

**COLUMBIA COUNTY**  
**Transportation and Road Advisory Committee**  
**February 29, 2024 (Leap Day)**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Attendance:**

Rosemary Lohrke – citizen (chair)

Nita Greene – citizen

Pat LaPointe – citizen

Karl Webster - CRPUD

Robert Stevens – Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments

Mark Pacheco – Columbia County PIO

Mike Russell – Columbia County PW

Grant DeJongh – Columbia County PW

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

- RL called the meeting to order at 10:05 AM

**B. INTRODUCTIONS**

- Attendees (less RS, who came later) introduced themselves

**C. OPEN FORUM**

- Discussion about whether this makes sense here vs. roundtable
- Determined that this was for public comment, roundtable was for members
- RL noted that she had comments on Cater Rd and Chapman Rd, would talk during roundtable

**D. APPROVE MINUTES**

- PL motioned, KW seconded, unanimous

**E. UPDATES**

1. Apiary Rd MP 11.8
  - RL: Why was this not fixed sooner? MR: Worked with regulatory agencies, determined that we needed to get permitting. USACE held things up. We let them know that the road is gone and we are replacing like with like – they said we still needed a joint permit application. Now shifting approach to stay out of the ordinary high water level, which removes the permitting requirement from USACE. This has been frustrating.
  - RL: Are there any other failed or failing culverts in the county? MR: Many, at least six more on Apiary Rd that are also wood and of the same vintage.
  - PL: How many people are impacted by this? MR: Not many. There are several people who use the spring box on the east side of the failure, off of Schaffer Rd, that now have to go around to get their water. Otherwise, there are not many people who live past this point. It impacts Camp Wilkerson and the timber haulers, primarily.

- MP: How does this impact first responders? MR: Have heard some interest in this from first responders, such as Clatskanie Fire and Rescue. (This adds about 40 minutes to the detour due to the condition of Highway 47.)
  - PL: Will Hood to Coast be impacted (third week of August)? GD: This should be completed by then. The proposed repair gets us out of the in-water work window.
  - NG: Who is the agency that is causing the delay? MR: US Army Corps of Engineers. We have talked to Senator Merkley's office about this, got in touch with the regulator's boss's boss – same answer.
  - RL: Did working with USACE used to be easy? MR: It depends on the regulator. PL: No, USACE and the railroad were always the hardest to work with.
  - MR: We have engaged with a contractor who has an engineering subcontractor. We are getting geotechnical analysis and surveying completed. We are submitting for Federal Highways Administration emergency relief project funding, which is an 80:20 split. The project estimated cost is \$1M, so \$200,000 of County money would be better. There may be some ineligible costs – engineering is about \$50K, and we may have to eat that.
  - RL: Do we have a plan for the other culverts? MR: Commissioner Garrett has requested that we put a plan together and apply for federal grant funding.
2. East Fork Nehalem River Bridge Replacement (S-V Rd MP 2)
- MR: We were on schedule for summer 2024 construction. However, the merger of the provider for precast concrete beams has resulted in a delay that would cause the project to span two construction seasons, impacting traffic on Scappoose-Vernonia Rd for that period. Being sensitive to how the ODOT Bennett Rd project went, and to save money, we are postponing the April 2024 bid date to November 2024, to be constructed over the summer of 2025. This also allows us to secure the additional funding needed to complete the project, as the budget – based on the 2018 local bridge program estimate – is about \$1M short of the 2024 construction estimate.
  - RL: Is it likely that we will get this money? MR: Indications are yes.
3. Millard Rd Realignment
- MR: This project is scheduled for summer 2024 and is on schedule. This will realign Millard Rd at the connection to Old Portland Rd, allowing for more ease of use by truck traffic. It will improve Millard Rd to Highway 30 as an alternative route to Bennett Rd.
  - PL: Will this allow pole trucks? MR: Yes.
  - RL: Will this correct the dip in the middle of the Millard Rd section? MR: Yes. RL: Will that impact the surrounding houses. MR: It should not.
  - PL: What is the likelihood that this will allow the speed on Old Portland Rd east of Gable (near Walmart) to be increased from 25 MPH? MR: That is within City jurisdiction. PL: Can the County recommend it be raised? MR: Yes. RL: 40 MPH makes more sense there than 25 MPH. PL: With the new apartments, it might make more sense to send them across to Old Portland Rd than have them head back toward Highway 30 and Gable Rd. MR/RL: Even with the apartments yet to be at full capacity, it is adversely impacting the intersection. PL: Waterfront developments will make that worse.

#### 4. Budget Priorities

- MR: Public Works has submitted its FY25 budget. Most of the 2015 emergency projects are done – this will get those project costs off the budget. The remaining emergency projects are being converted to a process wherein we can purchase equipment.
- Supervisor Kelley Lungberg has retired. With that, we will be adding two new road maintenance workers, one in Saint Helens and one in Rainier. I would like to add four, but two seems to be what can be afforded at this point. Waiting for response from Board of Commissioners.
- RL: What does the budget look like? Could TRAC get a copy of it? MR: Yes, and it is about \$10M.

