

**Eugene and
Lane County Oregon
2022 highway expansion plans
Beltline - Route 126 widenings**

Beltline and 126 widenings

lessons from stopping the West Eugene Parkway

LOW BUILD ALTERNATIVES

fiscally constrained

climate concerned

peak traffic and peak energy

legal and ethical

planning for a possible, positive future

requires changing assumptions

about endless growth on a

round, abundant, finite Earth

Mark Robinowitz • road scholar

PeakChoice.org • PeakTraffic.org • SustainEugene.org

Beltline Highway Facility Plan: Delta Highway to River Road

ODOT map: clearer numbers added by
 MARK ROBINOWITZ, ROAD SCHOLAR
 PEAKCHOICE.ORG · SUSTAINEUGENE.ORG

ODOT cost estimate:
 third of a billion
 this is more than Biden
 infrastructure law
 allocation to fix all of
 Oregon's broken bridges



Widen Beltline
 Highway to three lanes
 in each direction

Delta Sand & Gravel
 strip mine

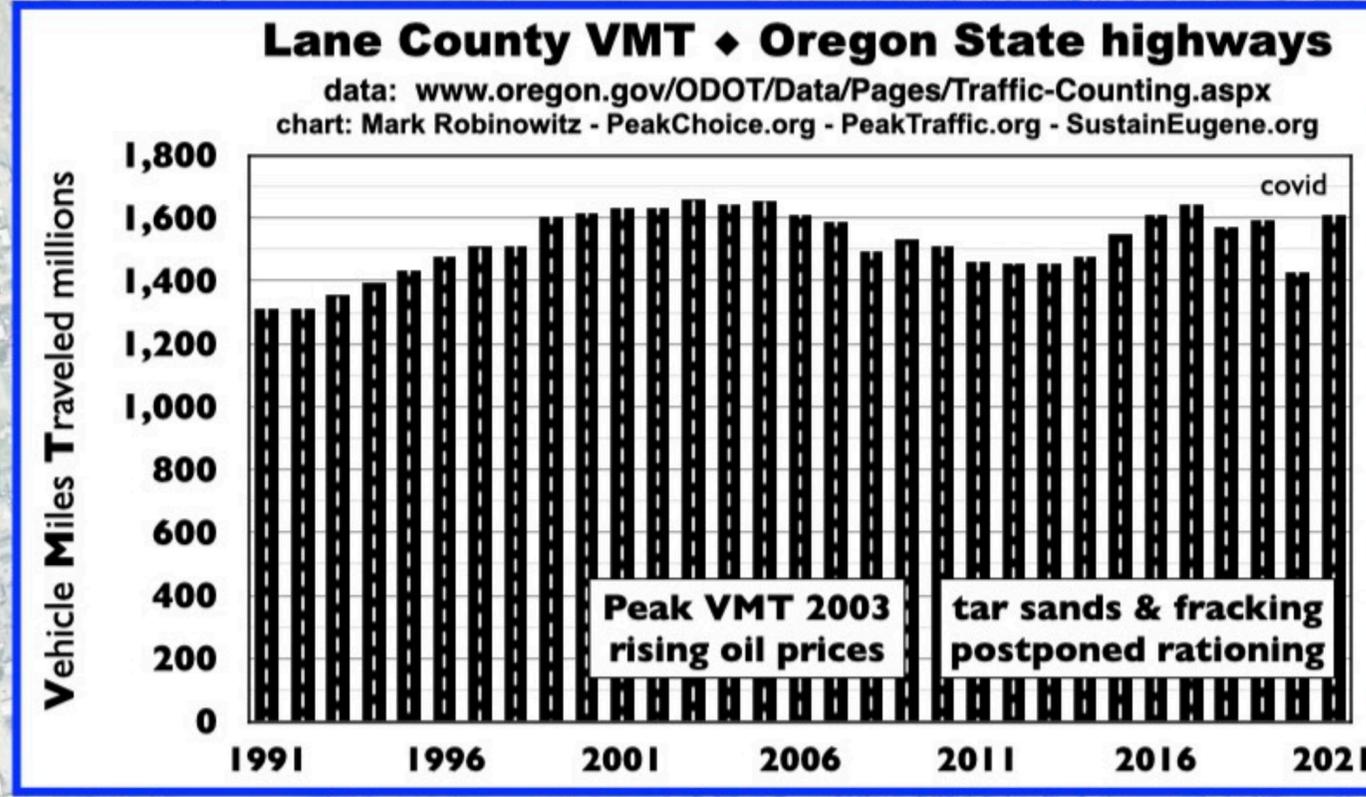
New bridge
 to serve local traffic

Rebuild Beltline
 Willamette Bridge

new overpass over BL has
 room for several "ultimate
 lanes" between its pillars.
 That widening would
 require rebuilding Delta
 bridge over BL which ODOT
 ignored in Beltline study.

River Avenue/Division
 Avenue interchange
 improvements

River Road
 interchange
 improvements



LEGEND

- Existing Highway Configuration
- Road Modifications
- Removed Ramp or Roadway
- Delta/Beltline Interchange Project

16 lanes

7 lanes

12 lanes

10 lanes

12 lanes

Norkenzie and
 Gilham
 overpasses
 would be torn
 out and rebuilt
 if extra lanes
 are added on
 Beltline to
 Coburg Rd.
 ODOT ignored
 this in their
 study even
 after they
 included
 Coburg
 interchange in
 the study area.

ODOT's approval kept quiet from the public

ODOT has been considering a massive widening of Beltline highway since the previous millennium. After numerous iterations, they approved an expansion in March 2022 - without much notice nor soliciting any public comments. ODOT did not even bother to post a copy of their approval documents to our publicly funded website. In September 2022, I filed a formal request for a copy of the "Finding of No Significant Impact" and "Categorical Exclusion" ... and after a few days, ODOT finally posted a copy on the website. Despite being a project likely to cost over a third of a billion dollars, public input was ignored. It took years for ODOT to scrounge up the five million dollars to pay for the study and there is no money available for the construction cost. Technically, ODOT's approval had to be ratified by the Federal Highway Administration, Oregon Division, since the project will likely be funded with federal gas tax money. Title 23, United States Code, governs how these projects are approved. "Categorical Exclusion" means a federally approved project is supposedly too minor to require public input about the impacts. A third of a billion dollar highway expansion that would have 10 to 16 lanes is apparently considered too trivial for the illusion of democracy.

From: CARY Molly A

Subject: RE: Public Records Request

Date: October 10, 2022 at 8:54 AM

To: Mark Robinowitz

Mr. Robinowitz -

The Categorical Exclusion signed by FHWA is posted on the project website for Beltline, ODOT project number 16223, at this link:

<https://www.oregon.gov/odot/projects/pages/project-details.aspx?project=16223>

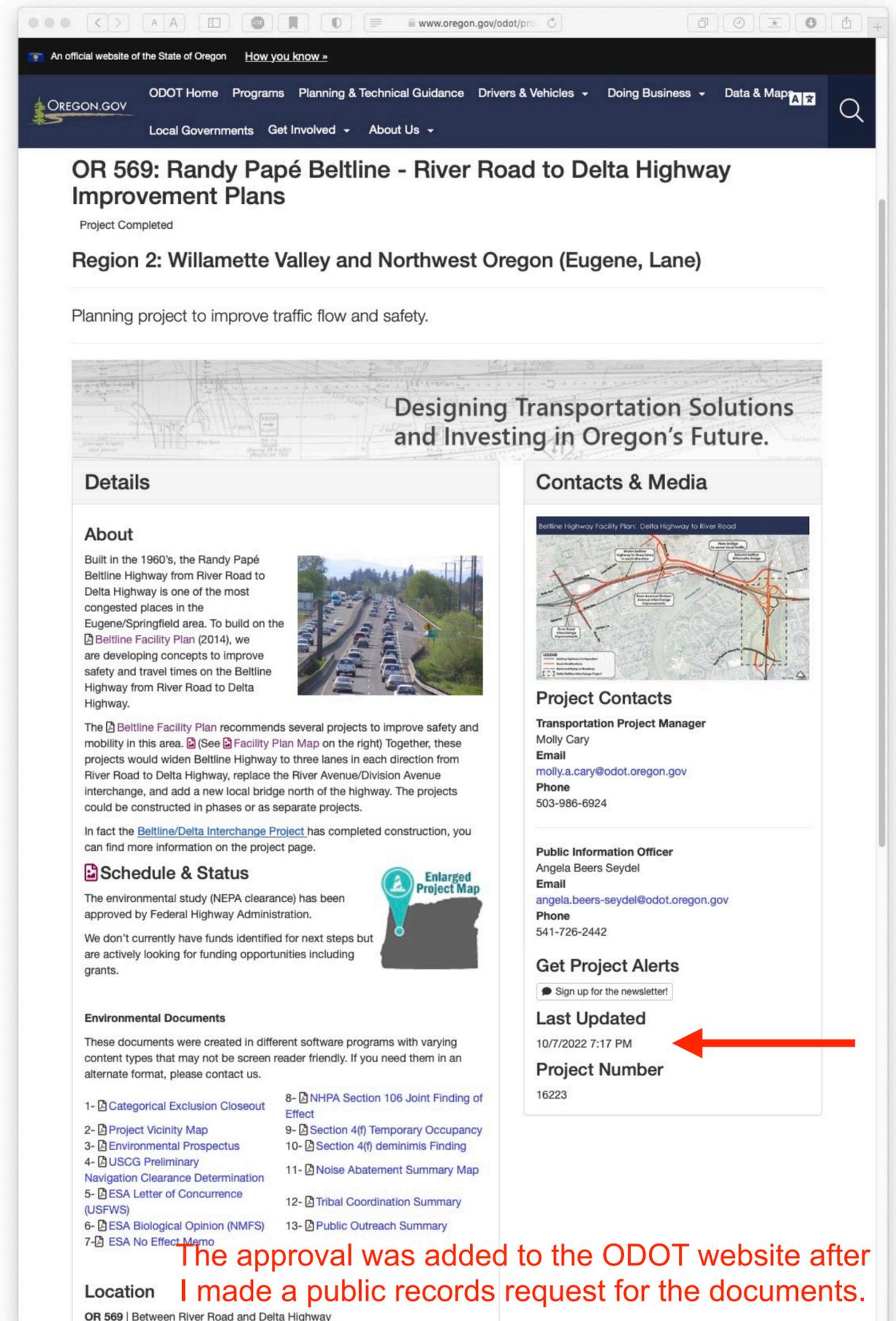
If you have difficulty accessing the document please let me know.

