2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLAN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A key element of the planning effort for the City of Woodland has been to ensure that there was robust community involvement in the identification of transportation needs, the development and evaluation of improvement alternatives, and the identification and prioritization of recommended projects. This chapter highlights the public involvement process and its role in the development of the Woodland Transportation Infrastructure Plan (TISP).

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PLAN

The development of improvements in the Woodland study area will impact the community at-large, and a host of individual stakeholders including (but certainly not limited to) public and private utilities, freight interests, emergency services providers, and local businesses and residents. Each of these groups uses the City’s transportation system in different ways. Each has diverse concerns and will face unique challenges as recommended improvements are implemented.

Recognizing that there would be a wide range of needs and opinions that must be addressed during the planning process, one of the early tasks was to develop a Public Involvement Plan (see Appendix G). The intent of this plan was to lay out a well-organized and integrated process of public information and involvement focused on:

- Educating the public and stakeholders in the earliest stages of the project to help them provide informed advice to the project team.
- Informing these interests continually throughout the various stages of the process to minimize “surprises” along the way.
- Involving the public and stakeholders early and often to create a solid foundation on which the more technical aspects of the project can be built. Working with affected groups early in the process to determine desired outcomes helped to create a vision and a set of guiding principles that informed decision-making throughout the study.

For the Woodland TISP, efforts were made to concentrate public involvement in areas where key policy, function, and conceptual design decisions were required. Early and frequent public involvement provided the project team with the opportunity to better understand issues, trade-offs, and opportunities within the study area.

Key elements of the public involvement plan are documented in Appendix G and included the following activities:

- Early stakeholder interviews and local outreach/meetings were held for the purpose of providing a basic understanding of the community’s key issues, concerns, and opinions regarding transportation issues in the study area.
- A project Vision and list of Desired Outcomes for the planning process was developed and vetted during early public outreach activities. This vision and outcomes were later used to develop criteria for the evaluation of a range of improvement options.
- A Citizens Advisory Committee was established and met five times through the planning process to provide coordinated public input at a level of detail greater than
the public events. CAC members included representatives from local manufacturing industry, a trucking company, the Woodland Chamber of Commerce, residents and farming interests, the building industry, and the Diking District.

- A variety of public events were conducted including:
  - Three public open houses. The first open house focused on introducing the project and soliciting input from the public on issues, concerns and ideas related to potential improvements. The second open house included presentation and discussion of preliminary improvement alternatives. The third open house presented preliminary improvement recommendations.
  - Three jurisdictional briefings involving local elected representatives. These meetings included a brief presentation covering material similar to each of the public open houses and were held immediately prior to the open houses.
  - Presentations at local community meetings such as the Woodland Chamber of Commerce, the Port of Woodland Board of Commissioners, the Rotary Club, the Woodland School Board, the Cowlitz County Board of Commissioners, and one-on-one briefings for state legislators.

- Effective Communications were maintained throughout the project to ensure that all relevant issues were raised and addressed, and that information disseminated in the community was accurate and timely. Numerous public outreach activities were undertaken including: four project-specific newsletters, discussion of project status in the monthly CWCOG newsletter for the duration of the planning project, press releases and public advertisements prior to the public open houses, interviews with local media that formed the basis for news stories about the project, and posting of project materials on the CWCOG website.

- City Council Briefing at the conclusion of the study and prior to adoption of the Woodland TISP’s recommendations.

- Development of a Public Involvement Plan for on-going activities to carry through plan implementation stages.

2.3 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The Woodland TISP began with a series of stakeholder interviews designed to provide a basic understanding of the community’s key issues, concerns, and opinions regarding the study area. Sixteen stakeholder interviews were conducted by Parametrix and Normandieu Associates during the month of June 2007. Interviewees included those who live, own businesses, or work in Woodland, as well as governmental staff and elected officials. The interviews focused on identifying existing transportation system issues that could affect the development of the Woodland TISP, including potential impacts on businesses and residences, project funding options, and locations for potential transportation improvements. The information gained from the stakeholder interviews helped to frame the issues for discussion in the kick-off public meetings held on August 16, 2007. This information was also used to develop and refine project improvement alternatives, as well as the guiding principles and criteria that facilitated an evaluation of these alternatives.

2.3.1 Key Findings and Conclusions

The stakeholder interviews produced a wealth of information about the corridor (see Appendix G for more detailed information about interview questions and responses). Some of the key stakeholder comments included:
• Congestion at freeway ramps, along SR 503, at railroad crossings and in downtown has become a problem for businesses and reduces the quality of life for residents.

• Limited opportunities to cross I-5 worsen the congestion problems on SR 503 and at the interchanges. Some thought a new over/under pass, perhaps at Scott Avenue, was needed to divert traffic from the freeway ramps, and to reduce congestion and enhance the flow of traffic along an east-west travel corridor.

