



October 12, 2005

To: Metropolitan Policy Committee
From: Petra Schuetz
Subject: Agenda Item 4.d: I-105 Communications Evaluation

Action Requested: None, information only.

The summer of 2005 brought the largest transportation preservation project to the central Lane County area in over a generation.

Interstate 105 between the Washington-Jefferson Bridge and Interstate 5 in Eugene was 38 years old. The aging pavement was cracking, separating, and lifting. The three bridge sections along the corridor ridge were substandard both in width and rail condition which contributed to a pavement rating at the bottom end of "fair" category. The project area had exceeded qualifications for a preservation project for years.

Approximately 66,000 trips a day travel the corridor and the worsening surface condition also caused safety issues. Frequent lane changes from the eight entrances or exits to the highway in 3.2 miles were causing accidents and lower levels of service (LOS) at interchanges and over bridges, particularly during peak commute travel times.

The I-105 Improvement Project had a large potential impact on regional traffic as five full multi-day lane closures were necessary within a 66 day window of closure construction. Completing the work had an estimated cost of \$14,500,000 (when the project went to bid).

This major project would affect large cross-sections of the region's population including adjacent residential neighborhoods, business areas, regional events, and the traveling public. In order to help mitigate negative impacts on traffic flow and access and assist the Oregon Department of Transportation with public outreach and a communications plan, ODOT contracted with the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) in November 2004. As project scoping began, efforts to develop a comprehensive communications plan found an invaluable partner in Commuter Solutions' Congestion Mitigation Program. Commuter Solutions is the regional Transportation Options program (formally Transportation Demand Management or TDM Program). Commuter Solutions has been a key regional partner providing marketing expertise, programs, and services that reduce the community's reliance on the automobile. An opportunity to use the respective specializations of the two agencies provided a solid foundation on which to build a successful communications plan.

The communications plan incorporated a multi-level approach to outreach including information dissemination and an emphasis on encouraging travelers to use an alternative mode. Because this project emphasized comprehensive strategies, nontraditional partnerships and a relatively new process for ODOT, an evaluation was performed and a document is soon to be submitted to ODOT to be used as a reference for future planning and communications processes. Following are project result highlights:

Quantitative Results

| Strategy Used | Count | Comment |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Website | 1,657,000 | Between February 1- July 30, 2005- all pages |
| Businesses Contacted | 25,155 | Letters sent. More targeted follow-up made to est. 1,000 via phone & email |
| Presentations Given/Knocked on Business Doors | 169 | At business/group sites and meetings |
| Materials Sent | 876 | 1-on-1 contact occurred where catered materials sent |
| Press Releases | 12 | Collaboratively constructed by LCOG and ODOT |
| Construction Updates | 19 | Distributed by ODOT |
| Email Updates | 14 | Both weekly and 'emergency' messages |
| Flyers Distributed/Requested | 1,229 | By individuals and businesses |
| New Bus Pass Businesses | 6 | Several additional businesses are still working through the logistics of participating |

What Worked

There were several elements of the communications planning and implementations that made key differences in the success of the project.

Design Team

The Congestion Mitigation Program design team represented people with complimentary specializations, and networks. This enabled a relatively small group of people to cover a variety of stakeholder group interests and use respective strengths and resources to solidify the outreach effort.

The Website

KeepUsMoving.info was developed as a cost effective and flexible tool to for sharing information between the planning staff, media, and the general public. With well over one million hits on the site, it became an effective nexus for information exchange. The versatility of the site and easily

navigated design, assisted planners in providing consistent information, multiple media sources for information and respective communications needs.

Hotline

Using the existing, Eugene hosted, Regional Metro Road Report hotline helped leverage efforts by having an established structure to work with.

Weekly Emails

Weekly emails were sent to stakeholders and the general public. When changes occurred, this was an inexpensive and time efficient way to inform interested parties. A list of nearly 900 addresses was collected by the end of the project closures.