Again, thank you for your interest.

Molly Cary

ODOT

Area 5 Transportation Project Manager



www.oregon.gov/odot/pro

An official website of the State of Oregon How you know »

OREGON.GOV ODOT Home Programs Planning & Technical Guidance Drivers & Vehicles Doing Business Data & Maps

Local Governments Get Involved About Us

OR 569: Randy Papé Beltline - River Road to Delta Highway Improvement Plans

Project Completed

Region 2: Willamette Valley and Northwest Oregon (Eugene, Lane)

Planning project to improve traffic flow and safety.

Designing Transportation Solutions and Investing in Oregon's Future.

Details

About

Built in the 1960's, the Randy Papé Beltline Highway from River Road to Delta Highway is one of the most congested places in the Eugene/Springfield area. To build on the Beltline Facility Plan (2014), we are developing concepts to improve safety and travel times on the Beltline Highway from River Road to Delta Highway.



Contacts & Media

Project Contacts

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Last Updated

10/7/2022 7:17 PM

Project Number

16223

Schedule & Status

The environmental study (NEPA clearance) has been approved by Federal Highway Administration.

We don't currently have funds identified for next steps but are actively looking for funding opportunities including grants.



Environmental Documents

These documents were created in different software programs with varying content types that may not be screen reader friendly. If you need them in an alternate format, please contact us.

- 1- Categorical Exclusion Closeout
- 2- Project Vicinity Map
- 3- Environmental Prospectus
- 4- USCG Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination
- 5- ESA Letter of Concurrence (USFWS)
- 6- ESA Biological Opinion (NMFS)
- 7- ESA No Effect Memo
- 8- NHPA Section 106 Joint Finding of Effect
- 9- Section 4(f) Temporary Occupancy
- 10- Section 4(f) de minimis Finding
- 11- Noise Abatement Summary Map
- 12- Tribal Coordination Summary
- 13- Public Outreach Summary

Location

OR 569 | Between River Road and Delta Highway

The approval was added to the ODOT website after I made a public records request for the documents.

ODOT “public engagement” summary ignored decades of public input

ODOT’s addendum to their approval of the Beltline widening ignored substantive comments informally submitted over more than two decades. These concerns included “induced demand” (building road capacity can make traffic worse by encouraging more driving) and “Peak Vehicle Miles Traveled” (traffic on the ODOT network has peaked in Lane County, according to ODOT, and oil depletion makes further reductions inevitable).

Induced demand did get a mention in the public engagement summary but there is not any discussion in the Finding of No Significant Impact about how the Beltline widening would or would not cause this problem. There is no discussion of the critical role this highway expansion would have regarding additional expansions of Eugene, especially onto nearby farmland. This concern has been echoed in other highway expansions around the country, including some that have been stalled in federal court (I-355 in Illinois, the Chicago outer bypass, was blocked for years because the approval ignored this). Unfortunately, the deregulation of the judicial system has made environmental lawsuits much less effective (the extension of I-355 was eventually built, further facilitating continued sprawl in the outer suburbs).

Induced demand used to be a major concern for highway expansions but **the arrival of Peak VMT makes this less of a concern.** Growth in highway traffic leveled off a decade and a half ago, sustained by the energy pulse of fracked oil and tar sands mining (which offset the continued decline of conventional oil and increased the total available liquid fuels available for transportation and other uses). Fracked oil peaked in 2019 in the USA and is unlikely to be increased further. Here in Cascadia most of our liquid fuels come from the Alaska pipeline, which peaked in 1988 at over 2 million barrels per day but now is under a half million per day.

I have heard a few planners at the City of Eugene, ODOT, Federal Highway Administration, other government agencies and private contractors who have acknowledged this is a legitimate concern, but none have dared share their private views in public. My guess is the transportation industrial complex will continue planning an infinite growth future until physical limits become more apparent and then they will pretend that no one could have seen this coming.

- Mark Robinowitz, PeakChoice.org, PeakTraffic.org, SustainEugene.org

BELTLINE HIGHWAY PROJECTS: RIVER ROAD TO DELTA HIGHWAY



Public Engagement Summary

Includes efforts made during the River Road to Delta Highway planning process through November 2019. Does not include efforts made for or prior to the Beltline Highway: River Road to Delta Highway Facility Plan (2014).

OVERVIEW

Open Houses

- 3 Events, 100 Comments

Steering Committee

- 7 Members from 4 Jurisdictions, 2 Meetings

Community Advisory Committee

- 17 Members, 3 Meetings

Presentations to Community Groups

- 11 Presentations, 250+ Participants

Business and Property Owner Outreach

- 1,000+ Mailed Postcards plus Targeted Outreach

Community Tabling

- 10 Locations

OPEN HOUSES

Purpose

Gather input on project concepts.

Share information about design, construction schedule, and construction impacts of the Delta Highway Interchange Project.

Share information about how the public can stay involved and informed in the future.

Feedback

100 comments submitted (total).

Support for reducing congestion and improving safety.

Agreement with the need for a new local bridge just north of Beltline Highway, supported multimodal improvements, and supported reducing noise pollution.

Concern about future growth and that expanding lane capacity will add to congestion by encouraging people to drive.

Open House Events

- Open House #1, North Eugene High School
April 24, 2018
- Online Open House
April 23 - May 25, 2019
- Open House #2, Kelly Middle School Cafeteria
June 4, 2019

STEERING COMMITTEE

Purpose

Guide development of projects.

Help confirm that design and implementation serve the needs of stakeholders, improve safety and mobility, and are acceptable to all partners.

Included representatives from City of Eugene, Lane County, Lane Transit District, and ODOT.

Feedback

Offered guidance on project objectives, stakeholder and public outreach, and funding opportunities.

Shared feedback from members of their communities.

Recommended elements of project design and implementation.

2 Meetings

- Thursday, November 30, 2017
- Friday, March 29, 2019

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Purpose

Provide recommendations and advice as concepts are refined and an implementation plan is developed.

Serve as a forum to identify and build community consensus on alternatives that reflect a broad range of needs and interests.

Serve as liaisons to constituents, and represent the community as a whole.

Feedback

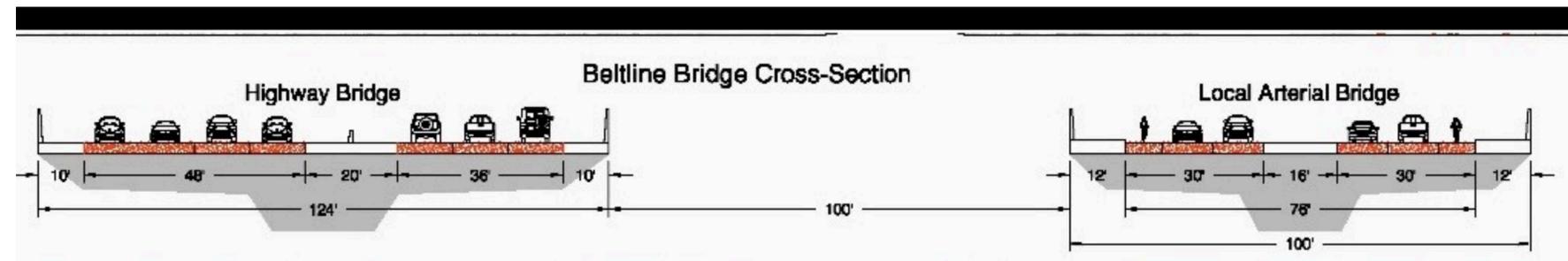
The 17 active members shared feedback on many aspects of the project, including:

- Active transportation elements
- Adjacent safety issues
- Public communication
- Coordination with other agencies
- Induced demand and environmental impacts

