmann added that the focus on climate change brings electrification and alternate fuel sources to the forefront with new possibilities for funding in these areas. Keeping this item on the group's priority list is good strategy to show legislators that the region as a whole considers these projects important. This may open up funding in the nearer future.

Jessica added that the presentation from Jessica Olson at the last Connect Mid-Columbia meeting brought out conversation on the benefit of mass transit using alternate power will significantly reduce emissions. Jessica added that she can work some of this language into the Action Plan.

Next Steps

Genevieve Scholl stated that in the year ahead the Port plans to increase activity and progress on the Hood River/White Salmon bridge replacement project. She explained that the Port wants to plan ahead for a "Bridge Week" to organize advocacy - phone calls and letters happening all at same time that could all be scheduled as one event that will be a public coordinated promotional/lobbying effort. She is in the process of looking at the calendar to select a week and would like to coordinate with MCEDD and any other regional partners in the group. Patty Fink stated that CAT will be happy to help in any way because this project is crucial to the communities on both sides of the river.

Jessica wrapped up the meeting by summarizing the next steps.

- MCEDD will finish this list that will be included as an appendix to the CEDS and will be updated with the feedback from today's meeting. She noted the group's willingness to gather together each year for a review and update, adding that MCEDD already updates the larger community projects list each year, with the updated list approved in March each year at MCEDD's full Board meeting. She noted that the Transportation list could function on the same timeline. Jessica reiterated the need to be nimble with the prioritization of projects as funding comes.
- Kate Drennan will move forward with building out the project descriptions discussed.
- The Port's Bridge advocacy week will need full support.
- Jessica will share out the notes from this meeting to all attendees and offered MCEDD's assistance with support and/or coordination to help projects move forward.

Kathy Fitzpatrick asked Dale to give a brief overview of how Klickitat and Skamania Counties participate in funding and prioritization with two policy committees formed under the RTC. Dale explained that Washington state formed a regional transportation planning organization. Clark/ Skamania/ and Klickitat Counties are all grouped together into one region, and the three counties do a combined and coordinated regional transportation plan. Dale further explained that funding in Washington is actually allocated to each county based on its population. Because Clark County has the highest population, the RTC is located there, and in Skamania and Klickitat the money goes to the county itself, which allocates and funds projects according to local priority. Kathy explained that the ability to participate in the policy meetings is a great way to find out more about the transportation needs and projects for each of the counties. She added that Dale runs and staffs the RTC, and that the agency's planning meetings provide a great participatory and engagement process.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35am.

Respectfully submitted by Jill Brandt, Administrative Assistant.