



Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., Governor

Oregon Transportation Commission

355 Capitol Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-2528

November 7, 2012

Boyd Britton
Co-Chair, Southeast ACT
201 S Humbolt, Suite 290
Canyon City, OR 97820

Dear Co-Chair Britton:

Thank you for the time you gave to come to the Oregon Transportation Commission work shop last month. It's abundantly clear that we have enormous talent and resources engaged throughout the state, and your leadership and involvement directly with us and the Department is very welcome and admired. Honestly, we're honored by having you engaged as a partner.

The Commission particularly appreciated the discussion as we prepare for the new Fix It/Enhance project selection process. Some of the discussion reflected a concern about the lack of objective criteria and a parallel concern that without more direction, the ACTs might have difficulty selecting and prioritizing their project recommendations.

I would like to take the opportunity to address those concerns and to be clear about the Commission's expectations as this process moves forward. Because of the wide diversity of project applications that the department expects to receive and the lack of maturity of comprehensive criteria, we do not believe a formal scoring process would be successful. All of our discussions to design and prepare for this STIP development process have been aimed at empowering the local communities and stakeholders that comprise the ACT to match identified problems with cost-effective solutions that reflect local values and concerns. However, there are some practical sideboards to help guide the decision-making process.

The primary requirement within the selection recommendation process are that the projects legitimately address at least one or more of the benefit areas included in the application (to address multiple areas generally makes for a stronger application). Information throughout the application will help determine if the proposed project is reasonable in cost and scope, whether it is timely and ready to move forward, whether it is consistent with plans and policies and whether the benefits described are reasonable and likely, and how these compare to other potential benefits from other projects proposed.

Regions, ACTs, and MPOs will receive a template by mid-November to report their conversations, justifications and process to develop their recommended project lists. You should develop this record during selection of the 150-percent list. You can later revise it during conversations to reduce the list to the final recommended list. This record will be essential to the OTC, OTC advisory committees, and others in order to understand how the ACT considered projects recommended for selection. While this template is still under development, we anticipate the ACTs would discuss:

- How does this project improve transportation choices for people in your community?
- Why is now the right time for this project?
- How does this project improve the lives of people or the economy in your community?

The intent of the documentation is to provide consistency as the OTC reviews projects on a statewide basis. Given our regard for ACTs, we consider it vital that we have a good understanding as to how each ACT and region developed its recommendations and to allow the flexibility to define such things as “leverage” or “key objectives” as they discussed projects. The keys to a successful project selection process:

- The process to review applications and establish priorities should be as inclusive of participants and as transparent as possible.
- No benefit category is defined as more important than others, and project applications do not need to show benefit in all categories to be eligible. Reviewers are to discuss the project benefits holistically and strive for consensus.
- Reviewers may use qualitative rankings within the benefit categories. For example, different projects may have high, medium, or low benefits for individual benefit categories such as “mobility” or “livability.” Discussion and consensus will then decide how to prioritize projects with very different benefits.
- Reviewers can use state and local plans, goals, and policies described in plans to help determine priority, such as the Oregon Transportation Plan, the Oregon Highway Plan, other Oregon transportation topic or mode plans, local transportation system plans, local comprehensive plans.
- Reviewers are expected to consider the merits of the project regardless of the level of detail in the application. For example, some jurisdictions may have access to considerable data and analyses to support their project. Other jurisdictions with more limited staff resources and experience may have less detail to report, but their applications must be considered equally.

As I mentioned in my earlier letter, the Commission’s expectations are that the projects selected are solution-based and not limited by funding silos; that overall projects selected reflect a balance between modes; that projects promote a multimodal transportation system; and that projects are the most efficient and effective to solve the transportation problem that the ACT sees as a priority.

This is an opportunity to leverage the “collective wisdom” that exists within the ACT with the right people at the table. The Commission recognizes the shared risk with this new process.

The Commission will look at the 150-percent lists and apply the guidance and direction outlined above. The Commission and the ACTs will learn a great deal as we go through this process, and I am confident that together we will be successful and will be able to take the lessons learned and carry them forward to the next STIP cycle.

As we have said in the process and at OTC meetings, we are confident we will learn from and improve the process. This is a substantial shift from past processes, but one we hope will yield the best possible projects and the best return for your communities and Oregonians as a whole. Please do not hesitate to

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contact us with concerns or questions as we proceed. Your regional managers and key ODOT personnel are dedicated to being helpful as you consider projects and submit applications.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank you and all ACT members for your service and dedication to making this process as good as it can be. All engaged know that we have limited resources, but we are also excited at the prospects of ensuring your talent and comprehensive view of the system in your region is given full consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P" and "E".

Pat Egan
Chair

cc: Steve Grasty