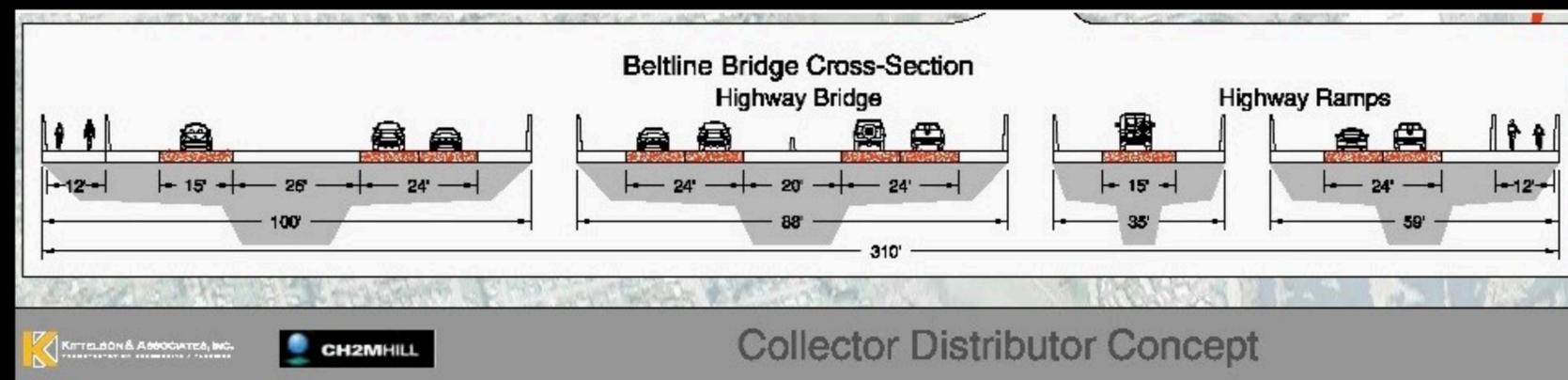
3 Meetings

- November 28, 2018
- March 4, 2019
- May 30, 2019

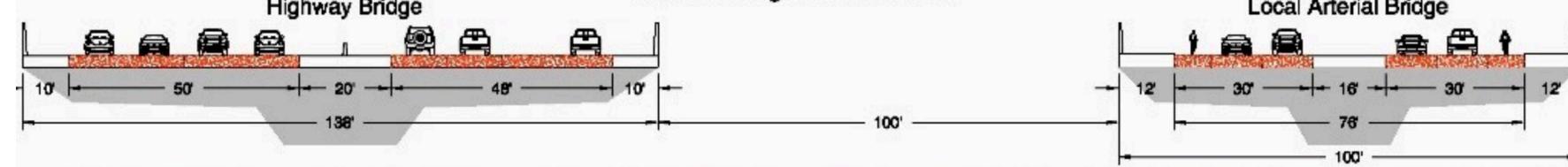
ODOT 2014 study: Beltline cross sections across the river



CH2MHILL **Improve Existing Concept**



KITTELSON & ASSOCIATES, INC. CH2MHILL **Collector Distributor Concept**



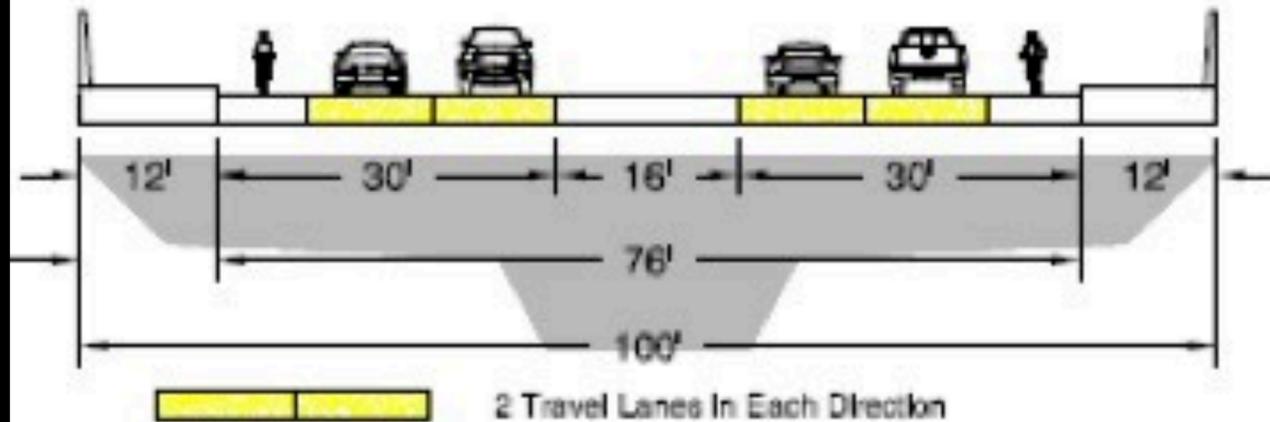
KITTELSON & ASSOCIATES, INC. CH2MHILL **Auxilliary Lane Concept**

ODOT has not released cross section graphic showing the 2018 version which would have 10 lanes of bridge across the river and up to 16 lanes between the river and Delta highway

(C) New Bridge to Serve Local Traffic

We are at Peak Traffic, not no traffic, so a bridge across the river will continue to be essential. We have enough physical resources and money to replace the bridge with a structure that will still be useful after the arrival of oil rationing.

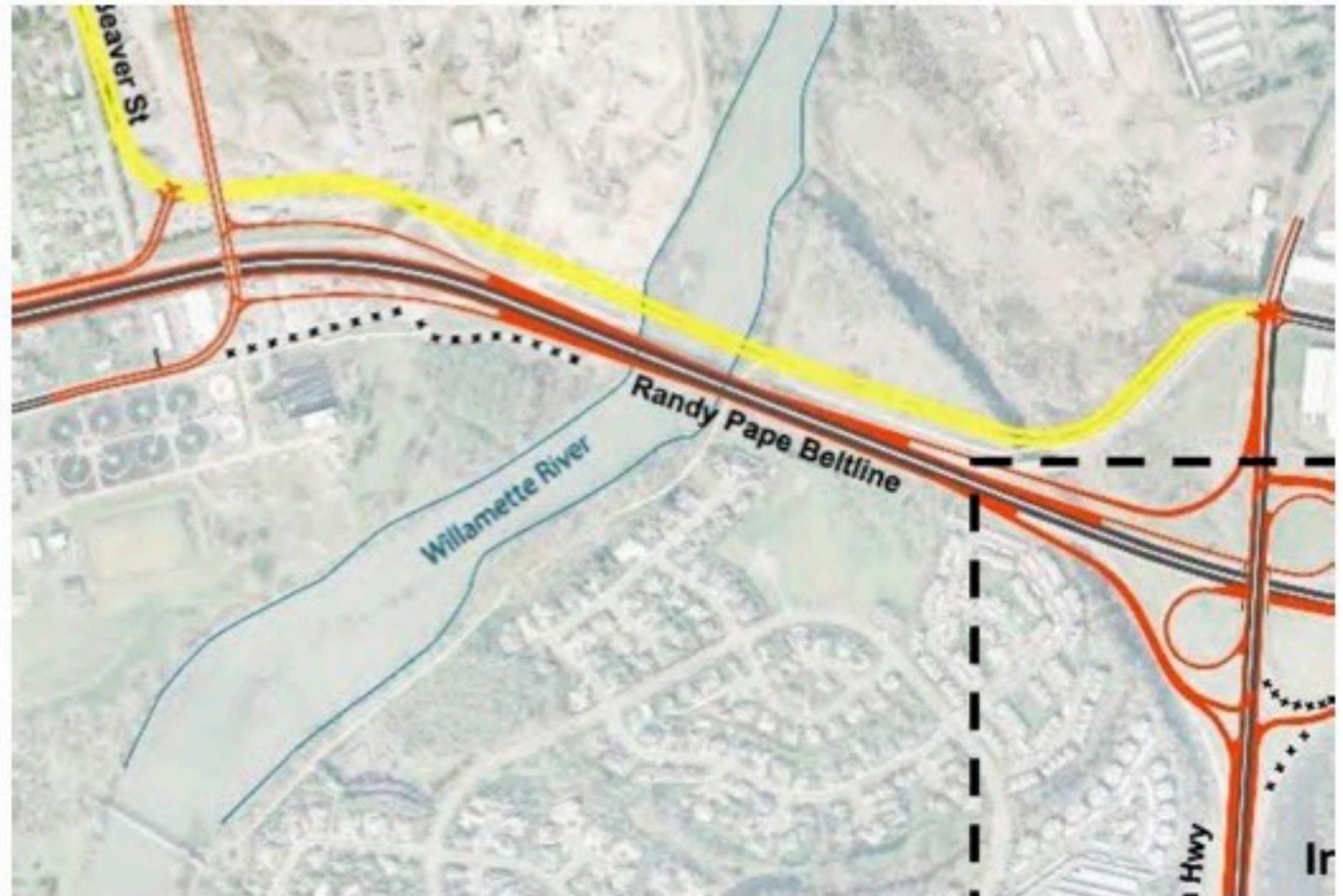
Long term plans should consider fiscal constraints, peak traffic, climate change, and energy depletion. Concrete and steel require a lot of fossil fuels. We should be wise about using what is left.



Beltline is the last highway bridge in Eugene that has not been repaired or replaced to cope with the looming Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

A low build alternative could replace the worn out Beltline bridge with a new structure (where the yellow lines are). The curvature of the mainline could be adapted to transfer the traffic.

Replacing the old Beltline bridge, built before the seismic risk was discovered, with a new bridge of the same width should be enough for the rest of the oil age.





Delta - Beltline project cost \$20 million
full Beltline widening across river
could cost over a third of a billion

2014 "low build" option

most of this was built as the
Delta - Beltline interchange expansion
removed "weaving" movements
was larger than "Low Build Concept"
(double lane off ramp northbound to westbound)
no longer considered part of
Beltline study from Delta to River Road

we're at Peak Traffic, not low traffic
including oil depletion and other limits to growth
into traffic projections would make a comprehensive
Low Build alternative easier to approve as meeting
the real "purpose and need" for the region.

EXAMPLE SCHEMATIC,
FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY

Troubled Bridges Over Water

Tens of thousands of highway and rail bridges across the country are worn out, rusting, frayed from decades of too many trucks and freight trains. Oregon has numerous broken bridges along I-5, I-84 and many other routes, but has only had funding to fix some of them.

ODOT and local governments used the replacement of the cracked I-5 Willamette River bridge as an opportunity to double the width of the highway - even though we are passing the end of cheap oil and the start of climate change. Replacing worn out bridges with new bridges OF THE SAME WIDTH would save tax dollars that could be used to fix more dangerous bridges before entropy or the Cascadia Subduction earthquake makes them unusable. Public safety and fiscal constraints mean that expansion plans be canceled in favor of maintenance and repair.



