

Technical Memorandum

February 28, 2024

Project# 27003.014

To: Lisa Cornutt, ODOT
Karl MacNair, City of Medford

From: John McPherson

CC: Marc Butorac

RE: Task 2.1.2B Final Purpose and Needⁱ

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memo is to transmit a succinct statement of purpose and need for the proposed South Stage Road Extension planning project. ODOT is preparing a Facility Plan to evaluate potential transportation improvements across Interstate 5 (I-5) between the Phoenix interchange (at Exit 24) and South Medford interchange (at Exit 27) in south Medford, Oregon. The Facility Plan analysis will be based on a Year 2045 planning horizon. Contained in this memo are the following scope items:

- A clear and succinct statement of the proposed action's purpose expressed as a desired transportation outcome that identifies the fundamental reasons why the action is being proposed; and
- A brief description of the problems that the proposed action is intended to address and, to the extent possible, an explanation of the underlying causes of those problems.

Specific supporting data to fully demonstrate the proposed action's needs and documentation of agency and public participation and input have not yet been completed. Future Technical Memorandums *4.1.1.3B Final Existing Condition Summary* and *4.1.2B Final Future Year Traffic Analysis Summary* along with PMT, PDT, PAC, and community feedback will ultimately confirm the needs. The initial draft of this memo has been reviewed by the Project Development Team (including FHWA staff) and their suggested changes have been incorporated. This memo will be used to generate additional feedback from agencies and the public during initial outreach activities.

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), a Purpose and Need Statement should focus on the transportation problem (or problems) to be addressed by the proposed action. It establishes why the agency is proposing to spend taxpayers' money while at the same time causing potential environmental impacts. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) recommends that the Purpose should define the transportation problem to be solved,

and the Need discussion provides data to support the Purpose. The Purpose and Need is the basis for developing methods and criteria for narrowing the range of alternatives to be carried forward into the NEPA process (see attached *Tech Memo #2.1.3: Goals, Objectives, Evaluation Criteria, and Performance Measures* for further information). For more FHWA guidance on preparing and using the Purpose and Need Statement see: [Environmental Review Toolkit \(dot.gov\)](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov).

Purpose and Need

The purposes of the South Stage Road Extension project are to: (1) reduce out of direction travel by improving east-west multimodal connectivity across Interstate-5; (2) to reduce existing and projected congestion and related traffic safety issues in the vicinity of the Interstate-5 interchanges with Garfield St. and N. Phoenix Rd. and the adjacent local street network; and (3) support local system improvements associated with current and planned land uses as well as improved emergency preparedness in the rapidly urbanizing area of south Medford, Oregon and north Phoenix, Oregon. The following transportation needs (problems) have been identified:

- **Interstate-5 (I-5) creates a barrier to local east-west travel that limits local road connectivity resulting in out of direction travel and poor east-west travel times.** No transportation facilities cross I-5 and the parallel Bear Creek Greenway between Exits 24 and 27, a distance of approximately 3 miles. Because of this lack of local arterial road connectivity across I-5, east-west travelers including transit users must traverse to either the Phoenix interchange or the South Medford interchange (via Barnett Road and Garfield Street) resulting in inefficient out-of-direction travel and excessive travel times, which increases economic costs for businesses and travelers. For people walking and biking, travel times are even longer. The lack of connectivity and intersection related congestion can be particularly serious for medical emergency response times with Asante Rogue Regional Medical Center located along Barnett Road east of I-5.
- **Lack of east-west connectivity across I-5 is a primary contributor to congestion and traffic safety issues at the interchanges and the local roads accessing the interchanges.** The South Medford interchange is one of the most congested areas in Medford. Because the east-west arterial network concentrates traffic at the arterial streets that do cross I-5 (Phoenix Road, Garfield Street, and Barnett Road) those interchanges, and local street networks, are currently and/or projected to be overcapacity and include intersections identified in the Safety Priority Index System (OR99/Stewart Avenue, OR99/Garfield Street, and I-5/South Medford Interchange) . At the South Medford interchange, congestion is causing a bottleneck with southbound queues spilling back onto the I-5 mainline, which is not just a congestion issue, but also slows freight access to I-5 and causes safety concerns for potential high-speed, rear-end collisions.

- **Improved east-west arterial connectivity is needed to support planned growth in the Medford and Phoenix urban growth reserves.** South Stage Road has long been planned as a primary east-west route across the Rogue Valley and it is the only arterial between the two interchanges that provides east-west connectivity from the City of Jacksonville and other areas within Jackson County to Highway 99. Local, adopted land use and transportation system plans identify an extension of South Stage Road as being needed to support future residential and regional employment land development in the south Medford and north Phoenix areas east of I-5. Providing additional east-west connectivity could also improve emergency response times and opportunities for egress during an emergency event (e.g., wildfire, flooding).

ⁱ This planning document may be adopted in a subsequent environmental review process in accordance with 23 USC 168 Integration of Planning and Environmental Review and 23 CFR 450 Planning Assistance and Standards.