Community Presentations

The most positive feedback was received from volunteers and staff visiting community meetings, groups, businesses, etc. Any individual could request a presentation or have catered materials sent via mail. This effort was time consuming, but the one-on-one contact produced higher quality leveraging and overall positive tone to the project.

Unified Theme

Developing a unified project theme that suited all stakeholders was a crucial piece of the outreach effort. The phrase “Repairs have to happen, sitting in traffic doesn’t” and “KeepUsMoving.info” served the interest of both private and public partners and covered a variety of travel objectives including detours and traffic avoidance, construction awareness and safety, using alternative modes, and tying a regional perspective to transportation projects.

Graphic Illustrations of Closures

The graphic illustrations that simplified the complex nature of the closures were used by media, local jurisdictions, the public, etc. They included a unified ‘look’, narrative, and were easily changed to represent updated information.

Public Official Support

Large projects are rarely successful without support from public officials. The region’s public officials supported the communications effort and catalyzed smooth communication among local partners.

Traffic Modeling

The LCOG regional transportation model was of great benefit to the communications effort. By identifying the peak AM and PM commute impacts that would most likely result from the five closures on the I-105 corridor, the design team was able to focus their efforts on certain areas. The model predictions in February were tested during the closure period with traffic counts and qualitative feedback from local traffic engineers. The model proved to be incredibly accurate in predicting the traffic impact of the closures. This served a valuable indirect benefit of the project by giving the regional modelers ‘real-world’ results.

What Could Have Worked Better

Distribution Lists

As the distribution list grew, so did the difficulties managing it. Staff from several agencies were conducting outreach and collecting new contacts with specific needs and requests. Staff did not develop a template and tracking system until these issues became relevant. It was difficult to install this process at a mid-point in the project. Further, the database was developed in Excel in order to allow simple transferability between agency systems. In retrospect, it became a time-consuming maintenance issue. Ideally, a database specific to public outreach could have aided efficiency.

There were some unanticipated turns for the outreach team throughout the course of the project. Several of the issues that arose, needed special attention that was often outside the scope of original work.

Eugene Bicycle Coalition

In late March, the Eugene Bike Coalition contacted LCOG with concerns about the design of the project as it affected the Northbank path- a multi-modal path between the Willamette River and I-105. The primary concern was the proximity of the new alignment if the I-105 to the path. Noise, aesthetics, and safety were all raised. This interest group was diligent and well organized. Several meetings took place to discuss the project details and ways to mitigate impact on the project. The largest barrier to this project was not being able to find documentation of prior public outreach to this group during the planning phase. Not having ODOT's record of outreach from years previous initially damaged the communications team's ability to gain trust in the project process. Fortunately, the acting Project Manager on the project took the time to attend three meetings and offer the minor adjustment of adding a fence to the project with the potential to do additional work after project completion if the highway shoulder treatments were inadequate. A post-check with the EBC yielded positive feedback on the finished product.

Schedule Changes

Because the contractor had almost full autonomy over the schedule of the project, schedule change became a daily coordination challenge. Schedule change triggered the implementation machine to begin a series of steps to ensure public awareness. One change, in particular, did not work well. For a week prior, there were rumors that the Closure 3 and Closure 5 would be consolidated compounding the effect of two closures, coincidentally, over University of Oregon's graduation weekend. A final decision was made 78 hours before the closures took place. An immediate release email was posted to all stakeholders, a press release, and the website promptly updated. However, the timeframe was too short for ample public awareness. Further, the graduation weekend brought thousands of out-of-town guests to the region—almost all who were unaware of the project and alternative routes to avoid congestion. The result was gridlock for much of Friday June 20. It is estimated that 50% of complaints about the project's impact occurred over that weekend. Communications staff was not available to assist ODOT and local jurisdictions. The University was also unable to develop a plan in the short timeframe to offer frustrated drivers. This was an example of where contractor schedule was not coordinated with the local community.

