

# CLACKAMAS COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

## Study Session Worksheet

**Presentation Date:** May 12, 2015 **Approx Start Time:** 10:30 am **Approx Length:** 30 min

**Presentation Title:** The Road Ahead: Focus Group Results

**Departments:** Public & Government Affairs, Transportation & Development

**Presenters:** Amy Kyle, Strategic Communications Manager, PGA; Barbara Cartmill, Director, DTD

**Other Invitees:** Randy Harmon, Warren Gadberry, Transportation Maintenance; Mike Bezner, DTD; Ellen Rogalin, PGA/DTD; Tim Heider, PGA; Diedre Landon, DTD; Mike Riley, Riley Research Associates; Karen Tolvstad, Fish Marketing

### WHAT ACTION ARE YOU REQUESTING FROM THE BOARD?

None at this time; this is background information inform future policy decisions.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In late April, two focus groups and one community discussion forum were held with various Clackamas County citizens to gather in-depth input on their views about the condition of the county road system and other issues related to the county's need for additional funds for road maintenance.

- **Focus Groups:** The two focus groups were conducted by Riley Research Associates working with ECONorthwest on April 21 and April 23. The focus groups were made up of 19 people recruited at random from an active voter list to represent diverse geography, gender, political affiliation and age.

The focus groups were conducted according to established research standards. Participants were screened to ensure that they would come with an open mind for the discussion, and those who indicated they always vote for or against proposed tax measures were not invited. Those who attended the 90-minute session were provided with a \$50 cash incentive payment.

- **Community Discussion Forum:** The community discussion was conducted by Fish Marketing on April 29. It was made up of seven people who agreed to participate from 33 people who received special invitations because they or the group they represent were recommended by a County Commissioner and/or they have been frequent participants in the Citizen Comment portion of BCC Business Meetings.

As a non-scientific discussion group, there was no screening of the participants in advance and no cash incentive payment. Knowing that participants were probably at a higher knowledge level about issues than random voters, the 90-minute discussion focused on the need and outreach methods, as well as perceptions of road issues.

Attached is an overview of the major conclusions and key findings taken from the groups, with the focus group conclusions and the discussion forum conclusions in separate lists. Also attached are slides to be reviewed at the study session that highlight the commonalities and differences between the two sets of conclusions.

This information, along with data from past surveys, is being analyzed by staff and consultants to inform the content of the scientific random sample telephone survey planned for the last weekend in May, and future outreach and education activities.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (current year and ongoing):**

The current annual gap between the amount of available federal and state revenue and maintenance needs is more than \$17 million. That gap has grown approximately \$660,000 per year since 2007. It is anticipated that the gap will continue growing at a steady pace.

**LEGAL/POLICY REQUIREMENTS:**

None.

**PUBLIC/GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPATION:**

PGA and DTD staff will continue to refine, revise and expand outreach and education activities based on feedback from past activities, survey data and focus group input.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

None at this time. Commissioners are encouraged to share their views of future survey and outreach plans based on the focus group results.

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Division Director/Head Approval \_\_\_\_\_

Department Director/Head Approval \_\_\_\_\_

County Administrator Approval \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- *Focus Group Conclusions/Community Discussion Forum Conclusions (one page, two-sided\_*
- *Summary of Focus Group/Discussion Forum Responses (PowerPoint slides)*

For information on this issue or copies of attachments, please contact Amy Kyle @ 503-742-5973
--



## FOCUS GROUP CONCLUSIONS

April 21 and April 23, 2015



Clackamas County voters were recruited at random to participate in focus groups to discuss perceptions of county road conditions, maintenance needs, potential funding options and communication opportunities.

