Eugene and Lane County Oregon
2022 highway expansion plans
Beltline - Route 126 widenings
Beltline and 126 widenings
lessons from stopping the West Eugene Porkway

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
ODOT 2014 study: Beltline cross sections across the river

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.
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.
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.

Delta - Beltline project cost $20 million full Beltline widening across river could cost over a third of a billion
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.
Beltline widening would not have the same legal obstacles that stopped the proposed West Eugene Porkway (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 has prepared a Categorical Exclusion for Beltline instead of a 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

www.oregon.gov/odot/Projects/Project%20Documents/21231_OR126_fern_ridge_corridor_plan_2013.pdf
In 2001, I asked then State Representative Floyd Prozanski what he thought of the West Eugene Porkway. 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.
Figure 7a: The Eight Alternatives

**No Build**

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.

**Lowest 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.

**Low 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.

**Medium 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.

Figure 7b: The Eight Alternatives

**ODOT plan**

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.

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

**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 Carnell Road alignments. No additional roadway improvements would be constructed (OR 126W would maintain the existing cross-section).

**Northern Route Alternative** would modify Tenth Street, 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. The roadway would continue north of Fern Ridge, ODOT probably will want that too.
Figure 2: TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT (TSM) CONCEPTUAL ALTERNATIVE

Existing Typical OR 126W Cross-Section

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

Cross-Section Elements
- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- Existing Bridge
- Existing Guardrail
- Existing Transit Stop

Legend
- OR 126W Study Area
- City Limit
- Railroad
- Park
- ND Scale

DKS Associates
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.
1. HUSTON ROAD: Two lane roundabout or traffic signals.
2. ELLMAKE 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.
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**

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

**Legend**
- Existing Left-Turn Lanes
- Existing Guardrail
- Existing Bridge

**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.*
West 11th / 126 west of Green Hill
about one mile east of the WEP’s western terminus
Some West Eugene Porkway 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.
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.