



## MEETING SUMMARY

**MEETING:** High Capacity Transit System Plan Think Tank  
**DATE:** Nov. 17, 2008  
**TIME:** 3 to 6 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Metro, 600 NE Grand Ave., Metro Council chambers

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Wink Brooks	Wink Brooks Strategies LLC
Tom Dechenne	Norris, Beggs & Simpson
Joe Dills	OTAK
Karen Frost	Westside Transportation Alliance
Mara Gross	Coalition for a Livable Future
Jim Howell	AORTA
Chips Janger	Clackamas County Urban Green
Jon Kellogg	Commercial Realty Advisors NW
Ernie Munch	
Wilda Parks	North Clackamas Chamber of Commerce
Michelle Poyorouw	Bicycle Transportation Alliance
Skip Rotticci	Costa Pacific Homes
Phil Selinger	Willamette Pedestrian Coalition
Chris Smith	
Robert Stacey	
Ric Stephens	Urban Land Institute
Lori Waldo	
Dennis Wilde	Gerding Edelen

### **MEMBERS ABSENT**

Charlotte Boxer	Pacific Continental Bank
Keith Lawton	Keith Lawton Consulting
Ethan Seltzer	Portland State University
Rick Williams	Lloyd Transportation Management Association

### **GUESTS**

Ron Bunch	City of Tigard
Carol Chesarek	Forest Park Neighborhood
David Calver	HNTB
Jessica Trump	TriMet

## **PROJECT STAFF**

Metro Councilor Carlotta Collette, Councilor Robert Liberty, Ross Roberts, Tony Mendoza, Karen Withrow, Crista Gardner

Project consultants Alan Jones, Steer Davies Gleave, Jeanne Lawson and Kalin Schmoltdt, JLA Public Involvement

### **I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

On Nov. 17, 2008 the second HCT Think Tank meeting was held for the Regional High Capacity Transit (HCT) System Plan project.

Metro Councilor Carlotta Collette welcomed the group and noted the vibrant conversation at the last meeting. She noted HCT thinking should consider local and global perspective. The Think Tank will address what the role of HCT should be within the community.

Ms. Jeanne Lawson, JLA Public Involvement, reviewed the agenda and reiterated the purpose of the Think Tank: to brainstorm and push Metro to expand their thinking. The meeting is intended to provide information on current policies and ask how they might need to change. Mr. Alan Jones will present HCT systems from around the globe and Mr. Ross Roberts will present on existing transportation policies in the region.

### **II. HCT AROUND THE WORLD: HOW TRANSIT CAN WORK**

Mr. Alan Jones, Steer Davies Gleave, gave a presentation illustrating high capacity transit operations and innovations from around the world with the goal of presenting ideas for what Portland could pursue as part of its own system. He addressed questions of how to reduce barriers to transit through way-finding techniques, simplified networks, incorporating connections to other modes, making transit centers into points of interest and improving safety.

HCT service can serve as an iconic presence that is defined by the vehicle as well as the method of operation. Whether light rail or bus rapid transit, an HCT system usually requires a form of system priority with a segregated right of way.

Choices about what sort of place is to be created will help shape decisions about using tunnels or taking lanes. Mr. Alan Jones noted several examples of European transportation priorities that included less parking, dedicated transit right-of-way, and facilities for bikes and pedestrians at the expense of automobile lanes. A shift in priorities can lead to the acceptance of HCT as part of the living space and “psyche of the city.” Growth and positive changes to businesses along the HCT route are often indicative of whether a system is successful.

### **III. DISCUSSION QUESTION ON TRANSIT’S ROLE IN PLACEMAKING**

Ms. Lawson invited the Think Tank to respond to the presentation and answer the question: How can transit support, or how might it hinder, the creation of great places where people want to be?

Mr. Chris Smith noted that the local model for locating rail transit is to choose the path of least resistance. He asked how reducing auto capacity could be justified. Mr. Jones responded that the

justification is difficult, but can be done if it can be demonstrated that transit permits a more effective use of the corridor. There are fewer European examples of using transit to create uses within a corridor, as the systems are typically built to serve existing density.