- Participants were largely unaware of the need for additional road funding, but are not opposed to options that would ensure proper maintenance, enhance safety or reduce congestion.
- To garner support from voters, any new funding program will require an extensive education program to inform and convince voters about the necessity of additional funding, as well as the specific benefits such funding would bring. Unlike funding requests for schools, appeals for additional transportation funding will require establishing similar urgency and an emotional connection with voters.
- While the cost-effectiveness of good maintenance is an important rationale for additional funding, the emotional connections associated with transportation safety provide an even stronger argument.
- Residents who live in cities with municipal transportation districts also recognize the need for countywide road funding. Further, those in both cities and rural areas were accepting of the notion that city residents might be charged less for a countywide program than those who live in unincorporated areas.
- Recent political decisions involving light rail and Multnomah County bridge funding have created some trust issues for some voters, however participants had generally positive views of their commissioners. Most participants feel that Clackamas County residents should be willing to pay some portion of regional projects that benefit them.
- More broadly, past election losses were attributed to the county not making its case well enough. Participants supported the importance of providing a detailed list of proposed projects to help convince voters of both the value and necessity of additional funding.
- Of the various revenue sources described, increases to the gas tax and/or registration fees seemed to make the most sense. Voters acknowledge the limitations of gas tax, given the increasing number of high-mileage vehicles on the roads. The concept of a county road district also appears viable; however, voters had negative reactions to the complexity of a county road utility fee.
- Citizens had very favorable comments about Transportation Department staff and the interactions they had with staff. Many participants also had positive comments about the value of many of the county's recent capital improvement projects.
- An aggressive communications effort will be required to bring voters around to the county's plan to address the road situation. Residents will need to be well-informed about the safety and cost implications of underfunding the Transportation Department's proposed budget. In addition to being well-informed, residents also appear to need to be more personally connected to the issues and proposed solutions the county is seeking.

**April 29, 2015**

Participants – a sampling of invited individuals – discussed key issues and levels of awareness, views on need for more funding, key messages & approaches, roadblocks to getting the issue resolved and various funding sources as viable options.

- Most invitees had a good read on the situation. They understood the funding situation is a real issue and didn't debate the facts.
- The issues of money spent on light rail, the Sellwood Bridge and bike lanes were raised early and often.
- All stated mistrust of government is the biggest issue.
- Nearly all stated the importance of selling a particular package showing exactly what road improvements residents would get for the money.
- All felt citizens don't know which roads are county, city or state roads. Most believed taxes paid to feds, state, county, or cities are all seen as government funds, and throwing our hands up about things that "state", "city" and "fed" controlled was not well-received.
- Most felt trying to bite off the whole thing is likely not going to work. It's too large and there is too much mistrust.
- Many thought there has been too much talk, and we need leadership and decision-making. It was suggested, and agreed upon by most, that the County needs to simply identify the problem, identify a proposed funding solution, describe exactly how the funds would be used and go out with that message.
- The high cost of waiting to repair roads was the message that resonated the most (with a defined timeframe for the financial cliff – is it in their lifetime?). Another key message: safety.
- Most felt the County's current outreach methods were valid. Using residents and community leaders as spokespersons and influencers is seen as critical.
- Most emphasized the need for an equitable funding source. The heavier the road usage, the higher the contribution should be (i.e., don't make a motorcycle pay the same as a heavy SUV).
- Increasing the vehicle registration fee was seen by a few as inequitable since just because a person has more vehicles doesn't mean they drive more.
- A gas tax was seen as an equitable source and one that could help gather revenue from users who are not residents.

*the* **Road Ahead**  
*Clackamas County*  
*Road Maintenance Outlook*

---

**FOCUS AND DISCUSSION GROUP RESULTS**

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS STUDY SESSION

MAY 12, 2015

# Focus Groups

---

RILEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

# Focus Groups

---

## Two sessions

- 90 minutes each
- April 21 in Milwaukie
- April 23 in Sandy

## Participants

- 9 in one group, 10 in the other
- Randomly selected from active voter lists to represent a diversity of:
  - *Geography (urban and rural)*
  - *Political affiliation*
  - *Gender*
  - *Age*
- Not selected if they indicated they *always* voted for or against proposed measures