I-5 Eugene-Springfield
worn out bridge replaced with
two new, larger bridges



I-35 Minneapolis
2007 collapse

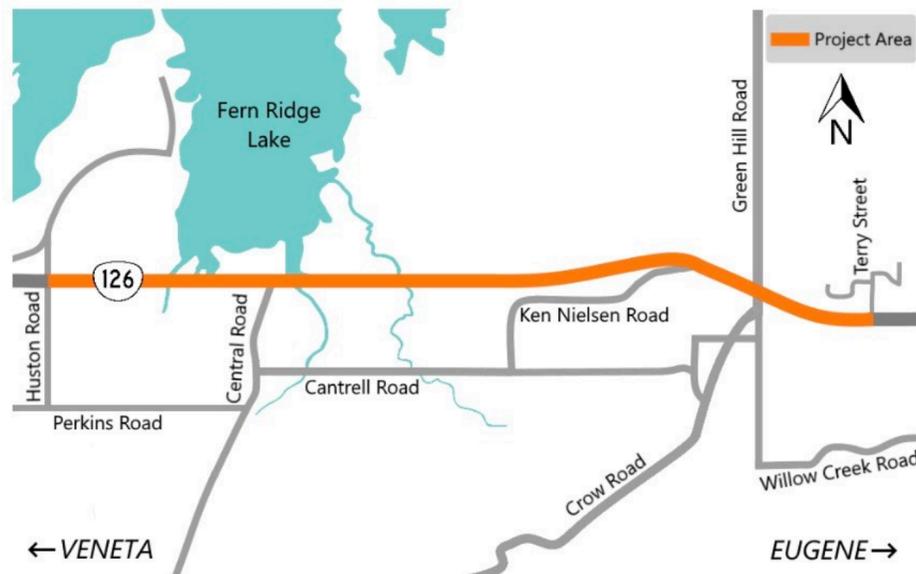
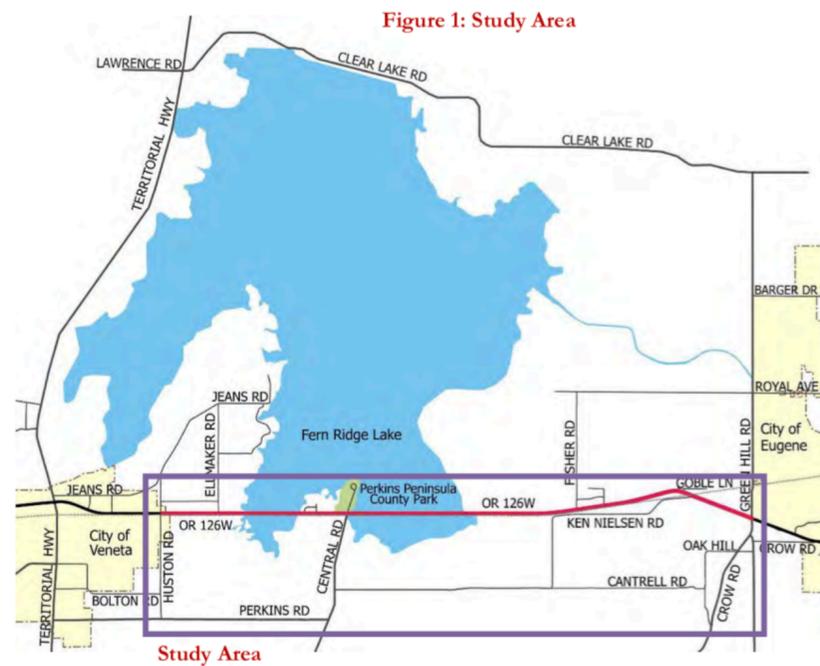
Beltline widening would not have the same legal obstacles that stopped the proposed West Eugene Parkway (discussed later in this slideshow). There are no parks in the path, no critical habitat for endangered species, minimal area of wetlands (and it is legal to destroy wetlands if so-called mitigation sites are made elsewhere) and the environmental impact it would have at the river crossing is within the “acceptable” limit.

There is a novel approach to force a Low Build type option, but before getting to that, a description of a parallel proposal to widen 126 from Eugene to Veneta, lessons learned from stopping the WEP, and then, a **legal strategy that might not only prevent overwidening Beltline but set a precedent that could impact a trillion dollars of new and expanded highways across the country.**

ODOT prepared a Categorical Exclusion for Beltline instead of an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment. In less legalese language, this means ODOT is bypassing the normal legal requirements for disclosing impacts. Later in this slideshow is discussion of the National Environmental Policy Act which requires these documents. “C.E.” is a way to avoid wasting too much money and time preparing unnecessary reports but was not intended for projects that could cost over a third of a billion dollars with years of construction disruption. This fits a pattern of using CE to ignore disclosing the impacts of many levels of federal timber sales on National Forests and other destructive proposals. In short, deregulation of protections established a half century ago during the peak of federal environmental regulation and laws.



Highway 126 widening: Eugene to Veneta



OR 126W Spot Improvements with separated multi-use path: \$15 million

OR 126W Three-Lane Alternative with separated multi-use path

- Causeway on Dike: \$95 million
- Causeway on Piers: \$145 million

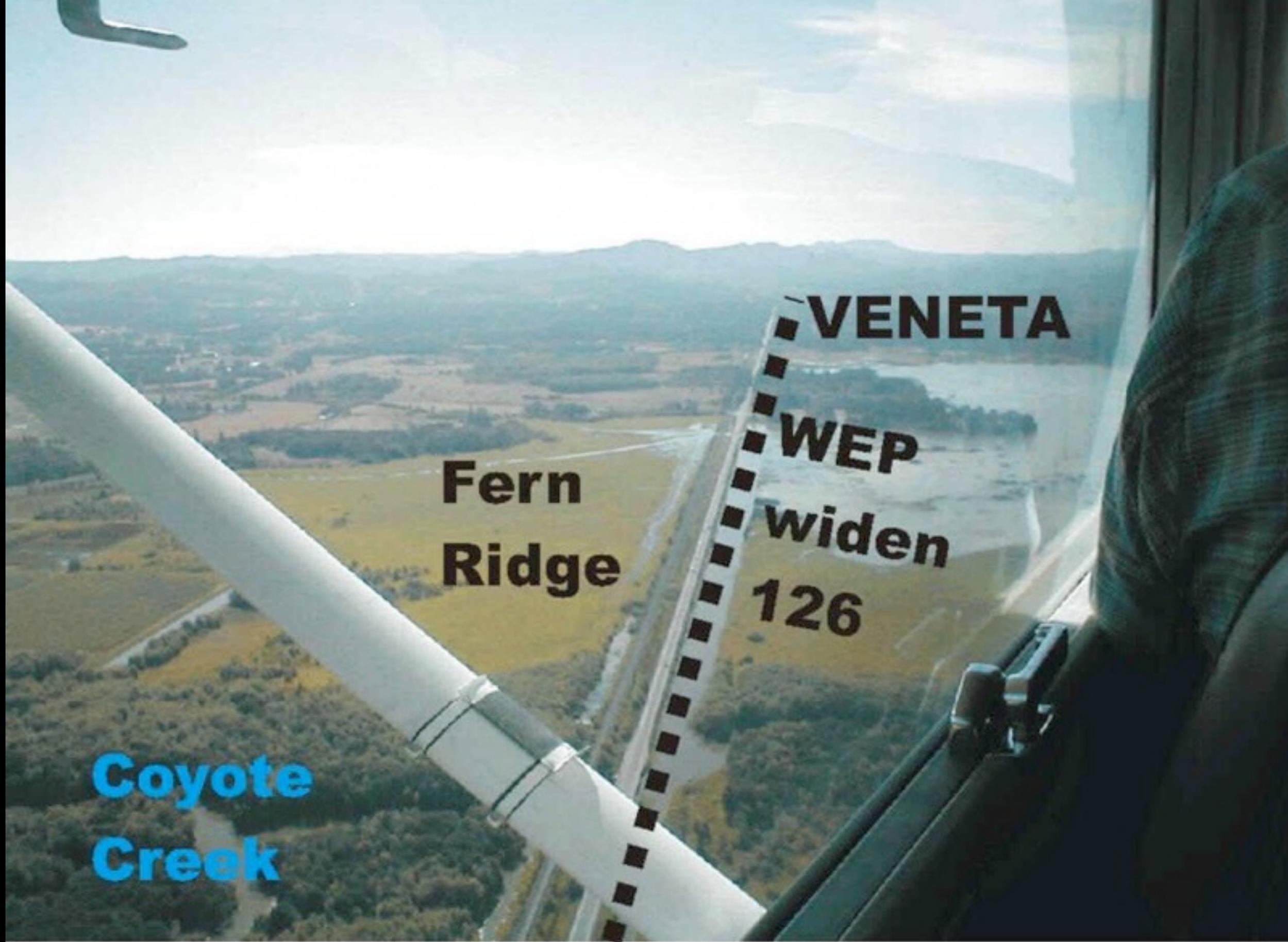
OR 126W Four-Lane Alternative with separated multi-use path

- Causeway on Dike: \$130 million
- Causeway on Piers: \$195 million

Widening over the water would be the most expensive part.

