

Hello, all.

It was another very productive open house last evening in Oakridge, where residents turned out to learn about and discuss the OR 58: Salt Creek Tunnel and Half Viaduct project.

First, a word of “thanks!” Those of you who turned out made us feel very welcome and relaxed. Your good nature helped create an easy exchange of information

Impact on businesses

Many of the issues you raised were very similar to those raised in Monday evening’s open house in Crescent Lake.

- Business owners tell us 50-75% of business occurs during the summer with July and August being the peak months.
- As much as 80% of business for one owner comes from truck drivers who are already indicating they will take an alternate route during the closures.
- Some new and currently fragile businesses may not survive if the closure schedule remains six 4-day closures.
- The ripple effect of failed businesses would be a decline in school enrollment at a time the school district is already downsizing.
- Another effect of lost business would be a loss of jobs. Labor forces would have to be scaled back to compensate for the loss of business.
- Several summer events, with hundreds of participants traveling from the east or California would be severely affected by the closures.

Closure communication

Once again, communication about the closures was widely mentioned. Among the issues raised were:

- Advance word on the closures is critical for controlling workers schedules and labor costs
- Advance and reliable word on the closure schedule is necessary to manage and plan events.
- One person thought communication of the schedule 6 to 9 months in advance was necessary.

Total support

As in Crescent Lake, several of you are totally in favor of the project.

- “Money well spent” said one participant.
- “Happy you are fixing the tunnel and road to be safe and last for the next generation,” wrote another.

Emergency services

There were several concerns raised about emergency services during the project.

- One suggested emergency access for ambulances during the closure periods
- Another suggested the placement of radio repeaters near Willamette Pass and the placement of a radio repeater system in the tunnel infrastructure.

- Designation of a temporary helicopter to be available during the project or longer was another idea.
- Establishment of a temporary or permanent cell phone site for emergency use was also suggested.

Alternative approaches

Many of you suggested or requested a different construction schedule for the project. Among those ideas were:

- Shift the closures to September and October
- Consider a single, long-term closure in late September and early October
- Do the work in March through May and September through November

Creative ways to capitalize on the project

There were some incredibly creative ideas offered on how the community might capitalize on the construction project. Those ideas included:

- A welcome party for the project and workers.
- A get acquainted pot-luck to introduce what the community has to offer to the workers.
- Coordinate lodging owners, restaurants and caterers to work cooperatively to serve the 'round-the-clock shifts of the workers.
- Create opportunities for "bicyclists only" on the highway.
- Have a web camera show the progress of the construction.

Next Steps

- Tonight, ODOT will make a project presentation to the Oakridge City Council.
- Later this month, Area Manager Sonny Chickering will attend the Gilchrist/Crescent Community Action Team (CAT) meeting.
- In October, Sonny will attend the Crescent Lake CAT.

We will take the information we are developing back to the Project Design Team and we'll be back in touch soon with a report on what the team tells us. In the meantime, please encourage your neighbors to send an email comment to me by September 9, to be included in our assessment.

Thanks again for a very nice and informative evening.

All the best,

Rick Little

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