



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Highway  
Administration**

**Public Involvement for Transportation Decision-making**

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**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT  
AT OREGON DEPARTMENT  
OF TRANSPORTATION**

**September 1997**

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# FORWARD

One way to find out how to use public involvement techniques effectively is to learn from the experiences of others. **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**, describes how a State department of transportation uses a variety of public involvement techniques in both project development and statewide planning. It is one of three separate case studies of public involvement. The others are:

- **METROPLAN (LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS): “Pouring Water on Dry Ground,”** a mid-sized metropolitan planning organization using varied public involvement techniques to start involvement early in long range transportation planning.
- **SOUTH SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT/LA LINEA DEL SUR,** proactive public involvement during project development in an area with large and diverse ethnic populations.

Copies of these case studies are available from:

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# NOTICE

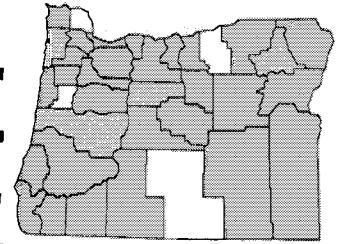
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# Case Study: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION



## ODOT public involvement

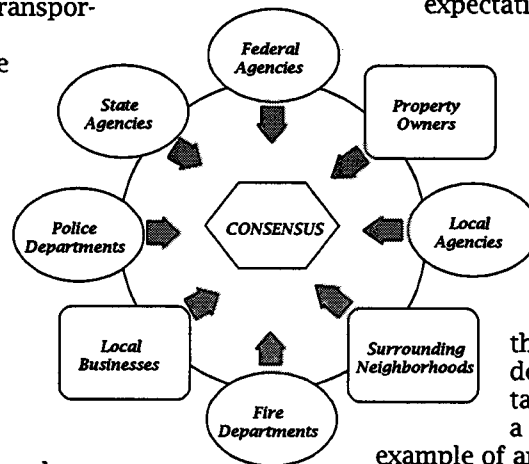
Oregon enjoys a national reputation for progressive public policy, good government, and an open and inclusive political process. During research for these case studies, observers often cited the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) as one of the best examples of transportation agencies that involve the public in their project planning and program development efforts. ODOT's experience offers valuable lessons to transportation professionals working to develop meaningful and effective public involvement programs.

- An example of ODOT's commitment to public involvement is the *Oregon Transportation Plan*. This long-range, multimodal, statewide transportation plan was developed over 24 months from 1990-1992, and its preparation included 49 public meetings and the direct involvement of more than 12 committees, dozens of organizations, and several thousand citizens. The goals, policies, and actions in the policy element of the plan were developed by more than 70 policy advisory committee members, including the Oregon Transportation Commission, local elected officials, transportation industry representatives, members of the public, and State agency representatives. These policies and actions were the focus of 23 additional public meetings held throughout the State to discuss the evolving policies and refine specific language in order to more clearly reflect the expressed views of the Oregon public.
- Another example is the *I-5/Highway 217/Kruse Way Interchange Project*. Anticipating a complex and potentially controversial process, ODOT formed a comprehensive advisory committee in 1994 at the outset of the project. A 55-member steering committee of representatives from local, State, and Federal government agencies, trucking concerns, police and fire departments, local businesses, property owners, and surrounding neighborhoods participated in five intense workshops to reach consensus on the proposed facility's conceptual design. (See Figure 1.)

Subsequent to these workshops, the committee presented its findings in a series of town meetings where local residents reviewed and commented on the design recommendations.

- In contrast, the agency was criticized by residents, community associations, other government agencies, and environmental groups for its initial approach to involving the public in the Portland area's *Western Bypass Study*, which ran from 1989 to 1995. Critics asserted that ODOT tried to force a highway plan upon a resistant community, with a nominal public involvement process, using an advisory committee that did not provide balanced representation of the major interests. The process met with vigorous opposition; in response, ODOT reevaluated its approach and restructured the study. After nearly five years of study, the recommended alternative gained a consensus of support, and a confrontational situation was turned around into a cooperative—albeit challenging—planning process.