Councilor Robert Liberty asked where Mr. Jones would emphasize investment in the metro area. Mr. Jones said that he would spend money to make sure that suburban sections are segregated with no shared tracks. He also noted the constraints imposed by the river crossing.

Councilor Liberty asked whether improving existing ride quality is as effective as adding new transit lines. Mr. Jones said that some findings indicate a consistent preference for light rail vehicles over bus, and that there is research to put a monetary value on rail. He noted that quality of life assessments are hard to quantify.

Mr. Jim Howell asked about the use of grass track, which was met with objections in the Portland area. Mr. Jones said that the use typically involves mowers to get the effect of grass with lower maintenance. The viability of the grass-track is often a function of location and local climate.

Ms. Lori Waldo asked about public private partnerships. Mr. Jones said that HCT is about integrated designs and integrating funding from multiple sources. He suggested that the success of public private partnerships is a function of allocating risk and responsibility to the right groups (public or private). Such partnerships can be complex and require extensive legal work.

Mr. Robert Stacey asked about the use of different modes within the same HCT system. Mr. Jones said that the existing bus network is typically restructured to work with the HCT system by removing competing lines, providing feeder lines, creating easy transfer points and minimizing the number of transfers. He suggested that bus should remain an equal part of the network and requires creative thinking.

Mr. Chips Janger noted the challenge of balancing diverse constituencies throughout the metro area. He noted the possibility of using bus to expand HCT service and cited the high capacity, high frequency bus rapid transit service in Curitiba, Brazil as an example. Mr. Alan Jones said that bus use is partially cultural and dependent on what people are prepared to use. High capacity bus rapid transit is possible, though light rail can carry more people comfortably. He advised against moving forward from any specific mode as starting point and instead defining the level of demand first. He encouraged thinking about individual component decisions as part of a larger network.

Mr. Phil Selinger noted the use of freeway corridors because of the lower cost and reduced impacts. He asked how to balance these incentives with the desire to provide transit service to the heart of the community. Mr. Jones said that speed itself can entice some people to make trips, and he suggested looking at a menu of ideas that were produced for the MAX Green Line to make the corridor more accessible through facilitating access and traveler comfort.

Ms. Karen Frost encouraged that data be shared with the community that shows how rededicating auto lanes for transit can be beneficial. Mr. Jones noted that some American

transportation priorities begin with maintaining existing highway capacity, which can mean adding lanes to make up lanes lost to transit. This is often not an option in Europe.

Mr. Ric Stephens suggested that potential litigation as well as design and safety standards might be standing in the way of a more European-style transit system. Mr. Jones said Europe has come to focus on a “streets for people” emphasis over the past 10 years. He said that the debate about standards has been ongoing and that it may be appropriate to start such a debate in the United States. Such a debate might help reconcile confusion about what defines a specific mode as a specific type of transit subject to certain standards.

Mr. Skip Rotticci commented that green guideways would be preferable to spending more on concrete. He said that Sacramento, Calif.’s development of freight tracks for light rail had forgotten about transit-oriented development and they are now trying to force it. The situation raises questions about how to bring transit to places where development has already occurred in order to make the system “cozier” and continue feeding communities through higher capacity transit. He also noted that some people are more likely to use light rail than bus.

Mr. Tom Dechenne asked about freight movement and compatibility with HCT. Mr. Jones said that the typical integrated design approach follows freight routing standards to facilitate truck access.

Mr. Ernie Munch asked about the level of investment and the impetus for the systems in the presentation. Mr. Jones said he did not have the investment figures on hand. He noted that in Grenoble, France, a successful referendum led to the light rail system. The city government also championed the project as part of a transit legacy. He noted an example in the United Kingdom where existing railway lines were able to be converted.

Mr. Dennis Wilde asked whether the greater success of transit-oriented development for streetcar versus light rail was a function of accessibility. Mr. Jones suggested that the vehicle shouldn’t make a significant difference if used in the same street environment, though alignment choice will make a difference.