Emergency Service Providers

Before a communications contract was negotiated, ODOT had an agreement, under mandate, to provide Regional Emergency Services with a project access plan to the construction zone for each stage and closure. Only weeks before closures took place, this had not been delivered. A communications meeting had been arranged for the regional emergency service representatives. At the meeting, there were several technical questions about access points and document delivery. This was outside the scope of the communications staff capability. The result was a frustrated contingent of service providers with a separate set of expectations. This was the example of the communications staff misestimating the audience's needs.

Fortunately, EMS eventually received the documentation that they needed, but it was far later than the target date. This was cause for projected frustration onto the communications team- a situation that should have been avoided.

Harlow Neighbors

Five years previous to the I-105 Improvement Project, preparations were made to mitigate project impact. One such related project was building a sound wall to protect the Harlow neighborhood from highway noise. This was a contentious public outreach process. The preservation phase communications staff was unable to locate public outreach documentation from ODOT on the former process where identification of key neighborhood contacts and issue areas would have helped communications staff reach that community with historic sensitivity.

There were complaints of noise during the project. However, according to project managers, far fewer questions and complaints were received than expected.

Turnover

Staff turnover was an issue during the course of the project. The most crucial link for the communications team to ODOT was the relationship with the Project Manager. Between November 2004 and June 2005, there were four Project Managers for the I-105 Improvement Project. While positive working relationships developed with the CMP outreach team, the changes had an effect on the project as different management styles and familiarity with the outreach project varied between ODOT staff.

In June, there was another unexpected loss. Don McLane, the Assistant Project Manager for ODOT passed away suddenly. He was a crucial team member and his presence, attitude, and knowledge was greatly missed.

Prior Public Outreach Documentation

Communications partners should have acquired documentation of all the public outreach that was done in previous stages/years of the project. This should include all years of outreach dates, topics, issues and responses. Though several agencies and scores of staff may have been involved in the project, the communications team should have a clear and complete record to refer to when asked.

Information Consistency

There were three main contacts for the media and public during the outreach effort; the ODOT Project Manager and Public Information Officer, an Assistant Planner at LCOG, and Commuter

Solutions. Consistent messages were coordinated between the three agencies. At times, however, media and the public would call local jurisdictions and organizations not directly affiliated with the communications process for the project-- this led to occasional misinformation being shared with the public.

Regional Road Report was a great resource and example of local partnership. Due to the speed of information change or availability of the person responsible for updating the line, there were incidents of dated information for several hours. This weakness improved as the project communications began synchronized better during later stages.

The 1660AM radio station was installed by ODOT after closures began. The communications liaison was not responsible for its updates and the coordinator was operating from a different city. There were several occasions where this information was well dated. This caused confusion for many people particularly when the 1660AM station was posted at the construction site instead of the local, contracted numbers.

Morning Call-ins

After the first couple of closures, LTD morning call-ins were less effective as the Media became more self informed of upcoming changes in traffic flow and closure information. This was a dedicated effort and coordination between the bus operators, the Commuter Solutions staff and the media, but considering the level of effort, the media, unfortunately, was less interested in the 'alternative mode' information during the morning commute.

Community Survey Results

To further measure the performance of the outreach before and during the closure periods, Commuter Solutions commissioned Lockwood Research to conduct a telephone survey.

The objectives were to:

- Measure awareness of Commuter Solutions after the outreach efforts related to the I-105 Improvement Project.
- Identify which outreach effort(s) were most effective.
- Measure how travel behaviors were affected along the I-105 corridor.
- Determine preference levels of various commuter options.

The method was to interview a random sample of 400 Eugene-Springfield households by telephone. Each interview completed a 7 – 10 minute survey July 30 – August 3, 2005. The telephone interviewing was completed at the Lockwood 10-station call center and a field supervisor monitored all calls.

Awareness

The outreach efforts were successful, 95% of the total sample was aware of the I-105 Improvement Project, though over one-half of respondents felt they were not affected by the construction or road closures.

- Most respondents recall becoming aware of the road construction project from a press release/media/news story (42%), followed by the TV (37%).