**Figure 1. I-5/Highway 217/Kruse Way Interchange Project Advisory Committee**



ODOT's approach to public involvement is, in part, a reflection of Oregon's progressive tradition and of the expectations of an active and vigilant public.

But the lessons we can derive from ODOT arise more out of what the agency has forced itself to become: an organization in which both planning professionals and management are committed to meaningful and effective public involvement because they have been encouraged to innovate by citizens who *expect* involvement. ODOT recognizes that improved outreach efforts throughout project and program development yield smoother implementation, improved agency credibility, and a better product. ODOT is a good

example of an agency with a nurtured tradition of public involvement that continues to strive for improvement and to find better ways to work with its citizens to develop the best possible transportation projects, services, and programs.

## Learning from experience

ODOT has had its share of criticism from Oregonians. In 1989, the agency announced plans to build a western by-

pass highway around southwest Portland, connecting some of the region's fastest-growing suburbs. The initial project design was perceived by residents, community associations, and growth-management advocates as insensitive, with unanswered land-use issues, limited public involvement, and a pro-highway advisory committee. In retrospect, ODOT staff now recognizes that the approach was not well designed. To be fair, ODOT may have been overly influenced by the perspectives of some local jurisdictions whose cooperation it sought. These criticisms are not unlike those leveled at many agencies working to effect a variety of projects or programs and trying to satisfy many (sometimes differing) constituencies, with public involvement treated as a thorny requirement.

Meeting with vocal opposition and faced with the potential for expensive, protracted confrontation, ODOT regrouped and reconsidered its program. Shifts in public attitudes towards agency activities, the active suggestion by a non-profit group—1000 Friends of Oregon—for a land-use-based alternative, and the development of State policies concerning citizen participation in land-use planning also influenced the turnaround. By all accounts, the Western Bypass was an important turning point in ODOT's history of public involvement. In retrospect, the project is now regarded as an example of creative problem-solving and consensus-building forged through cooperation among the various participants, including ODOT, the affected communities, and concerned non-profit and private groups. ODOT staff practiced patience, creativity, and perseverance to rescue the process and make a success of it. Working uphill from a poor start, listening to criticism and acting upon it, and continuing to involve many people as the process evolved, ODOT demonstrated that through attentive dialogue, even critical and antagonistic groups can become partners in planning.

After a rocky beginning, Portland's Western Bypass study continued for five years, permitting a large segment of the community to participate in discussions and resulting in a greater consensus of support for the final recommendations. A discrete portion of the proposed expressway will be built, and several other projects—including improved transit services—resulted from the study. The Western Bypass experience encouraged ODOT to develop a *corridor study approach* to transportation planning—a strategy that has won praise even from the agency's most vocal critics and has meshed nicely with ODOT's long-range and statewide planning efforts. By analyzing transportation problems in the context of a corridor, instead of single intersections or short segments, ODOT is better able to incorporate several viewpoints, allow greater numbers of people and organizations to participate in the planning process, and enable citizens and planners to treat problems in their larger, more natural, contexts.

From this challenging experience, ODOT redefined "community involvement" more broadly, to include working not

only with landowners directly affected by a potential project, but also with local jurisdictions, special districts, other agencies, local commerce, and interest groups from a broader community. ODOT staff, Metro (the Portland metropolitan planning organization) and city of Portland planners, and independent observers agree that ODOT has become more cooperative with the general public and has adopted a more flexible, responsive manner. *Where well-meaning professionals used to feel more comfortable approaching the public with detailed analyses and a predetermined set of solutions, ODOT now recognizes that the public expects to have a genuine role in defining the problem and identifying a broad set of potential solutions.*

Even the agency's critics admit that ODOT has improved its public involvement efforts since the Western Bypass project. ODOT's willingness to respond to criticism and to change course demonstrated its commitment, sensitivity, and flexibility. Consequently, ODOT has successfully implemented several projects with effective and inclusive outreach programs, including elements that could be readily repeated elsewhere.