Mr. Smith noted that light rail always appears to trump bus rapid transit in terms of value because it has fewer transfers. He asked whether there is ever a benefit from multiple modes within the same system. Mr. Jones noted that a light rail system tends to lead to more rail, though other modes can be added, as in Istanbul.

#### **IV. STATE OF THE REGION: 2040 GROWTH CONCEPT AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Mr. Roberts presented information about the current state of the region in the context of the 2040 Growth Concept and the corresponding decision to focus development within town centers and corridors. The region continues to grow and change. Household sizes are decreasing, energy prices are increasing as are anticipated costs for infrastructure maintenance and development. Metro area residents cite land use regulation and environmental protection as beneficial and appear to understand their connection with the economy.

Congestion continues to grow and denser development close to transit is becoming more appealing. Transit ridership has increased dramatically and remained high despite the recent drop in fuel prices. Spending on utilities and infrastructure has declined.

Transportation is the second largest source of greenhouse gases in the region, even though Portland has some of the highest bicycling and walking rates in the nation. Because of the physical benefits, transportation choice can be a form of preventative medicine.

Of all the RTP scenarios, the HCT scenario showed the smallest increase in greenhouse gases and the greatest increase in transit use. The HCT scenario was also the most expensive to operate and maintain.

Mr. Roberts raised the following policy questions for the group to consider: How should HCT balance the need to serve corridors and access versus centers with speed? How should service to existing populations be balanced with the needs of the future growth? How can existing system improvements be balanced with future system improvements? How should the system account for local aspirations and interests?

## **V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

Ms. Lawson invited the Think Tank to respond to the presentation and respond to Mr. Robert's questions.

Mr. Stacey noted that none of the RTP scenarios effectively reduced greenhouse gases or reduced or stabilized Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). The scenario does not seem to help achieve the statewide goal of returning to 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Serving development along the edge of the urban growth boundary would seem to support a transportation network that speeds people across the region but fails to facilitate development opportunities in the center. Transit should be designed to make the center functional and not just facilitate long distance travel. He noted that expediting travel through downtown, through tunnels or otherwise, would benefit suburban travelers, though the current system meets downtown access goals.

Mr. Rotticci noted how Japanese transit models are more vertical than European systems, incorporating below-ground and above-grade alignments. He noted that way-finding is very easy in Tokyo despite the language barrier.

Ms. Frost observed that about 30 percent of people in Washington County and about 66 percent of Clackamas County residents travel outside of their counties to work. She said that long distance travel will be driven by employment in the regional centers.

Mr. Smith suggested that transportation policy is land-use policy in disguise and that it is a waste of money to use transportation funding to solve land use problems. If the centers and corridors are correct, then there will be a shift to more local trips, which is the way to effectively reduce greenhouse gasses. Correspondingly, it will be important to encourage walking and biking. He questioned whether the HCT system would be able to contribute to reducing the need for cross-region trips and by helping job creation in local corridors and centers.

Ms. Michelle Poyorouw noted that disasters in places like New Orleans and New York made it clear that redundancies in the transit network were important to the function of the system. She said that redundancy in the form of overlaying regional grids will be necessary to allow the region to successfully weather a disaster.

Mr. Howell said that a grid forms the foundation of any good transportation system. He said that high ridership in Portland is due to good frequencies on the grid lines and that HCT lines should be added to serve the grid. A grid also establishes network redundancy. He added that there is a need to traverse the region quickly, which does not exist because of the downtown bottleneck, and that light rail needs to actually function as HCT. A successful system will likely be composed of busses overlaid with HCT.

Councilor Liberty posed several system wide questions: What specific transit investments should be used to create the place and what the place should look like? Who will benefit from the investments and will the investments be distributed equitably? What are relative benefits of investment in quality over quantity? Will investments in safety lead to a greater increase in ridership than a corresponding line extension? Should shorter, low speed trips or longer, high speed trips be emphasized? Can we afford both? Would we make different decisions if we anticipated less funding over the next 20 years compared with the last 20 years?