#### 5. Fleet Maintenance Software Update

- GD: We have implemented this amongst fleet staff to track work orders, repair costs, maintenance, and out-of-department costs for invoicing. We have not begun pre-/post-trip inspections yet. Part of this is timing for the implementation. Part of this is that it takes our crew about 10 minutes to complete the performance of the check, which, with one tablet, places the total check in/out time at 30 minutes. We need to have something in place, as we are seeing some repairs that should have been prevented by a pre-trip inspection, including this last week. However, we need to find something that works for us.
- PL: How will this be audited? GD: By comparing what is in the system with time cards. Initially, this will likely be monthly, eventually quarterly. PL: Is there any way to automate this? Can the systems be integrated? GD: Our current time card process is highly labor intensive, so tentatively, it would be difficult. But we could ask the system developer if a bridge can be made between it and our time card system to aid with auditing.
- MR: In addition to auditing, we will also know that the process is working if we see a reduction in fleet staff time and costs on repairs.
- PL: Need to make sure that the data is being input, and input correctly.
- RL: What is the staff reception to this? MR/GD: Mixed. It depends on the staff.
- NG: What is the cost of the tablets? Could more be purchased? MR: Possibly.

### **F. ROUNDTABLE**

#### 1. Cowlitz-Wahkiakum COG MPO Planning Update

- RS: COG is kicking off its comprehensive safety action plan, which impacts the MPO area. This extends down to the City of Rainier, so there will be outreach to the City of Rainier and Columbia County. The grant was from USDT (Safe Streets for All – SS4A). The agreement is executed and the consultant onboard. The kickoff meeting will be the next technical advisory committee meeting for COG.
- MR: What is impacted? RS: All roads in the MPO boundary, which includes all roads in the Rainier UGB, including the watershed area and Highway 30. Updates on this project will be sent to TRAC.
- MR: Columbia County has also applied for a similar planning grant, though we had to acknowledge the current effort for City of Rainier through this grant. RS: A lot of money is available for planning right now, per FHWA. This effort helps local agencies compete with larger agencies for implementation money.

2. Major Project Tracking Webpage
  - MP: Would TRAC find it useful if the County had a webpage that was dedicated to large, ongoing, or high-visibility projects? Examples include Apiary Road MP 11.8, John Gum building restoration, courthouse renovation.
  - RL: This sounds like a good idea, but it will increase the work for Public Works staff.
  - NG: A lot of people do not think that the County does anything, and this could help them understand what work you are doing.
  - MP: I will work on this if it makes sense, but I do not want to spend the time on it if it is not going to be used. RL: I think this will help people know what is going on in the County. KW: It sounds like it would help with facts vs. speculation. NG: This could be used to direct social media traffic to actual information.
  
3. Work request – rock on S-V MP 8
  - KW: There was a rock on Scappoose-Vernonia Road at about MP 8 this morning during the morning commute. Please address.
4. Cater Rd alignment concern
  - RL: The alignment of Cater Rd at Scappoose-Vernonia Rd is terrible. When Dave and Lonny required this, it created an impossible intersection. Please address.
  
5. Chapman Rd culvert concern
  - There are two driveways, the first and second on Chapman Rd, that are overflowing onto the roadway, resulting in freezing and hazardous conditions. If someone slides on this, they will end up in the creek. Please address. Dave used to allow the homeowners to pay the County to clean the culverts.
  
6. PW revenue
  - MR: The next focus of the budget is on generating more revenue. Talking to the Commissioners, there is discouragement away from increasing the depletion fee or instituting a local registration fee. As an alternative, we are looking at a levy or a bond, The levy would be for general maintenance and level of service improvements, the bond would be for projects, such as overlays, over a period of time, such as ten years.
  - RL: I think you should look at the depletion fees again. The bond makes sense – you want this targeted and not open-ended. You will also need to make sure that whatever is adopted cannot become permanent – that has happened in the past, and the public will want assurances.
  - NG: The problem is everyone wants the money. The Sheriff’s Office just passed a levy, and Saint Helens PD is looking at one. Scappoose schools just had one fail. RL: The County needs to keep the other agencies in line and let them know that not everyone can go out for funding all the time. MR: Roads loses to law enforcement and safety every time.
  - MP: The levy should be let when there are no other levies or bonds on the ballot – that will give it the best chance for success. It is also a matter of education.
  - RL: We need to know how these election processes work so we can help educate the public. MP: Agreed. The County does not have an advertising budget for these kinds of efforts, so we rely on word of mouth, websites, and local press.

7. Misc.

- NG: Thank you for fixing the pothole near my house.
- NG: Does the County collect depletion fees? MR: Yes, and we have verified that the quantities are about accurate, based on DOGAMI reports.

**G. ADJOURN**

- PL motioned, NG seconded – adjourned at 11:14 AM

Respectfully Submitted,

Grant DeJongh  
Scribe