

Tribe updating transportation, safety plans

By Danielle Frost
Smoke Signals staff writer

Most would agree that increasing safety and convenience to pedestrians and drivers are important. To that end, the Tribe is updating its 2007 transportation and safety plans, and is seeking public input from Tribal and community members.

“The plan is revamping mostly because of growth,” Public Works Coordinator John Mercier said. “Our Tribal land base has grown, as has our population and number of housing units. The 2007 plan is outdated because many of the construction projects in the old plan are complete or the project scopes have changed.”

Also, since the Tribe receives funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the federal government requires an up-to-date Long Range Transportation Plan with all planned construction projects listed.

The Tribe held the first two of several public meetings on Thursday, April 26, in the Employment Service Center at 8 and 10 a.m. Attendees included Tribal and Spirit Mountain Casino employees, employees of professional consulting firm Akana, and school district, county and state transportation representatives.

“We also have to update our plan to coincide with other agencies,” Mercier said. “ODOT has made changes in their transportation plans and we have to make sure our plan aligns with ODOT and other county plans.”

The first meeting focused on road safety and establishing a working

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~ Vice President and Principal Planner Dennis Petrequin

group, analyzing safety data, determining areas of emphasis, identifying strategies, prioritizing and incorporating strategies, and evaluating and updating the long range plan.

“Transportation safety is always a concern for us,” Mercier said.

The Tribe hired Native American-owned Portland firm Akana to assist with the transportation plan update. Akana has a working relationship with the Tribe that dates back to 1993 when it was formally known as Cascade Development Professionals. In addition to updating three previous transportation plans, Akana also has worked on Tribal housing projects and was the lead consultant on the Uyxat Powwow Grounds arena.

Vice President and Principal Planner Dennis Petrequin said that traffic fatalities nationwide have decreased, but that is not the case in Indian Country.

“It is very disturbing that the rate has gone up as much as it has,” he said.

Petrequin also said that while Highway 18 crash rates are similar to other principal arterials in Oregon over a five-year period of 2011 to 2015, Highway 22 has rates that are often double and almost triple that of similar highways.

“Highway 22 is higher across the board, likely due to the curvy, narrow roads,” he said. “As far as fatalities and serious injuries, the interstate system is the safest to drive.”

State rural areas had 417 fatal crashes per 1 million vehicle miles while the interstate had just 46.

The rate of fatal and serious injury crashes by road users from 2009 to 2013 was primarily young drivers and older drivers, at 30 percent and 19 percent, respectively.

The three highest fatal and serious crash attributes in that same time period are roadway and lane departures, aggressive driving and intersection crashes.

“Now distracted drivers account for a majority of the crashes, and distractions can range from pets in the front seat and cell phone use to eating,” Petrequin said.

Mercier said that truck traffic is frequent on Grand Ronde Road, as it is easier for the drivers than taking Hebo Road due to sharp turns and steep embankments. That means increased congestion as vehicles stop to turn on to Highway 18.

“We also have more than 400 employees and it gets really backed up,” he said. “It has become a big concern, especially on Fridays with weekend traffic heading to the coast.”

In addition to sidewalks, road widening, pedestrian pathways and guardrails, holistic approaches to safety also were discussed.

“I have seen places where the Tribe has done a traffic safety education plan,” Petrequin said. “Part of it includes activities such as bicycle clinics and handing out

free helmets. A lot of Tribes are now looking at holistic ways to tackle different safety problems.”

The road safety plan and accompanying road inventory list will be included in the overall transportation plan.

Petrequin said this is the fourth transportation plan his firm has worked on for the Tribe since 1992.

“We want to get all of the roads in so they are eligible for (federal) funding,” he said. “The components we could also look at include safety and non-structural improvements.”

An example of recent road improvements with federal funding was the reconstruction and repaving of Agency Creek and Yoncalla Creek roads completed in 2016. The reconstruction involved installing new culverts, reconstructing ditches/drainage, reconstructing some failing subgrade, reconstructing the under-pavement road base and installing new pavement. The project cost \$2.22 million.

Planning and Grants Coordinator Kim Rogers said there is a possibility of including the Tribal transit plan in the transportation plan in the future.

Petrequin said that the federal government is now considering alternative methods to single vehicle transportation.

“The BIA has realized that transportation is more than just (cars on roads) and you can do a lot more than 10 or 15 years ago,” he said. “We are going to take all public input, review it and determine what changes need to be made, then put it out for review.”

The review period is estimated to be mid-May through June for the transportation safety plan and July through mid-August for the transportation plan.

Mercier said that the next few months will include public input, forecasting and communication. For more information about the transportation and safety plans, contact Mercier at john.mercier@grandronde.org. ■

Location: 9615 Grand Ronde Rd. Community Service Center Bldg. B
Grand Ronde, Oregon 97347

Date: Saturday, June 23, 2018

Time: 9:00am to 1:00pm

Cost: \$65.00 (Cost includes registration fee)

Instructor: Juan J. Sifuentez

Phone: 503-798-3521

Email: juansifuentez1964@gmail.com

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