# Make-Up of Focus Groups

Incorporated / Unincorporated	Measure	Party	City	Age	Gender
Incorporated	Support: Usually	Democrat	Oregon City	55-64	Male
Incorporated	Depends	Republican	Oregon City	35-44	Male
Incorporated	Depends	Republican	Sandy	65+	Female
Incorporated	Oppose: Usually	Republican	Sandy	35-44	Female
Unincorporated - Rural	Depends	Democrat	Milwaukie	65+	Female
Unincorporated - Rural	Support: Usually	Democrat	Welches	65+	Female
Unincorporated - Rural	Support: Usually	Non-affiliated	Estacada	45-54	Male
Unincorporated - Rural	Support: Usually	Non-affiliated	Brightwood	55-64	Male
Unincorporated - Rural	Support: Usually	Republican	Beavercreek	55-64	Male
Unincorporated - Urban	Depends	Democrat	Sandy	65+	Female

Incorporated / Unincorporated	Measure	Party	City	Age	Gender
Incorporated	Support: Usually	Democrat	Milwaukie	35-44	Male
Incorporated	Depends	Democrat	West Linn	65+	Female
Incorporated	Depends	Democrat	Lake Oswego	65+	Male
Incorporated	Support: Usually	Non-affiliated	Happy Valley	35-44	Male
Incorporated	Depends	Non-affiliated	West Linn	55-64	Female
Unincorporated - Rural	Depends	Democrat	Mulino	65+	Female
Unincorporated - Rural	Oppose: Usually	Non-affiliated	Mulino	45-54	Male
Unincorporated - Urban	Depends	Non-affiliated	Gladstone	45-54	Male
Unincorporated - Urban	Support: Usually	Republican	Portland	55-64	Female



# Focus Groups: Road Maintenance

---

- Largely unaware of need
- Roads in good condition, though some pothole and congestion problems
- Not opposed to options to improve maintenance and safety, and reduce congestion
- Recognize need for countywide funding
- Understandable that people in cities that already pay for roads might pay less
- Generally feel residents should pay a portion of regional projects that benefit them
- Favorable comments about Transportation staff and recent capital improvements

# Focus Groups: Funding Options

---

- Past funding measures lost because County didn't make its case well enough
- Current options
  - Gas tax and/or vehicle registration fees make the most sense
  - Understand limitations of gas tax
  - County road district may be viable option
  - County road utility fee is too complex

# Focus Groups: Education & Outreach

---

- Extensive education program needed to inform and convince voters
  - Need to establish sense of urgency and emotional connection with voters
  - Strongest argument is transportation safety
  - Provide detailed list of proposed projects to help convince voters of value and necessity of additional funds
- Trust issues from the past – light rail, Sellwood Bridge
- Generally positive views about current County Commission

# Community Discussion Forum

---

FISH MARKETING

# Community Discussion Forum

---

## One session

- 90 minutes
- April 29 in Oregon City

## Participants

- 33 people invited:
  - *Individuals and individuals who represent interest groups, identified by commissioners*
  - *People who frequently participate in Citizen Comments at BCC Business Meetings*
- 7 people attended
- Several others said they couldn't attend, but would like to provide input in other ways
- Many expressed appreciation for being asked

# Community Discussion Forum

---

## Road Maintenance

- Understand the need; don't dispute the facts
- Biggest issue is mistrust of government
- Repeated comments about light rail, Sellwood Bridge, bike lanes

## Funding Options

- Need an equitable funding source; the heavier the road use, the higher the contribution
  - Some feel VRF is inequitable (just because a person has more vehicles doesn't mean they drive more)
  - Gas tax is good option
    - *Equitable*
    - *Would gather revenue from non-resident road users*

# Community Discussion Forum

---

## Education & Outreach

- Sell a specific package
- Can't sell the whole package all at once
- People don't know which roads are county, city or state
- Taxes paid at all levels are government funds; doesn't matter whether city, state or federal
- Less talk and more leadership/decision-making
- Strongest messages
  - *High cost of waiting*
  - *Safety*
- Current outreach methods are appropriate
- Need residents and community leaders as spokespeople

# Next Steps for Outreach

---

## Telephone Survey

- May 29-31
- Scientific random sample

## Ongoing

- Refine and expand current outreach methods
  - *Social media, traditional media (newsletters, newspapers), advertising, community presentations*
- Expand involvement of residents, business and community leaders
- Encourage and support expanded involvement of County Commissioners
  - *Facebook posts and other social media*
  - *Visibility at public events*
  - *Routine part of speeches, community conversations, etc.*
  - *Media outreach*