- Those respondents affected by the road construction were statistically more likely to mention road/highway signs/ODOT signs (32%), and the orange barrels, cones on the roadway (19%).
- Nine out of ten respondents (89%) typically travel by personal vehicle to get around Eugene and Springfield during an average week. Five percent (5%) of the sample does not have a vehicle in their household, and four percent (4%) do not have a licensed driver.
- One-fourth of those aware of the I-105 road construction project recall hearing the message 'Find a New Way' (25%), and 15% received a detour map.
- Those respondents who are aware of the I-105 construction project were asked if there was anything that could have been done differently to improve the way they received information, or the information that was received and one out of five (20%) said 'yes'. The most frequent suggestion was posting closures farther ahead/a few exits ahead (8 mentions), and sending information by mail (7 mentions).
- Those aware of the I-105 road construction project were asked how they prefer to get information about road construction projects. Those affected by the road construction project are statistically more likely to mention *road/highway signs/ODOT signs* (19%), *flyer/brochure* (11%), and/or *orange barrels, cones on the roadway* (5%).
- About one out of six total respondents (16%) have heard of Commuter Solutions.
- Those affected by the road construction are statistically more likely to say they have heard of Commuter Solutions (21%).
- Most of those who have heard of Commuter Solutions are only familiar with the name (40%), while 13% connect Commuter Solutions with alternate transportation sources, and 8% mentioned carpooling.
- One third (33%) of those familiar with Commuter Solutions recall seeing or hearing community outreach messages and informational pieces about the I-105 construction project that Commuter Solutions put out.
- Four out of ten (42%) respondents said the I-105 road construction project affected their daily travel. Among the total sample, 58% *changed their travel route* and 26% *changed the time of day* they traveled, and/or *didn't travel as often* (26%).

Source of Awareness

- Respondents recall becoming aware of the road construction project through a variety of sources. The two most frequently mentioned sources are from a press release/media/news story (42%), followed by the TV (37%).
- Those respondents affected by the road construction are statistically more likely to mention road/highway signs/ODOT signs (32%), and the orange barrels, cones on the roadway (19%).
- Those who typically use a personal vehicle to get around town are statistically more likely to mention a press release/media/news story (44%).
- Respondents also mentioned:
 - Web site
 - Community events
 - Word-of-mouth
 - Friend/Family/Neighbor
 - Advertising
 - Orange barrels, cones

- Radio
- Road/Hwy signs/ODOT signs
- TV
- Press release/media/news story
- One-fourth of those aware of the I-105 road construction project recall hearing the message *find a new way* (25%); which may be why 15% of those who are aware of the project received, or recall seeing detour map(s).
- Those who were affected by the road construction project are statistically more likely to say they received a detour map(s)

Helpfulness

For each source of information mentioned, respondents were asked to rate its helpfulness using a 5-point rating scale where 1 = not at all helpful and 5 = very helpful. Mean scores were calculated and the sources of information are ranked in order of their perceived helpfulness in the graph below. The Commuter Solutions average score is calculated from the one person who mentioned Commuter Solutions as a source of information *unaided*, and the twenty-one respondents who recall receiving information from Commuter Solutions when aided.

Travel Behavior Results

- Nine out of ten respondents (89%) typically travel by personal vehicle to get around Eugene and Springfield during an average week. Five percent (5%) of the sample does not have a vehicle in their household, and four percent (4%) do not have a licensed driver.
- There is a significant percent of the sample that uses more than one mode of transportation to get around Eugene and Springfield during an average week. For instance, those who mention they typically use the LTD bus to get around Eugene and Springfield are statistically more likely to say they also bike (26%), walk (26%) and/or carpool with adults outside of their household (6%). Among those who mention the personal vehicle is their most typical means of transportation, 7% also ride a bike to get around, 5% walk, and 4% ride the LTD bus. Males are statistically more likely to use a bicycle (15%), as are those respondents 25 – 34 years old (26%).

A final document will be published by the end of the month, including more evaluation results and recommendations.