### The Oregon Transportation Plan



The public involvement process for this statewide long-range plan was open and inclusive, ultimately involving several thousand participants (among the largest participation efforts for a statewide transportation planning process in the nation). All advisory and steering committee meetings were open to the public. Anyone present could

participate in discussions, and especially active and informed people were invited to become members of the policy advisory committees. Comment was encouraged right up until the hearing record closed. When changes were made to the draft plan, the new language was shown in italics and the old language crossed out. An explanation of each change showed who suggested it and how the staff responded. This made subsequent draft reviews more effective and easier for all parties and contributed to a greater sense of trust in the process by demonstrating in black and white that ODOT listens.

Public involvement was critical to the planning process. The goals, policies, and actions in the Policy Element were developed by more than 70 policy advisory committee members, including members of the Transportation Commission (a five-member, Governor-appointed board), local elected officials, transportation industry representatives, members of the general public, and State agency representatives. These policies and actions were the focus of public meetings throughout Oregon in 1991, whereupon they were modified as a result of comments. ODOT attributes the project's success to the commitment of the Commis-

sion, ODOT's management team, and the inclusiveness and openness of the process.

To generate interest in the Policy Element and the public meetings throughout the State, ODOT staff produced and distributed a newsletter and a brochure to a mailing list of over 1,800 jurisdictions, State and local officials, business and civic organizations, user groups, trade associations, and citizens. Press releases went to newspapers and radio and television stations statewide. ODOT administrators visited legislators, public officials, and the media to inform them about the issues and get exposure in advance of the public meetings.

Local government officials urged the Transportation Commission to make the Oregon Transportation Plan process as open and inclusive as possible. The Commission and ODOT wanted to involve groups with expertise that ODOT staff did not have, particularly in the area of freight planning, and decided to organize policy advisory committees to develop the plan's goals and policies. Each commissioner chaired one of the five policy advisory committees, making a substantial personal time commitment to interacting with concerned citizens, ODOT staff, and special interest groups as the plan took shape. Division administrators also agreed to serve on the committees, further expanding the exposure and involvement of senior personnel in the planning process.

### **Corridor studies**

Experiences such as those with the Western Bypass resulted in ODOT approaching transportation issues in their true, regional context. Consequently, ODOT has facilitated wider community discussion and consensus-building as a part of project planning. ODOT has found that staffing these projects with trained planners and community involvement professionals (as well as civil engineers) can make the process more effective and instill greater trust in the public. Complex, multi-jurisdictional projects force different constituents and community groups to recognize their common interests and mutual problems and develop potential solutions collectively. This effort has served to portray ODOT as a facilitator helping residents work together to adjust to growth problems through transportation planning, instead of forcing change upon reluctant communities. By more effectively engaging people, ODOT has demonstrated the utility of an open, participatory process for community planning. Open house meetings with brief presentations and plenty of staffed exhibits allow people to concentrate only on issues that interest them.

### **The Portland South/North Transit Corridor Study**

To reach a greater percentage of the affected population in the metropolitan region and help the public better visualize potential build alternatives, Portland Metro launched a comprehensive program at the beginning of its

planning effort. As a major player in this collaborative effort, ODOT actively participated in workshops, community meetings, open houses, home meetings, and other methods to keep the public informed and monitor public opinion. A newsletter was produced and distributed to a mailing list, and study materials were distributed through libraries and other public buildings. The need for consensus was designed into the planning process. Any dissent along the way required back-to-the-drawing-board meetings to forge agreement on any planning aspect of the project. ODOT continued its active cooperation with Metro throughout the MPO's planning process.

