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FREIGHT — WHITE PAPER

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cc: Project Management Team, Planning Commission, Transportation Commission

DIRECTION TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Five sets of white papers are being produced to present information on tools, opportunities, and potential strategies that could help Ashland become a nationwide leader as a green transportation community. Each white paper will present general information regarding a topic and then provide ideas on where and how that tool, strategy, and/or policy could be used within Ashland. You will have the opportunity to review the content of each white paper and share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas in a joint Planning Commission/Transportation Commission meeting. Based on discussions at the meeting, the material in the white paper will be: (1) revised and incorporated into the alternatives analysis for the draft TSP; or (2) eliminated from consideration and excluded from the alternatives analysis. The overall intent of the white paper series is to explore opportunities for Ashland and increase the opportunities to discuss the many possibilities for Ashland.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of the information included in this memorandum is based on a report prepared by the Rogue Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RVMPO) that pulled together several years of study on freight movement in the Rogue Valley area. This memorandum includes a brief summary of the commodity flow analysis included in the report as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the freight system and recommended improvements to specific modal elements, such as designated freight routes for the trucking industry, rail, and air.

FREIGHT TRAFFIC

Based on a recent study conducted by Cambridge Systematics on behalf of the RVMPO, roughly 40 million tons of freight valued at over $50 billion, moves in and out of the Medford-Ashland metropolitan area annually. According to Cambridge Systematics, trucks moved most of the

freight in terms of both weight (99 percent) and value (98 percent). The decision to move freight by truck, rail, or air is based on several factors relating to the weight and value of the freight as well as the distance the freight is to be hauled. For example, air freight tends to carry smaller loads with higher value than truck or freight rail and over greater distances, while freight rail tends to carry heavier loads of moderate to lower value than air freight or trucks.

ROGUE VALLEY FREIGHT SYSTEM STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The strengths and weaknesses summarized below represent the findings from a study conducted by the RVMPO in 2002 to assess regional freight movement in the Rogue Valley, as well as identify current and forecasted mobility deficiencies and develop long-range freight mobility solutions and strategies. Although many of the strengths and weaknesses are not specific to Ashland, they highlight regional issues that could be addressed to improve freight access and circulation. Several issues related to truck circulation and access in Ashland, primarily based on stakeholder interviews, were identified in the report and listed below.

Regional Strengths

- There are a significant number of freight and freight-related companies in the Rogue Valley that offer high paying jobs to local residents.
- The Rogue Valley's central location provides an intermediate stopping point on the west coast for long distance shipping.
- Local rail companies serve several local manufactures, especially the timber industry and plants in the White City industrial area.
- The Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport is the largest local intermodal facility in the area.
- There is a strong manufacturing base in the Rogue Valley with expected growth in the next several years.
- Air freight carriers who serve the Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport have shown an increase in activity over the last several years.

Regional Weaknesses

- Some designated truck routes require daily out-of-direction travel to avoid bottlenecks and congestion.
- Low volumes of freight traffic at the Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport results in low usage by freight carriers.
- Roadway restrictions that prevent the movement of oversized freight at certain times create logistical issues for many carriers.
- Lack of viable alternative routes for trucks when regular routes are blocked during construction.

- Lack of direct routes for trucks to industrial sites.
- Lack of north-south routes parallel to Interstate 5 that do not pass through town centers.
- The Rogue Valley area lacks the necessary intermodal connections to get products and raw materials from and to national and international locations directly.
- The portion of the rail line south from Ashland to Black Butte, California has no weight restrictions but has dimensional restrictions in the Siskiyou Mountains.
- The length of time it takes to move freight by rail and concerns for the reliability of delivery times contribute to low use of rail to move freight.
- Telecommunications could be improved
- Some manufacturers are unable to contract with an adequate number of refrigerated trucks for inbound raw materials or for outbound product.
- Travel through the Siskiyou Mountains on I-5 is challenging in the winter.

Ashland Specific Issues

- Safety and difficulty turning at the OR 99/Hersey Street intersection (Hersey Street is the main access to one of Ashland's industrial areas
- Lack of truck loading and parking zones for retail businesses in Downtown.

Regional Improvements

Potential regional system improvements identified in the strengths and weaknesses section of the RVMPO freight study include:

- Additional reloading facilities to help facilitate movement between modes.
- Additional warehousing for short- and long-term storage of freight.
- Additional freight capacity at the Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport.
- As larger railroads increase the size of their rail cars, rail system improvements will be needed to allow short line railroads to continue serving the larger railroad companies.
- Designated freight routes that separate trucks from non-commercial vehicles.