No cost estimate is available for a Low Build alternative that would combine "spot improvements," traffic calming, other safety design considerations and perhaps a passing lane or two on the sections not crossing Fern Ridge reservoir or wetlands. This would be cheaper than the "three lane alternative" and potentially affordable.

graphics and cost from ODOT's 2013 study



VENETA

WEP

widen

126

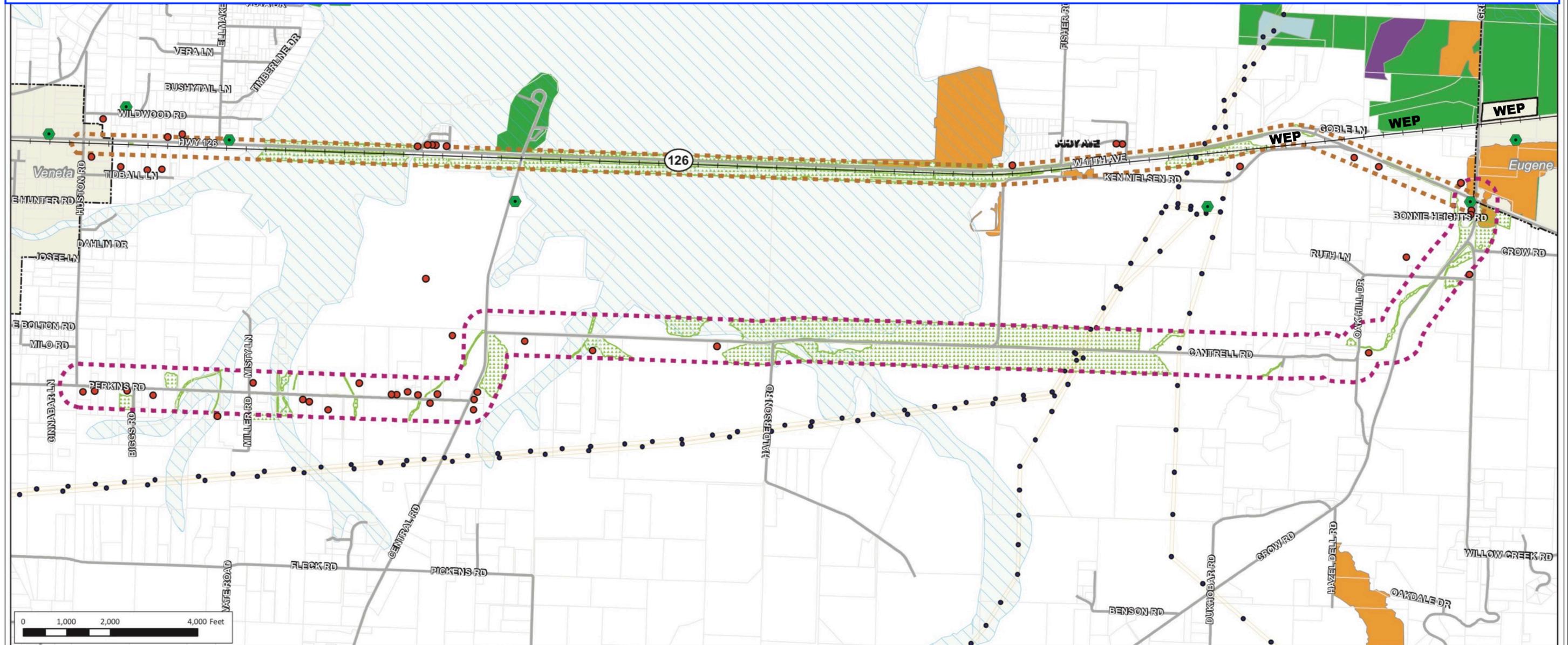
**Fern
Ridge**

**Coyote
Creek**

In 2001, I asked then State Representative Floyd Prozanski what he thought of the West Eugene Parkway. He said he was against it, partly because it would force a “causeway” (his term) across the lake. He added he grew up in San Antonio, Texas and knew about the Brackenridge Park freeway fight. In the 1960s, a highway was planned through that park, a main green space in that city. Efforts to stop that road included passage of Section 4(f), authored by Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas. There is a deeper look at 4(f) later in this presentation, it prevented the WEP.

During the peak of the WEP controversy, ODOT and FHWA officials were reluctant to say anything about what I called Phase 3 of the WEP: the extension all the way to Veneta. They knew that this would be difficult to permit under the Clean Water Act, and segmentation of the WEP’s approval to avoid the ecological and economic impacts of this future extension would be especially illegal. Segmentation violates the National Environmental Policy Act and segmentation to avoid consideration of Section 4(f), the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act is as illegal as a highway project can be.

In 2022, ODOT is planning the causeway even though WEP was canceled in 2007. Endangered species are more concentrated in the wrong-of-way of the WEP, but there are critical habitats directly next to 126. (Fender’s Blue Butterfly is vulnerable to highway lighting). **ODOT is planning to approve this with a “Categorical Exclusion,” instead of an Environmental Impact Statement. Even an Environmental Assessment that results in a “Finding of No Significant Impact” would be less inappropriate.**



LEGEND

Road	Railroad	Potential Historic Resource	BPA Tower	Fender's blue butterfly Critical Habitat
Tax Lot	OR 126 Study Corridor	Potential HazMat Site	BPA Transmission Line	Kincaid's lupine Critical Habitat
City Boundary	Parallel Facility Study Corridor	100-Year Flood Zone (A)	Potential Jurisdictional Wetlands & Water Resources	Willamette daisy Critical Habitat
	Public Park			

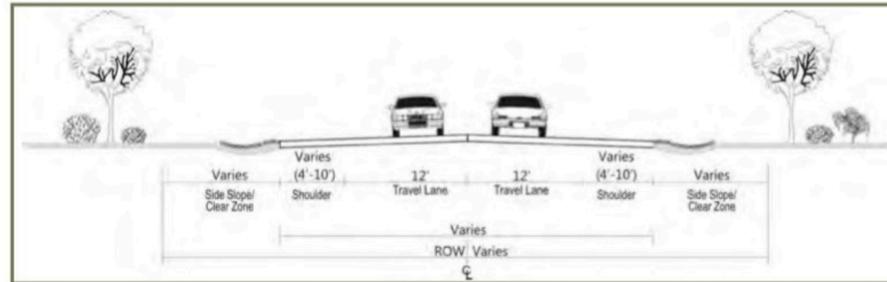
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Figure 3

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

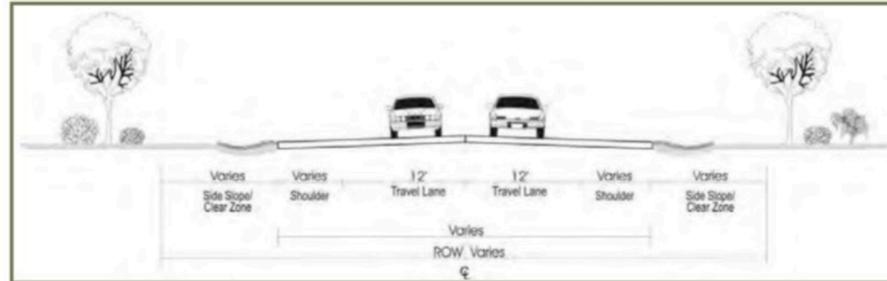
NO SCALE

Figure 7a: The Eight Alternatives



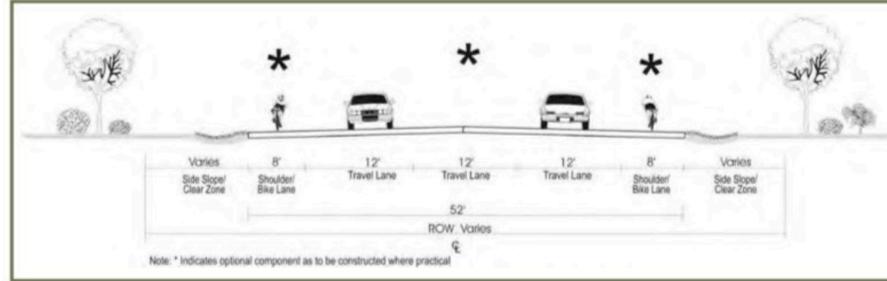
OR 126W Route No-Build Alternative would construct no improvements. OR 126W would maintain one travel lane in each direction, with left-turn lanes where they currently exist. The shoulders would continue to vary in size.

No Build



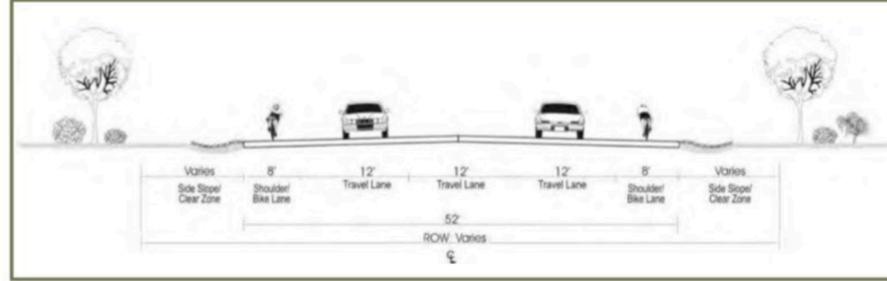
OR 126W Route Transportation System Management Alternative would include no roadway widening (OR 126W would maintain the existing cross-section). Lower cost improvements would be implemented such as improved signing and roadway striping, alternate mobility standards or transit and access management enhancements.

Lowest Build



OR 126W Route Spot Improvement Alternative would modify OR 126W where practical to include additional turn lanes, intersection improvements and shoulder widening. The shoulders would continue to vary in size and the roadway would transition between two and three lanes.