A series of mode and alignment workshops were held throughout the study corridor. Comments and suggestions from the public were used to develop preliminary scoping alternatives. Four scoping meetings were held throughout the corridor, in concert with special alignment reports, study newsletters, scoping packets, media outreach materials, and briefings to elected officials. Only then did the evaluation of selected alternatives, with its own public involvement process, begin.

### **The Oregon Public Transportation Plan**

As part of this long-range plan for public transportation, ODOT held a series of 23 public workshops around the State to gather public opinion about bus and rail transit and paratransit. Some meetings were held at traditional sites, while others were held in shopping malls and library foyers. The informal workshops in non-traditional places enabled ODOT to collect a wider variety of viewpoints, including those transit stakeholders not usually represented at formal meetings (the very young and the transit-dependent). To target minority communities, senior citizens, and the economically disadvantaged, ODOT selected shopping centers favored by these special groups. Working directly with mall managers, the agency was able to get market profiles for the shopping centers and target hours that typically have the greatest shopper traffic volumes. The workshops were simple, with a few attention-grabbing visuals, a straightforward three-question survey, and ODOT and local representatives on hand to discuss the plan and citizens' interests.

Altogether, ODOT staff talked to more than 800 people statewide and received more than 750 survey responses. Nearly 75 percent of the surveys were completed at the non-traditional mall and library sites.

### **Demonstrated techniques and applications**



In the course of involving the public in these and other planning efforts, ODOT staff members use several standard techniques, as well as some newer

techniques. They emphasize that the standard techniques can be made more effective through strategic thinking. Sitting around a table with other members of the project team, brainstorming about questions such as “Whom do we need to reach?” “Where can we find them?” and “How can we get them involved?” can produce good ideas. As with many strategic campaigns, timing and level of effort can be critical factors in making any public involvement effort successful. As one ODOT professional noted: “There aren’t that many public involvement techniques, but different approaches and combinations of techniques can have different effects with different groups.” Don’t abandon a technique based on one disappointing experience. Perseverance and creativity will be rewarded eventually with encouraging results.

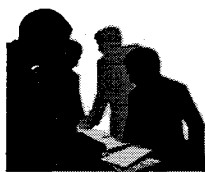
### Public meetings

The 48 public meetings held throughout the State during the public comment period as part of the Oregon Transportation Plan were designed to be informal and to solicit comments. Meetings began with brief introductions by local officials and an ODOT administrator who stressed the importance of the effort. After members of the audience introduced themselves, the staff tailored the presentations to those present. ODOT has found that meetings should be held in locations that are accessible and familiar to the community, with staggered meeting times to allow more people to attend. A record should be made of all public comments and input, and specific notation made to all suggested changes to draft documents. ODOT staff stresses that impressive turnout at meetings should not be equated with a successful outreach program. Sometimes only a few people may attend a meeting, but the agency’s effort to provide the opportunity to participate can make a critical good impression, even on those unable to attend. In rural parts of a State, meeting attendance can be small, but the input is no less important, and the citizens’ efforts to attend must be appreciated.



### Open houses

“Drop ‘n Shop” open house formats stress plenty of exhibits with ample staff on hand to allow people to make the most of their own limited time. People are encouraged to “drop in” and shop around for the information that interests them. These open house events are held in a variety of places, including public buildings (libraries) and commercial spaces (shopping malls). ODOT staff believe that when people know they won’t have to sit through a long presentation that doesn’t interest them in order to get the information they need, nor have to speak before a large group in order to express their concerns, they are more willing to attend. Part of making the experience easier for the public can be the agency’s effort to use



appropriate language. This may mean translations for non-English speakers, as well as using simple nontechnical terms, local references, and local issues, even in English-language documents and exhibits.

