



Save Helvetia
www.SaveHelvetia.org

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*Protecting Helvetia's farmland, forestland,
cultural heritage and natural resources*

January 27, 2014

Andrew Singelakis, Director
Department of Land Use & Transportation
Washington County
155 N. First Street, Suite 300
Hillsboro, OR 97124-3972

RE: Washington County Transportation Study
Draft Study Approach for Public Comment dated December 12, 2013

Dear Andrew,

Save Helvetia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Study Approach for Public Comment.

We believe that if citizens are involved in the planning process early on, it ensures more acceptance and less controversy later on. Too often we see advisory committees where the citizens are outnumbered by business and land development stakeholders who wield out-sized influence on the committee proceedings. This is where citizens get frustrated: they are left out of the planning and decision-making in favor of more "important" stakeholders and given 3 minutes at a hearing to comment on the pre-determined decisions. Statewide Planning Goals 1 and 2 call for opportunities for citizens to be involved at all stages in the planning process.

Here are Save Helvetia's recommendations:

Phase 1 - Launch the study

The proposed advisory committees should include a Citizens Advisory Committee that includes perspectives from a broad range of the public, such as:

CPO representatives
Community-based organizations from both urban and rural locales
Transit-dependent people
Lower income communities
Bicyclists who regularly bike for transportation
Walkers who regularly walk for transportation
Commuters
Seniors
Agricultural groups, such as farmers and CSA's

Phase 2 - Taking stock

This phase of documenting transportation opportunities and challenges should reflect what the County is already doing to encourage multi-modal forms of transit, what the TSP update covers and what the millennial generation represents: the reduced desire to own cars, the increased desire for bike-friendly places that have access to good public transit, walkable neighborhoods - the ability to get around in the places where they live, work and play without a car.

All meetings should be open to the public as observers. If not, why not?
The results of this phase should be shared with the public, from allowing citizens to observe meetings to allowing the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee to review and comment on draft reports.

Phase 3 - Looking ahead

As with the other phases, we recommend that the meetings to develop investment scenarios be open to the public as observers and that the results of this phase be shared with the public. We encourage you to honor the values found in Goals 1 and 2 of SB 100, namely involving citizens in the planning, not just informing them at the end and allowing them to comment on the decisions made in closed meetings.

Phase 4 - Reporting out

We encourage you to not only share evaluation results with the public and stakeholders but to allow them to comment in a meaningful way. A study that attempts to project transportation needs 50 years in the future is a challenge. We encourage you to look beyond the assumptions presented in Mayor Willey's White Paper of September 2012. Lifestyles and demographics are sure to change over the next 50 years.

The draft is sketchy on opportunities for citizen involvement. These need to be fleshed out to fully allow the public to comment on the plan. We encourage as transparent and as involving a process as possible.

1. All meetings should be open to "public observers".
2. Citizens should be welcomed to comment on draft reports.
3. Do public meeting laws apply to this study process? If not, why not?

4. What will be the opportunities for citizen participation?
5. Will meetings of appointed experts, coordinating committees, and other internal committees be open to the public as observers?

In that the legislative funding was part of the end of session “Christmas tree” bill, it lacked any hearing, and was without any testimony or debate. We therefore believe that it is incumbent upon Washington County to create as transparent and involving a process as possible. Adherence to Oregon public meeting laws and citizen participation goals will help assure diverse perspectives as this study progresses.

We look forward to help you with this effort, by serving on the advisory committee, helping to provide the rural perspective, and reviewing draft reports.

Sincerely,

Robert Bailey
Board of Directors
Save Helvetia

Save Helvetia is a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization that advances policies, leaders and actions that protect Helvetia’s treasured agriculture and natural and cultural resources for our region’s present and future generations.