Mr. Joe Dills suggested that the focus should be on centers and corridors and that focusing on low speed trips with an overlying network is part of the answer. Many centers and corridors are currently off the main lines and have latent potential for connections. A key strategy would involve investing in connecting these areas. He added that multi-tiered systems work well in Japan because of the super high density of the cities and such systems may not be the best in the United States because of the lower densities. He also advised caution with regard to elevated trains.

Mr. Selinger noted Mr. Jones' description of pedestrian investments and said that considering such elements is necessary to establish complete connections to the HCT system. The system will not work if part of the connection to the system is out of place.

Mr. Janger noted previous discussion about minimizing growth in the region and said that he anticipated greater than expected growth that should not be overlooked when coordinating transit with new development.

Mr. Munch agreed with Mr. Stacey's comments and noted that, thus far, there has not been a clear vision for how Portland can meet statewide sustainability goals. It will be necessary to define what needs to be done before it is possible to describe the purpose of HCT. For example, is the 1990 greenhouse gas levels target mandatory or merely important? It will be difficult to explain the motivations for investments until these values are defined. He added that another way to look at *redundancy* is *diversity*, so the system speaks to the needs of different parts of the population.

Ms. Mara Gross suggested the need to review all available tools and keeping the urban growth boundary small will likely not be enough in and of itself. She agreed with Ms. Karen Frost's

suggestion regarding making jobs available close to where people live and she noted the need for discussion of how to develop diverse housing options in keeping with the 2040 goals.

Mr. Dechenne noted the lack of a grid and system redundancy to address bottlenecks along the edge of the metro area. He said the complete system needs to be emphasized as part of a long-term plan that addresses how to get from place to place as growth continues.

Ms. Waldo said that the grid system needs to be thought of as more than just east-west and north-south. The system should connect the locations where people go. She noted that if the goal is to reduce emissions, then priorities will need to be firmly established. A deliberate decision to invest in the future is the only way to avoid constantly fixing the problems of today.

Mr. Rotticci noted that 2008 has witnessed a paradigm shift in that transit ridership has not yet dropped along with gas prices. More people will likely be working independently, family sizes will start shrinking, more people will be living in cities, and new residents will be more accustomed to living in higher density environments. With these considerations, now is the time to think more boldly about possible HCT funding options.

Mr. Howell noted that people will have to conform to the existing grid system which must be high frequency to facilitate transfers and work effectively. Transfer facilities tend to be ignored despite being natural nodes for development. He added that a better intercity bus service is also needed considering the lack of rail service.

Councilor Collette raised several questions: Should we promote transit-oriented development or let development follow transit? Should there be investments in improving the existing system or building more lines? Is bus rapid transit a viable interim option with the goal of changing to light rail? Should we be buying right of way now? Are there least-cost options that have not been considered? Are there ways to plan communities and the transit system differently?

Mr. Jon Kellog encouraged capitalizing on existing, successful places where people want to live by driving transit to those areas. For example, the use of the I-205 MAX alignment appeared to take the path of least resistance and consequently does not seem to offer as many growth opportunities as an alignment on 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue.

Ms. Wilda Parks observed that the current process appears to focus on individual pieces instead of an integrated system. She noted that the MAX Green Line will serve to carry people from Clackamas County, but there are not corresponding connections for people traveling the other direction. The line does not provide good transit connections and pedestrian access is poor. She suggested concentrating on areas of need and to listen to concerns about station locations as people will need to be able to get to and from transit stops easily.

Mr. Stacey suggested that it will be difficult to count on sustained levels of infrastructure funding. He noted the pay-as-you-go approach as a possible funding solution. Paying to drive and sales tax provide funds elsewhere. He noted that capturing funding within a transit corridor can help create cost-effective and system-sensitive investment because the need is driven by the local market. Such a system avoids relying on the federal government and provides incentives to

avoid paying to drive. It would also encourage development patterns that get people closer to where they want to go.