### Informal workshops

By holding Public Transportation Plan workshops in local shopping centers, ODOT was able to include a broader cross-section of the public in the planning process. The informal nature of the workshops allowed greater opportunities for one-on-one discussions and enabled people to get the information they wanted, while ODOT was able to solicit more ideas, comments, and concerns in shaping the plan. ODOT staff suggests trying to balance staffing at workshops to include State or regional representatives, as well as local people. In an informal situation, such as a kiosk set up in a local shopping center, a familiar person or a well-respected local official can attract individuals to the display and encourage their participation in the outreach effort, even if they are unfamiliar with the details of the project. The agency staff can focus on the specific transportation issues, while the local people increase the participation rate.



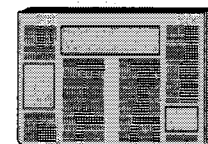
### Surveys

A draft version of the Oregon Transportation Plan included a survey form, and additional copies were available at public meetings. The results reinforced comments made during the public review process and clarified attitudes about finance. The surveys used at the Plan’s workshops were simple and straightforward: Three questions asked people to check the types of services they wanted in their communities, prioritize them, and check preferred funding sources from a given list. Additional space was provided for comments. Two questions required selecting options from lists, and the third required ranking. While respondents could add to the given lists, the survey did not require detailed answers or extensive writing. By providing blank space, ODOT invited written comments from those so inclined, but participants did not find themselves forced to sit down and write out detailed comments just to answer the survey. ODOT staff consciously limited the survey to two sides of a single sheet of paper for clarity and simplicity.



### Press releases

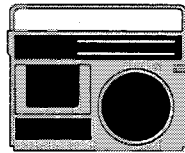
ODOT sent releases to radio and television stations and newspapers throughout the State to announce public meetings associated with the Oregon Transportation Plan. Members of the media interviewed ODOT staff to expand stories based on pre-meeting materials and to follow up reports of the meetings. A widely read business paper, the



*Daily Journal of Commerce*, ran a six-edition series of articles on the plan, giving it greater exposure within the State's business community. While press releases are not particularly innovative, their use can be. They can be used to announce otherwise routine events or spotlight an agency's response to special conditions. By using a variety of writing styles to capture the media's attention, and by customizing releases—where possible—according to the style, market, and expectations of each medium, ODOT found it could *make* news out of its activities through well-designed press releases.

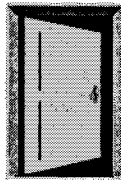
## Radio news service

ODOT produces two news stories every week about transportation issues around the State. The stories are given to about 150 Oregon radio stations for broadcast. Smaller stations in the more rural areas appreciate the additional news source (some say it's like having a Salem reporter on staff) and ODOT appreciates the added opportunity to get the facts out to the public. Topics focus on safety issues and current projects. ODOT strives to make the news stories objective and to avoid propaganda and competition with commercial news services.



## Door-to-door outreach

As part of one corridor study, an ODOT staff member found going door-to-door in the affected communities on a Saturday was a good way to get people involved in the project. While ODOT had publicized the project in the press and other media, staff found many people did not consider the implications of the project on their communities until an agency representative knocked on their doors and invited them to discuss the issues. Getting more people involved early assured broader support as complex issues surfaced, and the extraordinary efforts ODOT made to reach people in the first place reaped greater credibility for the agency.



## Editorial boards

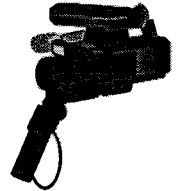
ODOT staff tries to keep editors of major papers informed of agency projects and of public issues tied to those projects. By meeting specifically with major newspaper editors and educating them about all aspects of a transportation project, ODOT can increase project news coverage and better assure objective newspaper editorials. This is especially important during the course of a controversial project or divisive public campaign, when the influence of a major paper's editorial can be very important. ODOT reached out to newspaper editors during development of the Oregon Transportation Plan, and the agency routinely includes editorial boards in the public involvement process of any large-scale project. ODOT found it was in the



agency's best interest to keep news editors well informed.