• Safety issues mentioned by interviewees included roads with sharp turns, especially on SR 503; congestion delays to emergency response times at the current and future police/fire stations; flooding near the Dike Road interchange; poor signage leading to driver confusion about one-way or two-way streets; and congested evacuation routes.

• The interviewees had a significant knowledge of local transportation issues. Though the interviewees contributed a number of ideas for transportation projects to ease congestion, connectivity and/or safety problems, on the whole, the interviewees expressed an openness to the ideas that would emerge out of the TISP.

• Interviewees had positive and negative comments on roundabouts.

• Congestion was frequently cited as an issue of concern for businesses that depend heavily on moving freight by truck.

• There is concern about the limited availability of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the City of Woodland, particularly in relation to safe travel along or across SR 503.

• Interviewees held a variety of opinions about the potential success of a local measure to fund improvements to Woodland’s transportation system.

2.4 PLAN VISION AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

The project’s vision statement was developed to provide overall direction to on-going planning activities by indicating how project success could be measures. The vision reflects community values with respect to both the transportation system and the general “feel” or quality of life within Woodland.

Project Vision

The City of Woodland’s transportation system effectively and efficiently moves people and goods while reinforcing the City’s small town feel, with improved connections between Woodland’s residential neighborhoods, industrial areas, downtown, farms, parks, I-5 and recreational areas.

Desired Outcomes

Desired outcomes provide more specific measures by which project success in achieving the vision can be determined. Based on stakeholder input, CAC discussion and verbal and written input obtained during the first project open house, desired outcomes were identified as follows:

• Provides a plan to manage traffic congestion now and for the future, while maintaining current conditions or improving traffic on the I-5 off-ramps.

• Serves all forms of street travel including autos, trucks, pedestrians, bicyclists and future transit.

• Maximizes safety for all users.
• Improves local street connections to reduce need to use I-5 Interchanges for local trips.
• Accommodates growth consistent with Woodland’s adopted Comprehensive Plan.
• Can be constructed in phases, is cost-effective and meets state and local requirements.
• Provides for property access without degrading safety and the capacity to move traffic.
• Enhances emergency vehicle response time and provides emergency evacuation routes.
• Improves links to recreational areas for Woodland residents and those from outside community.
• Addresses rail crossing issues.
• Addresses flooding issues.
• Results in a clearly articulated plan that addresses needs, is supported by the community, and can be used by elected leadership to advocate for project priorities and secure funding.
• Establishes a partnership among local, county, state, and federal agencies, as well as the private sector to implement plan recommendations.

2.5 CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was formed to advise the project team on technical and jurisdictional issues. The CAC included representatives from local manufacturing industry, a trucking company, the Woodland Chamber of Commerce, residents and farming interests, the building industry, and the Diking District. Five CAC meetings were held over the duration of the planning study with the specific objectives identified below. Minutes of the CAC meetings are included in Appendix G.

• Kick-off Meeting – to provide information about the project, solicit input on key issues and concerns, and discuss an initial draft of the Vision Statement to identify “desired outcomes”.
• First Regular CAC Meeting – to review and discuss findings of the stakeholder interviews and existing conditions analysis.
• Second Regular CAC Meeting – to review and discuss results from the future conditions analysis.
• Third Regular CAC Meeting – to identify and discuss a wide range of conceptual improvement alternatives with the objective of screening choices down to a narrower range of “reasonable” options.
• Fourth Regular CAC Meeting – to discuss the evaluation of the refined list of “reasonable” improvement options with the objective of identifying and prioritizing recommendations.
2.6 COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Three interactive, public events were held at key steps during the planning process. These were designed to engage the public and obtain both their input and feedback. The three events were widely advertised, and centered around the topics described below.

1. Issues, Outcomes and Vision
2. Preliminary Improvement Options and Evaluation Tools
3. Implementing the Preferred Plan (actions, priorities, responsibilities)

Notes from each public event and copies of presentation material are included in Appendix G. A brief description of each event is provided below.

Kick-off Public Open House: Issues, Vision and Outcomes

This kick-off public open house included a short presentation and an open house-style workshop for the general public, community groups and stakeholders. Prior to the workshop, the information obtained from the stakeholder interviews and STAC/CAC meetings was used to develop a preliminary list of issues and opportunities, a draft vision for the project, and a preliminary list of desired outcomes or guiding principles to direct the project planning process. The objectives of this workshop were to:

- Inform attendees of the purpose and schedule for the project, and opportunities for information and involvement
- Flesh out the list of transportation system issues and opportunities
- Test and refine a project vision
- Test and refine desired outcomes or guiding principles
- Obtain input on preliminary ideas for improvements

Second Public Open House: Preliminary Improvement Options and Evaluation Tools

In preparation for this well-publicized workshop, information was gleaned from the kick-off public meeting, stakeholder interviews, and STAC/CAC meetings to create draft evaluation criteria and initial alternative improvement scenarios and concepts. This was an interactive event that relied on working table groups organized by specific geographic areas. The objective of these working groups was to discuss, test, adjust, and adapt initial alternatives for improvements by examining the trade-offs associated with each. The outcome of the open house was a refined list of the most promising improvement options to be carried forward for detailed analysis.