Mr. Janger encouraged Metro to think beyond dependence on federal subsidies and rely more on local resources.

Ms. Frost suggested thinking about the use of ODOT facilities. While ODOT would like to give up ownership of highways to cities, cities often want ODOT to bring the roads up to standard before transferring ownership, though the specific improvements (such as widening) are often unwanted. She noted that Beaverton currently has a bad atmosphere for walking and suggested taking over state highways as a way to create walking and biking opportunities.

Mr. Wink Brooks said that the best thing would be to keep people closer to their homes and combine transit and land use into an overall regional strategy to reduce trip length. He suggested that a better highway could attract industry and employment to the Damascus area and that such a facility should be augmented to facilitate HCT connections to Clackamas Town Center. Mr. Brooks noted that employment centers may become less centralized in the future and that suburban centers will need to work as well as urban centers.

Mr. Smith said that facilitating traffic or transit through a neighborhood is often perceived as a bad thing, and that stops are often treated as mere way-stations en route. He suggested that existing transit models might be bad for land use. He suggested that priorities should not include buying right of way, but rather taking it back from drivers and not letting a lack of right of way push transit to locations where it is simply affordable.

Mr. Howell said that it may be necessary to buy right of way and coordinate plans now so as to save money in the long run. For example, considerations for subway could have been combined with the big pipe project. To that end, a long-range regional plan is important; though older ideas should also be revisited to make sure they still make sense today.

Mr. Dechenne agreed that finding local funding needs to be a priority. He said that elements that can be funded locally should be kept separate from elements that need federal funding.

Mr. Wilde agreed that it is not necessary to purchase more right of way and that I-205 was probably not the best alignment in hindsight. He noted the need to build life into the system or it will not be used.

Mr. Selinger encouraged holistic thinking and being aware that transit policy and road policy will need to work together even though they can sometimes be diametrically opposed.

Mr. Brooks questioned whether it will be possible to afford all of the desired transit lines and urged attention to cost effectiveness. He discouraged getting hung up on one type of transit or another.

Mr. Rotticci noted that the statewide land use laws don't directly support HCT. He suggested that now is the time to influence the Big Look committee and ask why there can't be a statewide

policy that allows expansion into lands that can be serviced effectively by transit. He noted that the recent urban growth boundary expansion into Damascus does not offer easy ways to urbanize or to introduce HCT.

**VI. NEXT STEPS AND WRAP UP**

Councilor Collette noted key topics from the discussion:

- focusing more on station areas as opposed to specific transit lines
- interest in letting riders feel safe
- creating links with bus service
- making connections with stations
- thinking more about investments in affordable housing and services.

Overall, she summarized that the group is interested in building “life” into the system and developing stations and stops so as to be communities in and of themselves.

Mr. Tony Mendoza provided an update on the study. Elements from the Think Tank discussion such as redundancy, funding and market responsiveness will be incorporated into the evaluation criteria that will help determine how Metro prioritizes HCT improvements in the system plan. The final set of evaluation criteria will be developed in February and analysis will be developed soon after.

**VII. ADJOURN**

Seeing no further business, Councilor Collette adjourned the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

**ATTACHMENTS TO THE PUBLIC RECORD FOR NOV. 17, 2008**

The following have been included as part of the official public meeting record:

TOPIC	ITEM	DOC DATE	DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	DOCUMENT NO.
I.	Meeting Summary	10/14/08	HCT Think Tank Meeting Summary	111708TTank-01
I.	PowerPoint Handout	10/7/08	Issues in Transportation by Jeffery Tumlin	111708TTank-02
II.	PowerPoint	11/17/08	HCT Around the World: How Transit Can Work by Alan Jones	111708TTank-03
IV.	PowerPoint	11/17/08	High Capacity Transit in 2040	111708TTank-04
IV.	Map	11/17/08	Corridor and Project Ranking Against Screening Criteria	111708TTank-05
	Handout	11/17/08	Questions for Consideration	111708TTank-06
	Handout	10/16/08	Public Outreach Summary Summer/Fall 2008	111708TTank-07