## Video sampling

After conducting a statistically valid survey of public opinion, ODOT staff videotaped volunteer citizens on the street expressing common opinions. These statements are incorporated into the presentation of survey results at hearings, board meetings, or public comment meetings. The presentations are not meant to be actual testimony, but rather vocalizations of valid public opinion. The image of Jane Q. Public reiterating a common concern can be much more effective than a simple chart in a summary report. While video sampling is not a public involvement tool per se, it may be used to support a larger public involvement effort and present survey findings in a more creative, dynamic manner.



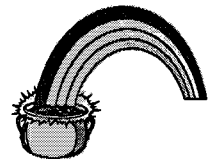
## Attitude and commitment

Several ODOT staff members stress that the variety of outreach and participation techniques available to all transportation professionals are far more useful when applied by staffpersons who like public involvement. They are committed and have a positive, enthusiastic attitude. While focusing on any new techniques and methods, one should be sensitive to the context in which they may be applied. The needs and interests of the citizens involved should remain paramount. Sometimes people don't want to try something new, they just want to use familiar methods, but with new elements, new players, or new ideas.



## Benefits of effective public involvement

Most transportation agencies around the country have had challenging experiences similar to ODOT's initial Western Bypass effort. Any public involvement veteran can attest to the high toll in agency morale, legislative support, and credibility that bad press can cost an agency. Effective public involvement is critical to the successful implementation of transportation planning and program development, and it is essential for creative and viable solutions to emerge from a problem-solving process. ODOT's reorganization of the Western Bypass project, and its clear effort to regain public trust by involving and listening better to the community demonstrates this lesson.



ODOT's approach to public involvement reflects a belief that by bringing a wide range of affected people into an open dialogue, they learn to consider their concerns in the context not only of technical feasibility, but in light of other people's concerns as well. They are, therefore, more likely to come to consensus. Citizens are more likely to

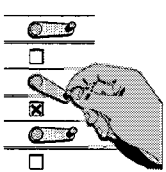
support a plan or program if they can:

- 1) see that their views have been fairly considered;
- 2) accept that a legitimate process was used to arrive at the decision; and
- 3) understand the reasons for the decision.

With consensus, ODOT can move a project or program forward into implementation with fewer community, political, regulatory, and legal obstacles, and it can garner additional support that may actually accelerate the necessary funding process. When there are legal or other challenges, ODOT has found these obstacles are more successfully surmounted with a record of a legitimate public involvement effort in hand. This can mean less time and less money spent to rescue a project or program from vocal and confrontational opposition.

With an open, visible process, citizens can see that ODOT is listening and responding to their concerns. They can also track and better understand the key steps in the decision-making process. ODOT thus builds a stronger base of trust with its constituents—not only for the specific project or program at hand, but for the agency's overall operations.

Experience has shown that by ensuring that community values and concerns are addressed in the process, the resulting plan or program can be more responsive to the needs of the community, more politically viable, and sometimes more technically viable due to the early identification of technical issues brought out by strong public scrutiny. For example, the South/North Corridor project proposed a regional bond measure to fund the local share

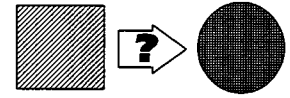


of project implementation costs. A 1994 special referendum won approval for the \$475 million bond with 64 percent of the vote. This was one of only a few transportation initiatives to succeed at the polls in 1994, a year characterized around the country by strong public hostility to new taxes.

The vigorous public involvement program that preceded the vote is credited with assuring the voters' approval, as well as the subsequent passage of a bill to provide State funding for the project.

ODOT believes public involvement is simply the right thing to do. This attitude is rooted in the belief that citizens have a fundamental right to a voice in major planning and decision-making processes that affect their communities, and a say in how public moneys should be spent. If expressed as such to the public, this value-based approach is likely to be recognized as sincere; it therefore produces a more positive public response to agency appeals and enhances agency credibility.

## Can the Oregon example be copied?



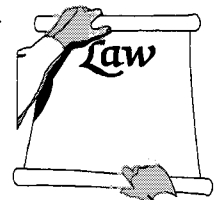
ODOT offers an inspiring example of how useful techniques in public involvement may be applied for transportation planning and program development. But can these techniques be as effective elsewhere, or is there something special about ODOT and Oregon?