Third Public Open House: Implementing the Preferred Plan

In this open house the previously-developed short list of alternatives was presented and discussed, focusing on evaluation results including conceptual design, effectiveness, benefits, potential impacts and costs. The results of the open house included a set of specific recommendations for each major project area (e.g., the I-5 interchanges and SR 503) and a general approach for prioritized implementation.

2.7 JURISDICTIONAL AND AGENCY BRIEFINGS

In addition to engaging and involving the general public through the three open house workshops, three jurisdictional briefings involving local elected representatives were held prior to each open house. These meetings included a brief presentation covering material similar to each of the public open houses and provided the opportunity for locally elected or appointed officials to be kept apprised of the study’s progress. These work sessions provided three “up-close and hands-on” opportunities to discuss the project and its issues, and helped
to ensure that the opinions of decision makers and key stakeholder group representatives were identified and incorporated into the study effort.

Additionally, over the course of the project several presentation were made at local community meetings such as the Woodland Chamber of Commerce, the Port of Woodland Board of Commissioners, the Rotary Club, the Woodland School Board, the Cowlitz County Board of Commissioners, and one-on-one briefings for state legislators.

Near the end of the project a formal briefing was held with the Woodland City Council to discuss and clarify Plan recommendations and the proposed phased implementation strategy.

2.8 PUBLIC OUTREACH

A continuous public outreach effort was maintained over the duration of the project to ensure that all relevant issues were raised and addressed, and that information disseminated in the community was accurate and timely. Numerous public outreach activities were undertaken including: four project-specific newsletters, discussion of project status in the monthly CWCOG newsletter for the duration of the planning project, press releases and public advertisements prior to the public open houses, interviews with local media that formed the basis for news stories about the project, and posting of project materials on the CWCOG website. Copies of the four project-specific newsletter are included in Appendix G.

2.9 STRATEGIC TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A Steering/Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) was formed to advise the project team on technical and jurisdictional issues. The STAC was comprised of agency representatives including: CWCOG, City of Woodland, Cowlitz County, Port of Woodland, WSDOT, and the Woodland School District. Five STAC meetings were held over the duration of the planning study with similar objectives to those described above for the Citizen Advisory Committee. Minutes of the STAC meetings are included in Appendix G.

2.10 SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT ABOUT NEEDS AND DEFICIENCIES

The public comments received during the planning process focused primarily on concerns over the existing transportation system and on recommended transportation improvements. Some of the most often cited comments included:

1. *Take care of SR 503,* either widening or adding turn pockets, and improve multi-modal transportation facilities in the corridor. Specific suggestions made during the planning process included, but were not limited to, accommodate turning traffic, improve intersection control particularly at Scott Avenue, provide school bus pullouts, add sidewalks, and improve signage to encourage motorists to use Dike Road interchange in preference to SR 503 interchange.

2. Alleviate congestion near I-5 Exits 21 (SR 503) and 22 (Dike Road) by providing an alternate east/west crossing. Specific comments included a broad discussion of the need for a crossing for improved emergency access and safety, improved access to the grocery store and ability to attract more shoppers to downtown businesses by reducing congestion along SR 503, concerns related to impacts on adjacent properties, need to also provide a grade-separation of the BNSF tracks to make the freeway crossing fully effective, design challenges related to potential flooding, need to maintain local street connections to Scott Avenue regardless of the crossing options ultimately selected, and need to improve the intersections of Scott Avenue with Old Pacific Highway and Scott Avenue with SR 503.
3. Address delays caused by railroad crossings. Options included constructing under or overpasses at crossings including Whalen, Davidson and Scott Avenue.

4. Improve I-5/Dike Road interchange. Suggestions included, but were not limited to: widen the exits and adding more lanes as the current Dike Road cross-section is too narrow to accommodate left-turn lanes at the freeway on-ramps, consider a variety of interchange designs, address the huge railroad bottleneck issue especially the need for a third rail track and heavy usage of the mainline facility, address the flooding issue, and improve signage to encourage use of this interchange in lieu of the interchange at SR 503.

5. Many other local circulation improvements were identified through the public involvement process including, but not limited to:

- The extension of several local roadways including Downriver Drive, Schurman Way, Robinson Road, Heritage Street, Pinkerton Road, and others.
- Improvements to the intersection of N Pekin Road at Goerig Street which lies in very close proximity to the at-grade crossing of the BNSF tracks on Davidson Avenue.
- Improve the intersection of N Pekin Road with Caples Road where there is an existing speeding problem.
- Construct a new road between Davison and Beechwood in city right-of-way on the east side of the railroad tracks to enhance local circulation in the area between I-5 and the railroad.
Possible corridor east of the BNSF right of way linking numerous east west streets