

erns with road and truck traffic'



A truck drives over a repaired pothole on Grand Ronde Road on Monday, April 22. Heavy truck traffic is taking a toll on the road, which was rebuilt a little more than a decade ago.

For those residents who don't or can't drive, various public transportation services, both fixed route and dial-a-ride, are available to Grand Ronde residents from the Lincoln, Tillamook and Yamhill County transit district services, and are incorporated into the transportation plan.

In addition to the short-term road improvements, there are also mid- and long-range projects under consideration.

Mid-range projects include a Grand Ronde Road overlay, Highway 22 realignment at Kissing Rock, extending Tyee Road east, upgrading Hubert Road and creating new Spirit Mountain Casino access roads and an RV park road.

Long-range projects include extending Andy Riggs Road and McPherson Road West, upgrading North and South streets, and widening Coast Creek Road.

State considering highway widening

The state of Oregon also is working on projects through 2021 that affect the Tribe's transportation planning during the next 20 years. These include conducting an updated environmental assessment, preliminary engineering and purchasing right-of-way at Highway 18 from Fort Hill Road to just past Spirit Mountain Casino, approximately a 2-mile span. The long-term plan is to install a barrier between the east and westbound lanes, and widen the highway in that span to four lanes. Additionally, an interchange, similar to what is seen at Fort Hill Road, is proposed for where highways 18 and 22 meet near Spirit Mountain Casino and Valley Junction.

"There is a big problem with congestion and wait times there," says Oregon Department of Transportation Project Manager Bill Ness. "Hopefully the project will address a majority of those issues."

Construction projects to widen

and improve road access are only one part of the puzzle. The other piece is implementing the safety measures outlined in the Long Range plan. Increased traffic, combined with more Tribal members living in Grand Ronde could spell disaster for pedestrians trying to cross Grand Ronde Road from housing to access Tribal government services.

Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight feels the number one priority is reducing the speed limit.

"It needs to be slower through Grand Ronde Road," McKnight says. "Back when there was an elementary school where Chachalu (museum) was, the speed limit was 20 miles per hour. I believe it was much safer that way, and that was with less people out and about then there are now."

Many truck drivers use Grand Ronde Road to access Highway 18 because of the difficulty navigating Highway 22 near the Kissing Rock curves and the challenges with being able to turn left on to Highway 18 near the casino.

"Having the trucks on Grand Ronde Road destroys it, and people end up getting impatient with the traffic and take risks," he says.

McKnight notes that since his officers have become more of a presence on Highway 18 near Spirit

Mountain Casino, drivers are paying closer attention to the 45-mph speed limit.

"The law enforcement presence there has been very helpful," he says. "Traffic will always be there coming to and from the coast. It's been that way as long as I can remember. ... Impatience from drivers is the biggest problem out there on the weekends."

Mercier says that one of the biggest hurdles to road improvements is being limited as to what can be done quickly.

"Projects such as pedestrian overpasses are very expensive and there is a lot of permitting, environmental clearances and accessibility issues," he says.

Encouraging Tribal members to return home will increase the need for housing, but the infrastructure should be in place first to ensure safety, he adds.

"We are talking about creating a development for home ownership opportunities, but we need to put the transportation infrastructure in first," Mercier says.

'A de facto barrier'

Planning Director Rick George, who has been instrumental in crafting the Tribe's updated Strategic Plan, said that transportation falls within the goal of building, expanding and invigorating the

community in different ways.

"There is an overarching situation that Grand Ronde isn't thought of by many people (in planning) as a community," he says. "It's unincorporated and there hasn't been much direction on what it is or what it will become. So, when you think of transportation connecting to community, start with what is that community now and what will it be. Going with the Tribe's vision, Grand Ronde will be a more prosperous, a more diverse and a more vibrant small town."

A key part of transportation in a community is having safe streets that connect pedestrians to services, George says.

"Grand Ronde Road is one of those thoroughfares that needs to be looked at," he says. "We need connection of the east side where housing is located, and the west side, which includes the Elders Activity Center, Elder housing and all of our government campus activities. Right now, the road serves as a de facto barrier. People are driving at high speeds and there are lots of large trucks. It's just not a peaceful, safe street now and needs to be looked at."

George says transportation is as new as community is to Grand Ronde in a planning capacity.

"We've shaped the transportation plan to adequately capture that," he says. "Between transportation and the community development plan, we are hoping to get a lot of Tribal member and community feedback."

The Strategic Plan looks at the "big picture" planning goal of wanting to grow Grand Ronde by developing the economy, offering services and bringing in new housing to attract Tribal members.

"The actual infrastructure to support this comes in a more detailed, planning process that is included in the transportation and transit plans," George says. "It is more detail focused. ... Housing developments drive things like walking trails, roads and streetlights."

And the most critical needs for infrastructure to get more Tribal members to come home?

"Three things come to mind that relate to transportation," George says. "One is housing diversity. Provide opportunities you don't have now. The second is services. If you talk to Tribal members and community members, services come up quickly. Whether it's a grocery store, salon or car wash, services across the board are needed for a thriving community. The third is education quality. There are a number of Tribal members concerned about the quality of the education. All of those things touch on transportation." ■

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A car waits to merge onto Highway 18 while turning from Hebo Road on Tuesday, April 2.