Any assessment of the applicability of ODOT's public involvement efforts to other agencies' challenges must first take into account the context and history of the agency. ODOT is not unusual in size or structure. It is a State agency, with a staff of about 4,500 people to serve Oregon's 3.1 million citizens. The State's large area (about 98,000 square miles, or 254,000 square kilometers) is divided into six ODOT regions. There are four metropolitan planning organizations in Oregon, centered around Portland (core city population 438,000), Eugene (120,000), Salem (117,000), and Medford (53,000). ODOT operates with a biennial budget of \$1.6 billion. While the agency has a large territory to serve, much of the population (about 70 percent) is concentrated in metropolitan Portland and the Willamette Valley. Large parts of the State are mountainous, park and forest preserve, or high desert.

Early in the twentieth century, the State developed the "Oregon System," a set of political reforms—including a strong reliance on ballot initiatives, referenda, and recall, as well as direct primary elections and female suffrage—that established the State's reputation for progressive, participatory government.

Increasing population pressures in the early 1970s led to creation of the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC), a statewide land-use planning and growth management agency. The list of LCDC's planning goals begins with a call for "the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process," including transportation planning. Many Oregonians refer to LCDC's "Goal One" as the most obvious foundation of participatory transportation planning, and many believe this 20-year legacy has instilled in the State's citizens the expectation that they will be able to participate in issues affecting statewide transportation policy matters, as well as projects more directly affecting their lives.

To satisfy concerns about planning coordination, the LCDC and ODOT developed the Transportation Planning Rule (OAR 660-12) in 1990, an administrative rule carrying out the LCDC's statewide transportation goal and governing transportation planning and project development at the local, regional, and statewide levels. Under the rule, the metropolitan planning organizations and regional bodies are required to adopt regional transportation system plans (TSPs)





consistent with the adopted elements of the State Plan. Local governments are to adopt local TSPs consistent with the elements of the State and the regional plans. With this rule, the State plan assumed authority and created expectations for coordinated and participatory transportation planning at all levels of government.

Oregonians take pride in their tradition of strong citizen participation in government, and they *expect* their public agencies to be open and cooperative. While this may suggest that ODOT's strong public involvement efforts are just "natural" in Oregon, in fact the strong participatory tradition and legacy of the Oregon System have forced ODOT and other State agencies to adapt to increasingly demanding citizen expectations, and to innovate beyond the relatively simple, perfunctory outreach efforts with which agencies in other States sometimes "get by." The strong opposition ODOT faced with the Western Bypass project and the agency's need to reevaluate its public outreach efforts on that project attest to this challenge.

Some observers suggest that Oregon has a leg up on other parts of the country only in that it began a statewide land-use planning effort 20 years ago with a deliberate participatory structure. By 1996, several other States, including Vermont, Hawaii, and New Jersey, have made significant efforts at statewide planning and land conservation. If the achievements these and other States have made in improving public participation instill similar citizen expectations, transportation professionals around the country may find themselves pressed to meet increasing public demands for participation opportunities, much as ODOT has done 20 years after the declaration of LCDC's Goal One.

The techniques, approaches, and attitudes transportation professionals in Oregon have used are largely transferable to other places, but the pace of innovation, as well as the degree of adaptability, may be dictated by the expectations and willingness of local citizens, as much as by the commitment of the transportation professionals and the management of the public agencies.

## **Public involvement advice from Oregon**



In the course of researching this case study, several transportation professionals (including ODOT staff, local government and non-profit staff, and private consultants to ODOT) were asked: "*What advice do you have for transportation professionals trying to improve their public involvement efforts?*" The following general advice was offered.

- ✓ **Don't be afraid of public involvement.** Get people involved in your project right from the start. The more you make them part of the process, the better assured you are of their cooperation and support

down the road. It is very important for them to get ownership in the beginning. Frequent contact establishes credibility.