Low Build



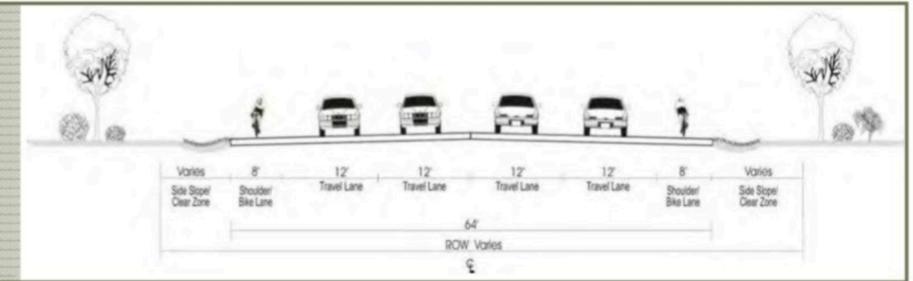
OR 126W Route Three Lane Alternative would widen OR126W to include one travel lane in each direction and a center lane for either turning or passing as appropriate. The shoulders would be widened to eight feet.

Medium Build

Figure 7b: The Eight Alternatives

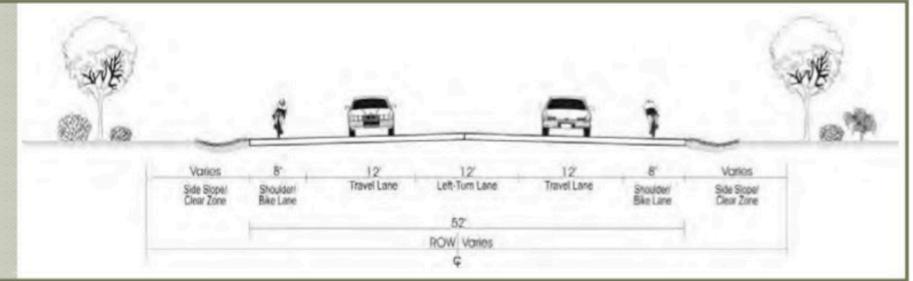
OR 126W Route Four Lane Alternative would widen OR126W to include two travel lanes in each direction. The shoulders would be widened to eight feet. Dedicated left-turn lanes would be added where appropriate.

ODOT plan



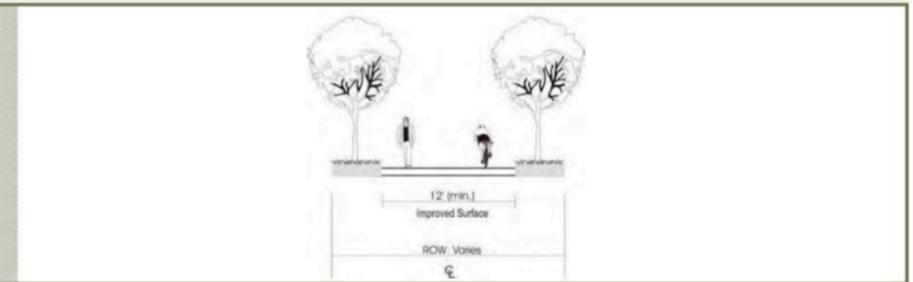
Southern Route Two/Three Lane Alternative would modify Perkins and Cantrell Roads where needed to include additional turn lanes and widened shoulders. The roadways would transition between two and three lanes.

upgrade parallel roads to the south



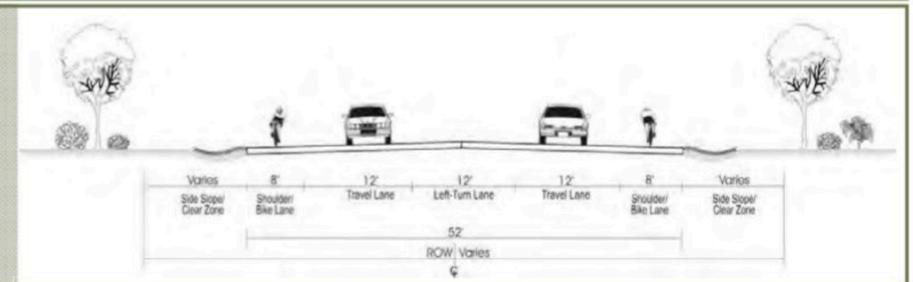
Southern Route Multi-use Path Alternative would construct a multi-use path for pedestrian and bicycle travel between Huston Road and Green Hill Road generally near the Perkins and Cantrell Road alignments. No additional roadway improvements would be constructed (OR 126W would maintain the existing cross-section).

only add bike path, not a serious alternative



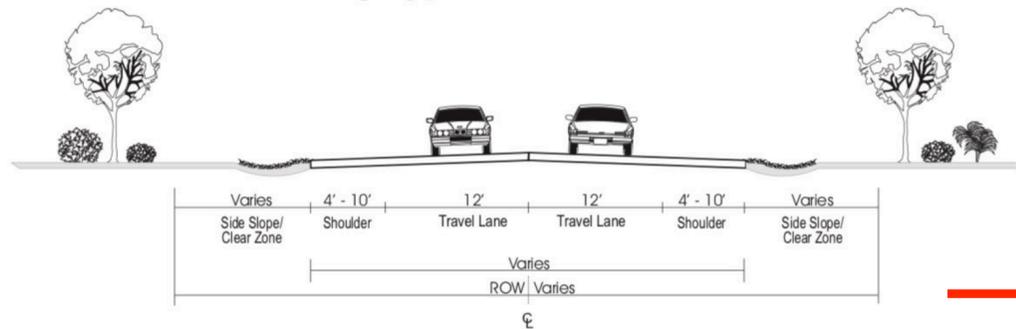
Northern Route Alternative would modify Territorial Highway, Clear Lake, and Green Hill Roads where needed to include additional turn lanes and widened shoulders. The roadways would transition between two and three lanes.

north of Fern Ridge, ODOT probably will want that too





Existing Typical OR 126W Cross-Section



Cross-Section Elements

- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- Existing Bridge
- Existing Guardrail
- Existing Transit Stop

Optional TSM Improvements (At Various Locations or Along Full Length)

- Edge and Centerline Delineation
 - Raised Markers/Rumble Strips
 - Reflectors on Guardrails
- Advanced Intersection Guide Signage
- Speed Feedback Signs
- Variable Speed Limit Signs
 - 35 to 45 mph Congested Speed
 - 55 mph Non-Congested Speed
- Increased Transit Ridership and Carpools
 - Park-and-Ride Lot
 - Improved Pedestrian Access and Other Transit Stop Enhancements
 - Rideshare Program
- Alternate Mobility Standards
- Access Management Strategies

LEGEND

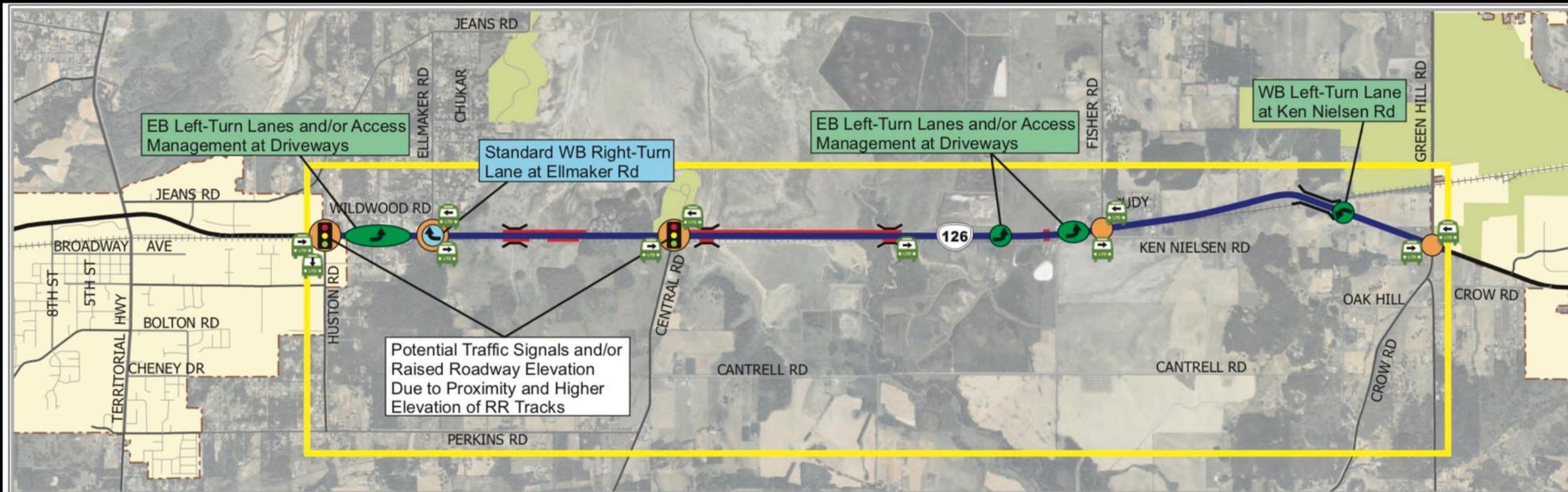
- OR 126W Study Area
- City Limit
- Railroad
- Park

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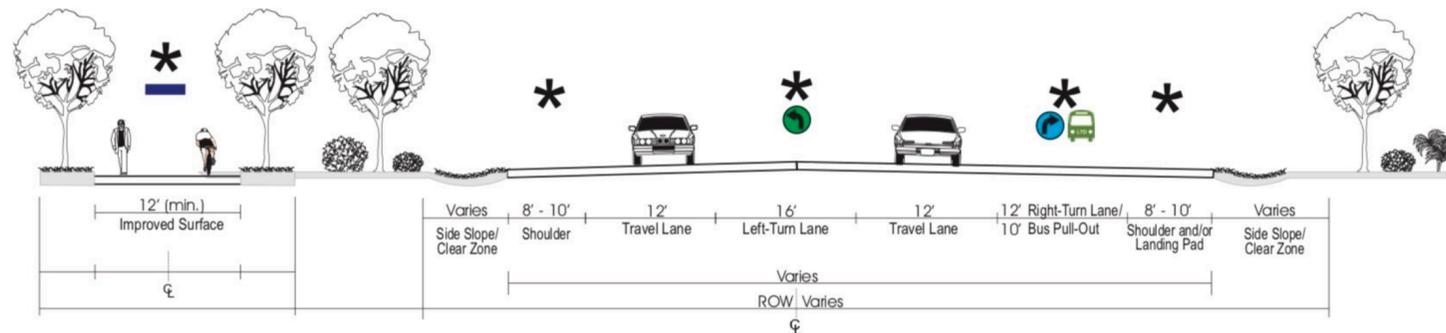


**TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT (TSM)
CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE**

Figure 2



Spot Improvements Cross-Section with Optional Multi-Use Trail



* Spot improvements may include left-turn lanes (●), right-turn lanes (●), traffic signals (🚦), limited passing lanes, and wider shoulders, especially where current shoulders are only 4 feet wide. A multi-use trail alongside the highway (—) would also be a potential addition to the corridor. In addition, transit stop improvements (🚌) may include far-side bus stop relocations, bus pullouts, landing pads, and pedestrian crossing treatments. Emergency turnarounds and police pull-offs may also be provided on the side of the road at select locations.

