

# TRANSPORTATION PLAN DRAWS CROWDS AND CONTROVERSY

*Planners worked to address all interests and concerns*

**A**n April 17 public hearing on a proposed 20-year transportation plan for Eugene drew a crowd of more than 50 citizens concerned about problems ranging from a dangerous highway interchange to carbon emissions.

Twenty-four citizens, including environmentalists, concerned seniors and the mayor of Junction City, spoke at a public hearing in Harris Hall before the combined panel of Eugene City Council and the Lane County Board of Commissioners. Half of the citizens spoke about safety issues at the Randy Pape Beltline and Delta Highway interchange, where high traffic and ignored speed limits endanger citizens and lower quality of life. Others brought up carbon emissions, non-vehicular transit and environmental concerns.

A major goal of the Eugene 2035 Transportation System Plan (TSP) is to reduce traffic fatalities and major injuries to zero as part of Vision Zero, a 2015 resolution passed by city council that “no loss of life or serious injury on Eugene’s transportation system is acceptable.” The Beltline project is a major move toward this goal, according to Rob Inerfeld, city of Eugene’s transportation planning manager.

The TSP proposes an \$83 million project that would smooth traffic flow at that interchange and enhance safety. Inerfeld says “Beltline has the highest concentration of crashes in our region. They’re mostly not fatalities, but the proposed improvements would make Beltline safer.”

At the Monday evening meeting, County Commissioner Pete Sorenson pointed out that Lane County has the highest death count in the state from car crashes, even though other counties have higher populations.

Junction City mayor Mark Crenshaw spoke in support of the planned improvements, pointing out that Delta Highway serves as a link from the rural community to the hub that is Eugene. “We’re talking about more than just citizens of Eugene,” he says.

Eleven Eugene residents living near Delta Highway spoke out about the difficulties they have with traffic in the area. Jean Rubel, a resident of Lakeridge Senior Park, voiced her concern about escaping the area if there were a natural disaster. “We would be trapped for days,” she said. Others pointed out difficulties crossing the street safely and requested bus stops near their homes.

Beltline and its traffic problems weren’t the only issue discussed at the public hearing. A number of climate activists, including several from 350 Eugene, came to voice their concerns that the plan doesn’t go far enough to limit emissions and to urge their representatives to do more. Debra McGee of 350 Eugene said, “Building more roads encourages more driving. It destroys wetlands, wildlife habitat and peaceful green spaces for humans. Building more roads does not reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Matt McRae of Our Children’s Trust said, “Lower-income residents — those who make less than \$25,000 a year — take the bus four times more often and walk twice as much as residents making more than \$55,000. Do you feel like the needs of these populations are reflected in the priorities of this Transportation System Plan?”

The city is being pulled in different directions for residents with different needs, and the transportation plan budgets accordingly. The Beltline project isn’t just for cars, it includes facilities for bikers and pedestrians as well. The total budget for the new TSP is \$634 million, and only three of the proposed 264 projects other than rail systems do not include explicit plans for bicycle, pedestrian and public transportation options.

The proposed TSP includes plans for a bikeshare program in Eugene to be implemented by the end of September, complete with an app that makes it easier to find



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available bicycles. Two hundred and thirty-nine of the 294 projects are exclusively pedestrian and bicycle projects with a \$72 million budget.

The TSP has the explicit goals of 50 percent reduction in fossil fuel dependence and tripling the number of trips by foot, bike or public transit during the next 20 years. Transportation planning manager Inerfeld says, “The way this plan addresses that is mostly by focusing on making walking, biking and public transportation more attractive forms of transportation and making them really easy choices for people in Eugene.” He adds, “This is a good plan for aggressively moving in that direction.”

Biking may also become safer with the new TSP, according to Inerfeld. “We’d like buffered bike lanes to be our standard,” he says, referring to bike lanes that are protected from traffic by a vertical barrier, like a curb, parked cars, or trees. The only example in Eugene currently is on Alder street near the UO campus, where parked cars protect bikers from traffic.

The TSP also includes plans for new bus rapid transit EmX routes. “We have River Road, Highway 99, Coburg Road, Martin Luther King boulevard, and Amazon Parkway,” Inerfeld says. “Those are the locations we’re looking at as part of the move ahead survey.”