- ✓ **Work toward consensus.** Get all the issues on the table then focus on one or a few related issues. Engage as many people who have a stake as possible. Keep consensus as a clear goal, but find ways for people to discuss and argue their differences constructively among themselves. Talking to one another is how people to reach consensus and agreement.

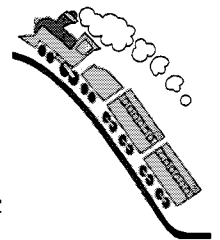
- ✓ **Get out and talk (and listen).** Do this on a regular basis, especially when there is no project or program at stake. In order to serve a community, you have to understand the community. This means getting involved in the issues, activities, and day-to-day events within the community.

- ✓ **Define your goals and objectives.** Make them clear. Know what you want. Too many people try to reach out with fuzzy ideas of what kind of public input they really want, and their outreach efforts fall short of expectations. Allow for the unknown and things going wrong, but effective participation often follows from effective planning.



- ✓ **Make sure you have in-house support and respect.** Talk to your own people at various management levels within your agency. Find out their attitudes and convictions about public involvement. It will help you with any necessary internal education process. To gain in-house support, stress long-term pragmatic benefits. Deep public opposition and dissatisfaction with the process towards the end can be lots more expensive than continuing public involvement from the start. Changing organizational culture takes time.

- ✓ **Be creative and keep trying.** Don't rely on one or two tools. Provide people with as many opportunities for giving input as possible. People have different amounts of time and inclinations---a wide variety of activities will provide more people with something they will participate in. ODOT staff relates experiences where any given technique (civic advisory committees or large public meetings, for example) can be very useful in one situation but regarded with hostility or disinterest in another situation, due to factors such as local project history or the efforts of vocal project participants or critics. It takes lots of strategic thinking up front to find the people from whom you really need input and to find approaches to which they respond. You may have to devote extra time to key participants to keep them involved, for



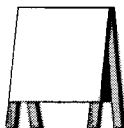
example going door to door in some neighborhoods to convince residents of your sincerity.

- ✓ **Don't succumb to cynicism.** Ask yourself: "Could I convince the person next to me at the supermarket check-out counter with this?" Techniques and tools can be good, but any effort short on commitment and an honest, caring approach may be doomed to fail. The public will hold you and your work up to scrutiny, so you must believe in the product and the process at every step in order to explain and defend it, if necessary.

- ✓ **Educate yourself and your agency, not just the public.** One-on-one conversations can be very useful for getting senior agency people to understand individual citizens' points of view. Go to great lengths to speak the community's language. Don't expect the public to listen to "planner-ese" and talk about policies. People care about their communities. Work to help them feel they have some control in their communities. Educate people to understand how specific problems came about, and how they can influence the decisions on the solutions. Then they are more likely to be interested.



- ✓ **Identify input and its results.** When people make comments or ask questions at a meeting, write them down on a flip chart. This shows them a record is being kept. At the next meeting, report back on these specific points. If you really want members of the public as your partners, you will have to show them that their input has results.



- ✓ **To reach the people, go where the people are.** Don't make them come to you. Get on the agenda of the Lions' Club, the local neighborhood association, and a church group to ask people their ideas or opinions.
- ✓ **Be open, be honest, be inclusive and be neutral.** The public can sense insincerity very quickly and accurately. Don't trust representatives; let people represent themselves. If initial efforts fail, regroup and alter the course. Do public involvement *with* people, not *for* people.
- ✓ **Give people something to react to.** Beware of open-ended processes that do not give direction or stimulate discussion. Sometimes you have to go out on a limb with controversial ideas just to get people involved and aware. This must be done carefully, but it can be effective in getting more people to take part in the process.
- ✓ **It takes patience and time.** Creating interest, reaching agreement, building credibility, using many different tools, building in-house support, planning public involvement all take time.

## ??? For further information:

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