Cross-Section Elements

- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- Existing Typical Two-Lane Cross-Section (with Potential Addition of Multi-Use Trail)
- 🚦 Existing Bridge
- 🚌 Existing Transit Stop
- 🚦 Potential Traffic Signal and/or Raised Roadway Elevation (Due to Proximity of RR Tracks)

LEGEND

- 🟡 OR 126W Study Area
- 🟡 City Limit
- ++++ Railroad
- 🟢 Park

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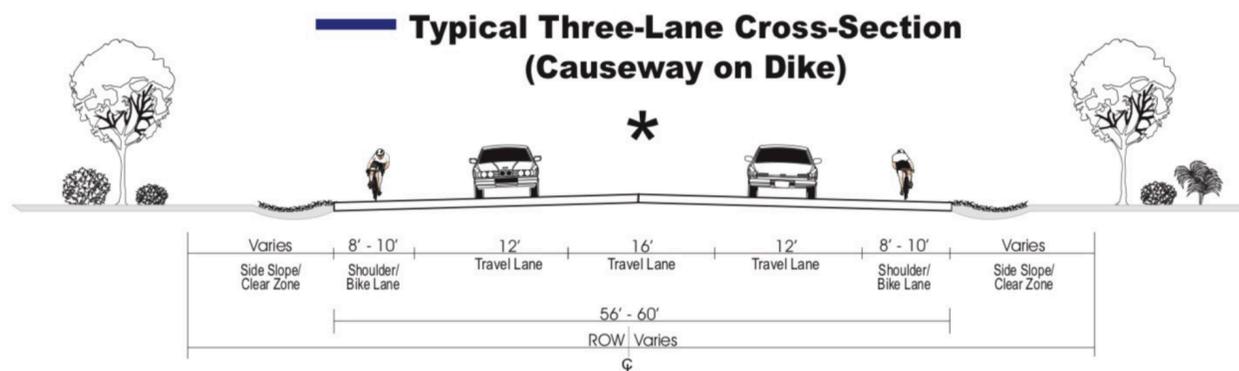
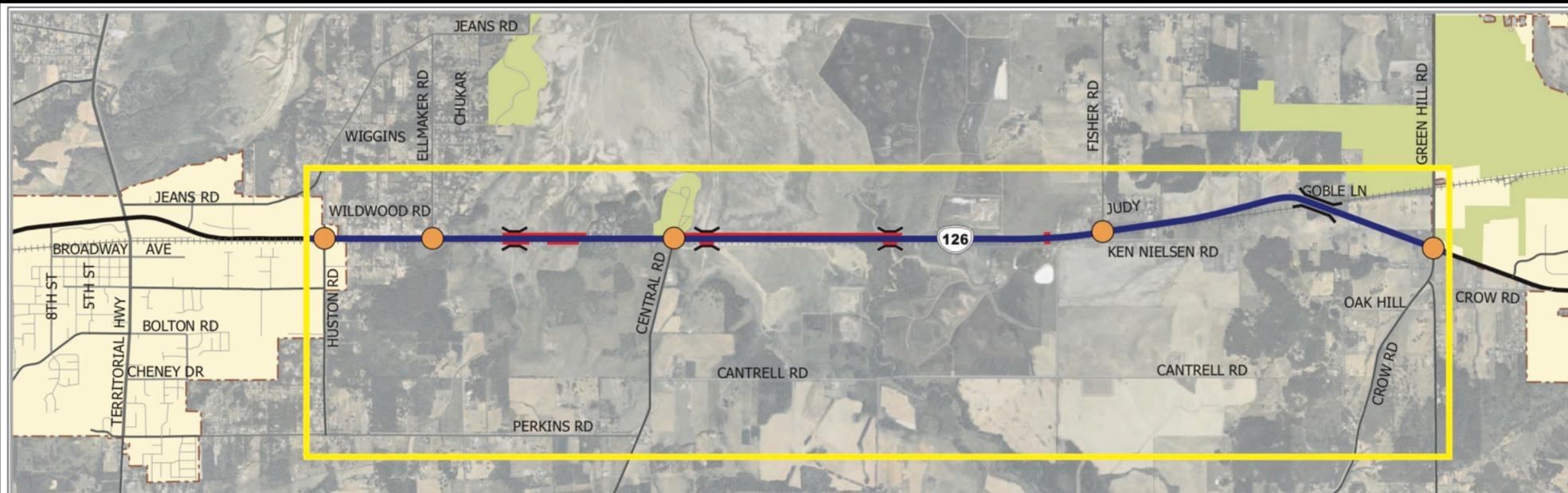


Figure 3

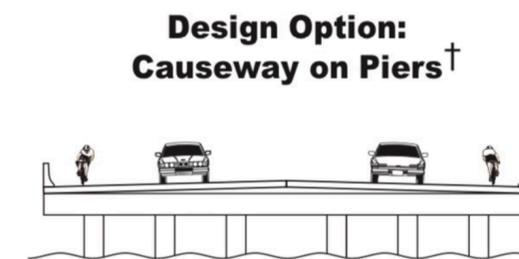
**SPOT IMPROVEMENTS
CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE**



- 1 HUSTON ROAD: Two lane roundabout or traffic signals.
- 2 ELLMAKER ROAD: Two lane roundabout or turn lane improvements.
- 3 CENTRAL ROAD: Two lane roundabout or traffic signals.
- 4 FISHER ROAD: Two lane roundabout or turn lane improvements.
- 5 GREENHILL ROAD: Two lane roundabout or traffic signals.



*The additional center travel lane may be used for passing lanes in alternating directions or a reversible travel lane that serves eastbound traffic in the morning and westbound traffic in the evening. Left-turn lanes at select intersections may be included in the three-lane cross-section or added as a fourth lane.



[†]A causeway on piers is an optional design feature that may be used over environmentally sensitive areas. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities may be included on the structure or provided on a lower level on the side of the structure.

Cross-Section Elements

- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- = Existing Guardrail
- = Existing Bridge