Freight Routes

The 1999 Oregon Highway Plan established a Statewide Highway Freight System based on freight volume, connectivity, and linkages to major intermodal facilities. The OHP designates Interstate 5 as an Interstate Highway and a designated freight route and Ashland Street (OR66) and Main Street-Siskyou Boulevard (OR 99) as a District Highways and not designated freight routes.

When the RVMPO study was initiated, all collector and arterial streets within the RVMPO were categorized as designated freight routes by the RVMPO. Through the efforts of the study and guidance from the Freight Advisory Council, route designation was refined to reflect actual use and anticipated need. The freight routes located within the City of Ashland as defined by the RVMPO are listed below:

- Interstate 5
- North Main Street (OR99)
- Siskiyou Boulevard (OR99)
- Ashland Street (OR66)
- Mistletoe Road

Currently the City of Ashland identifies all of the above roadways as local freight routes with the exception of Mistletoe Road. The City of Ashland's two main industrial areas are located along Hersey Street and Mistletoe Road. Tolman Creek Road connects Mistletoe Road to Ashland Street (OR 66). Trucks that are traveling to or from I-5 north of Ashland need to use the OR 66 interchange with I-5 as the OR 99 interchange only serves movements to and from the south. The City of Ashland should consider identifying Hersey Street and Tolman Creek Road from Mistletoe Road to Ashland Street (OR 66) as local freight routes.

The RVMPO freight study identified several projects to improve conditions along the designated freight routes within the Rogue Valley, including one within the City of Ashland. The freight study recommended the reconfiguration of the North Main Street/Hersey Street intersection to accommodate truck traffic.

Freight Rail

The Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad (CORP) provides rail service within the City of Ashland. CORP owns the line extending from Coos Bay to Eugene and then south through the Rogue Valley to Black Butte near Weed, California, stretching a distance of 449 miles. The line's volume has grown from 30,000 carloads per year to 50,000 carloads. On a daily basis, 30 carloads are sent out of the Rogue Valley and 15 carloads arrive from out of the region. CORP delivers sand and gravel from Gold Hill to Certainteed in White City, veneer to various mills, feed and fertilizer to Grange Co-op, and a nearly even volume of asphalt and propane. Outgoing products include lumber and plywood, oriented strand board, products from Certainteed, and particle board. Nearly 90 percent of transfers are rail to rail, typically switching full carloads from one train to another.

Poor track conditions and inadequately sized tunnels to both the south and north hinder an expanded role for rail in the Rogue Valley. The tunnels are adequate for current rail transport, but existing diameters are too small to accommodate a growing market in piggyback containers. CORP is investigating the cost/benefits of enlarging tunnels to the south to improve access to California markets. At this time, the cost of enlarging tunnels between the Rogue Valley and Roseburg reduces the viability of making similar improvements to the north.

As indicated previously, there is a need for additional reloading facilities in the Rogue Valley area to help facilitate the movement of freight between modes. Based on information in the RVMPO freight study, these types of facilities are typically located in industrial areas where access to and from the rail line can be easily accommodated by large trucks and can serve an area of up to 50 miles.

Public funding for rail improvements trails public funding for highway improvements. The 2001 State Legislature passed a bill that provides grant funds for shortline track improvements. Congress is also considering federal legislation that would provide funds for shortline railroads to make system changes allowing them to handle larger cars.

Air Freight

The nearest air freight service is provided by the Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport, which also serves as one of the primary commercial service airports for southwest Oregon. Its service area extends into northwest California. Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport is one of ten airports in Oregon with scheduled freight service exceeding 50 tons per year. Recently extended runways and other improvements allow larger planes, such as 747s, to land, improving cargo capabilities.

NEXT STEPS

Depending on input from the Project Management Team, Technical Advisory Committee, Planning Commission and Transportation Commission, the potential freight projects listed below will be identified as: 1) projects to evaluate further and potentially include in the TSP update; or 2) projects to remove from further consideration.

The potential projects to improve freight movement to/from and in Ashland include:

- Establish a network of designated freight routes that provide a designated freight route from Interstate 5 to the Hersey Street and Mistletoe Road industrial areas.
- Develop policies that apply to designated freight routes related to operational and design standards.
- Explore opportunities to establish reloading or transfer facilities within Ashland.
- Work with local rail operators to increase rail freight service to local businesses in Ashland's industrial areas.
- Identify a safety and/or capacity improvement for the OR 99/Hersey Street intersection (see Safety Focus Intersections White Paper) such signalizing the intersection, adding turn lanes, or restricting some movements at this or surrounding intersections.
- Adopt policies related to maintain or increasing truck loading zones in the downtown area.