LEGEND

- OR 126W Study Area
- City Limit
- + + + + + Railroad
- Park

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NO SCALE

Figure 4

THREE-LANE CROSS-SECTION WITH OPTIONAL CAUSEWAY ON PIERS CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE

Three lanes on land, two over water could be a reasonable Low Build alternative

Fig. A: Multiuse Section with Swale Separation

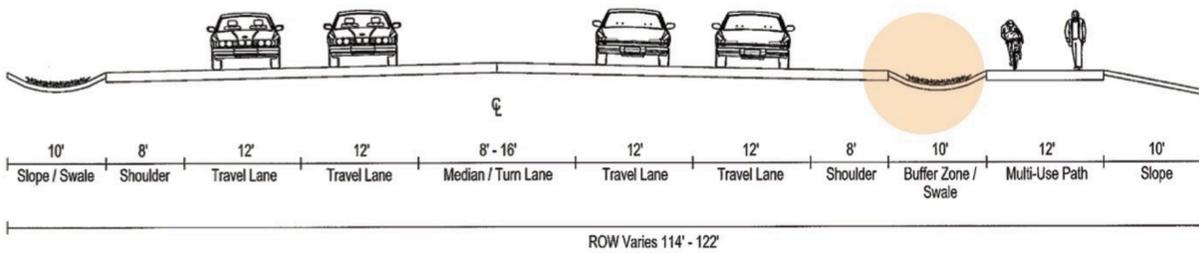
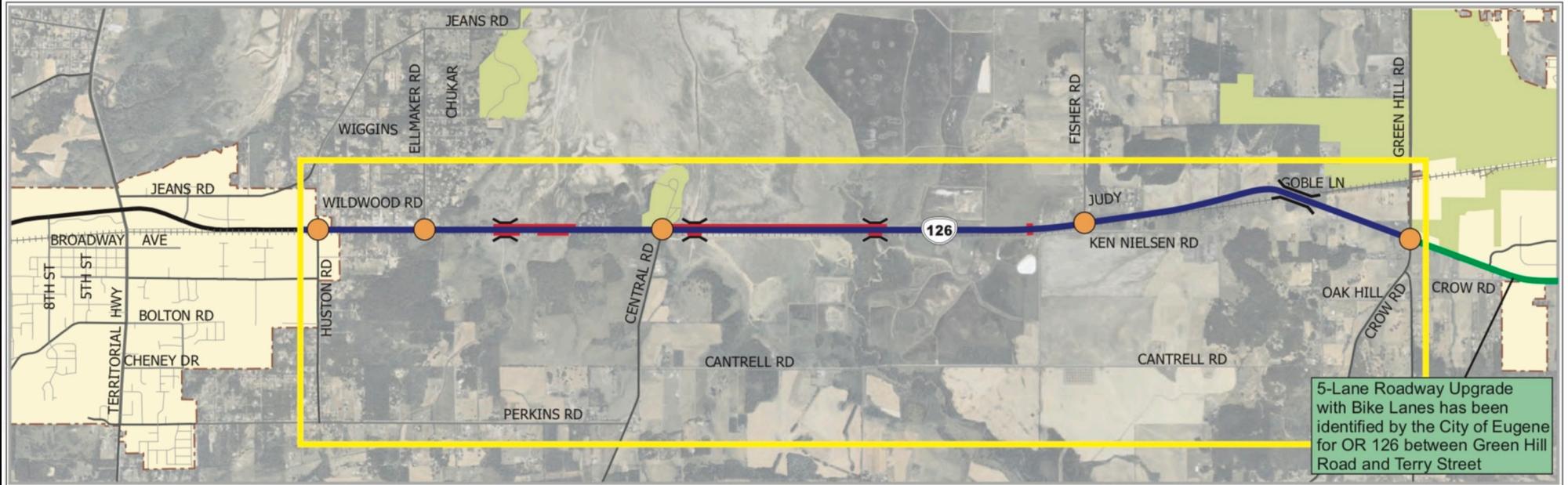
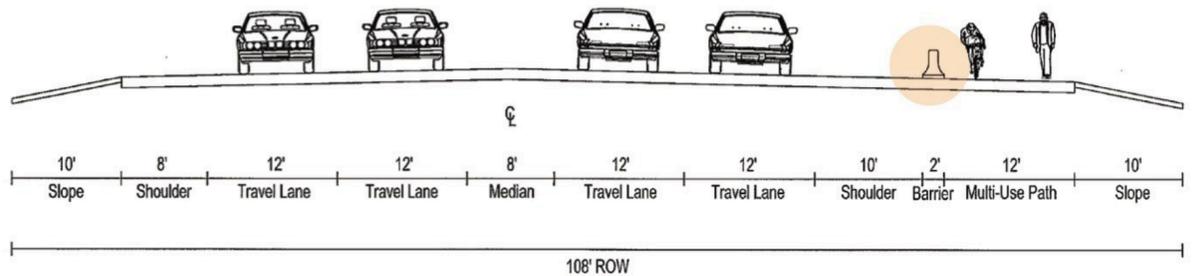
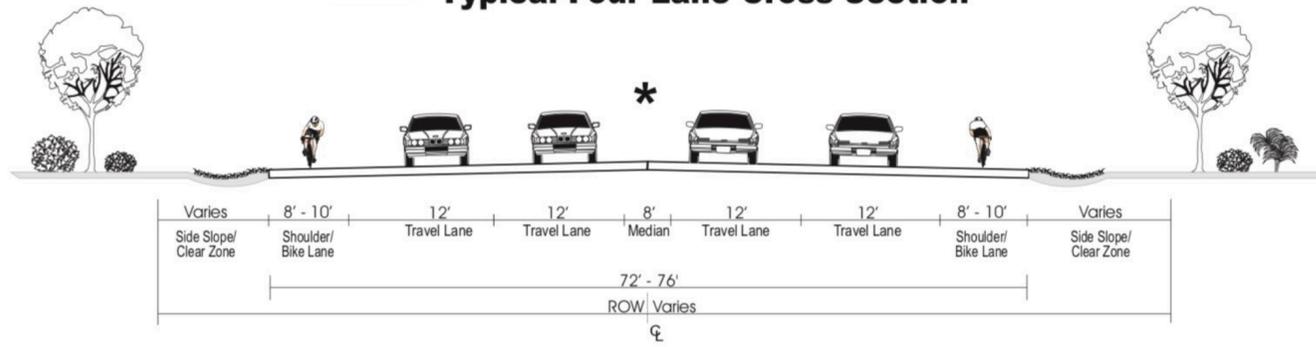


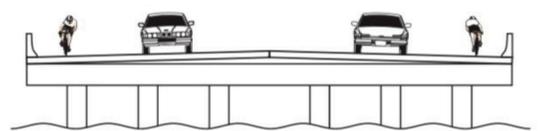
Fig. B: Multiuse Section with Barrier Separation



Typical Four-Lane Cross-Section*



Design Option: Causeway on Piers†



†A causeway on piers is an optional design feature that may be used over environmentally sensitive areas. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities may be included on the structure or provided on a lower level on the side of the structure.

*The four-lane cross-section would include a center left-turn lane (16 feet wide) in place of the median at applicable intersections.

Cross-Section Elements

- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- Existing Guardrail
- ≡ Existing Bridge

LEGEND

- ▭ OR 126W Study Area
- ▭ City Limit
- ++++ Railroad
- ▭ Park

DKS Associates
TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS



Figure 5

FOUR-LANE CROSS-SECTION WITH OPTIONAL CAUSEWAY ON PIERS CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE

West 11th / 126 west of Green Hill

about one mile east of the WEP's western terminus

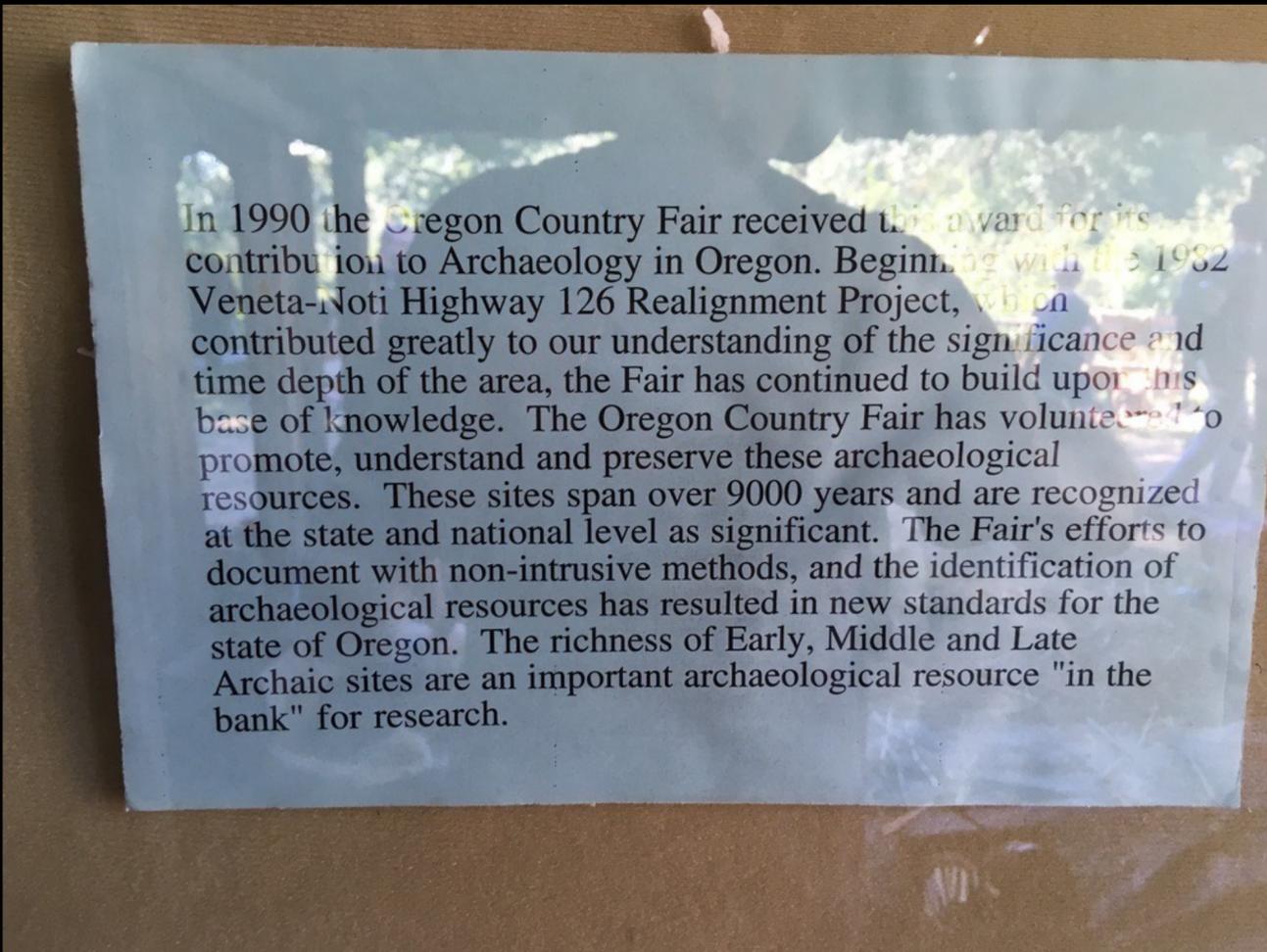
Some West Eugene Parkway proponents said WEP was needed to get to the coast faster, yet the WEP would have ended over an hour's drive from Florence.

ODOT's 126 study says most 126 traffic is local, not going to the coast. Widening 126 would subsidize Veneta's expansion.





OCF sign
Ark Park



In the 1980s, ODOT and Lane County planned to build 126 through the Oregon Country Fair. Before that construction, the main connection from Eugene to the coast went along Suttle Road (on the north side of the OCF property). Routing the new road through the fair would have damaged, displaced or destroyed the festival, then a goal of some of the County's conservatives.

OCF managed to divert the expressway by documenting ancient Kalapuya archeological relics in the wrong of way.

The area around the 126 widening from Eugene to Veneta is as archeologically significant as the OCF property.

Highway departments are the largest employers of archeologists in the United States because of federal laws that try to protect, or at least document, significant sites.

