OCOG Primitive Roads Work Session - Notes

May 13, 2019

<u>Attending:</u>

Soo Ing-Moody, OCOG Chair and Twisp Mayor

Josh Thomson, Okanogan County Engineer

George Mazur, WSDOT NC Region Senior Transportation Planner

Tim Rieb, Brewster City Council Member

Carlene Anders, OCOG Vice-Chair and Pateros Mayor

SCJ Alliance Staff: Charity Duffy, Hans Shepherd, Thera Black

<u>Notes:</u>

After introductions, SCJ staff provided an overview of the meeting agenda and then offered background on the need for the project, its relation to the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan, and the overall approach.

- Why is a primitive roads strategy needed? Most lane miles in the Okanogan Region are unimproved gravel roads managed by multiple land management agencies with multiple management plans. The 2014 and 2015 wildfires pointed to the need for a coordinated plan in the event of an emergency though there are likely to be other benefits of coordination, too. This is not being done in response to a requirement but instead, as an identified regional priority need.

- Based on early investigations this appears to be the first regionally coordinated primitive roads strategy in Washington state or even the western US. SCJ has reached out to land management agencies. SCJ has heard that state and federal agencies recognize the need and support development of a coordinated plan. Interagency coordination and collaboration are needed. There has been good affirmation to date from agencies contacted about this process

- Terminology varies from agency to agency, as do standards and management protocols. Already the team is reconsidering the use of "primitive roads" to describe the highly rural gravel roadway network since that term has very specific meaning in state statute for counties and does not include all of Okanogan County's gravel roadways. Effort will be made to come up with agreed upon terminologies and standards for this planning purpose that are consistent across agencies and resulting eventually in an agreed primary network that is seamless across boundaries.

- Phase 1 work is a scoping phase to establish a clear picture of "what we know, what we don't know, what we need to know" to develop this strategy. Through this phase the team is collecting and assembling roadway and other data from each of the land management agencies and evaluating it for

consistency and sufficiency for this planning process. What data gaps need to be addressed for this process? The team is also conducting informational interviews with key stakeholders and all land management agencies. This helps to get word out about the study effort and also allows the team to get information, gain a better understanding of overlapping interests, and identify opportunities for shared resources. Key stakeholders will also be tapped to help evaluate the composite data set since they know it the best.

- Phase 2 Implementation work will be shaped by the scope of work developed in Phase 1 and will get underway after July 1 as funding is available. That is why effort is being made to engage key stakeholders in participating in the scoping phase to ensure the approach makes sense to those who will implement it on the ground. The goal is to build champions within the agencies who see value in this work and will participate in implementation and on-going coordination efforts. Stakeholder engagement in Phase 2 will be expanded to other interest groups (i.e. first responders, hunters, etc.).

- Phase 2 work will include some efforts to secure additional funding for this work beyond OCOG's baseline funding.

- While the initial focus is on a highly rural gravel road network that better supports emergency management and response needs, there are likely to be other benefits to this work. A core assumption is that if this strategy is robust enough for emergency management response it will likely support other needs as well.

- Staff underscored the value of questions, insights, and issues generated during this meeting, explaining that input from OCOG members now will help inform the investigation and scoping process for the implementation work.

The rest of the work session was an open discussion among participants.

OCOG Discussion and Observations:

1. What evacuation routes exist if the dams break or are compromised? Chief Jo and Grand Coulee are upstream from Pateros and Brewster. The cities have been told by the Army Corp of Engineers that if Grand Coulee fails these two communities have a maximum of 22 minutes to evacuate all residents to high ground. This will require the coordinated use of rural, primitive roads outside each city, and should be considered during this process.

2. Scope of work should include identification and evaluation of blockages, gates, culverts, etc. that can impede the use of some rural facilities. Lidar data can be a powerful tool for evaluating many conditions in remote locations. In its research SCJ has heard that state and federal agencies are interested in collecting lidar for the rest of the Okanogan Region; this work may create some impetus for that data collection effort. Additionally, a Long-Term Recovery Group may be able to help conduct critical field checking later on. Carlene is a contact for that group.

3. Existing disaster planning efforts funded by FEMA are underway and may provide useful input to the process as well as a conduit later for getting information back out. "Map Your Neighborhood" is a three-year program engaging landowners in identifying critical access routes and developing coordination strategies tailored to individual areas. Work is underway in the Methow and is just getting underway in Pateros and Brewster this year; efforts will get started in Oroville and Conconully later. Work is organized by municipality or, in rural areas, by school district geographies. Carlene is a good point of contact for the Pateros/Brewster effort. Soo is a good contact for the Methow Valley Public Safety Committee, which is leading the Methow effort. The Methow Valley Public Safety Committee can be a valuable resource for other data, too. It consists of fire districts, Sheriff's office, local police departments, air rescue, search and response, others, providing a one-stop resource for information. They meet once a month.

4. The end game strategy is to get agreement among the various land management agencies on what constitutes the primary gravel road / primitive routes of value for emergency response and come up with a coordinated strategy for designating and maintaining these routes regardless of jurisdiction. Other objectives may be identified as scoping and implementation work progresses.

5. Versatile mapping products are needed. Maps should be easily scalable and printable, customized to specific areas. Maps must be easy to understand and easy to share.

6. Be cognizant in the approach that it takes more than a roadway network to support emergency evacuation. Dust and smoke will make it nearly impossible to see more than a few feet ahead. People panic easily and can create gridlock on evacuation routes or run off the road and require rescuing. Pilot cars may be the only feasible solution in some cases. In an ideal world there would be dedicated routes for emergency vehicles, but this probably won't be practical. Recognize that the network is but part of the solution and that innovative technology or methods may be needed to fully support emergency response needs. This effort won't be able to address those other factors, but it should be open to the fact that a coordinated response plan will be part of the solution.

7. Okanogan County Department of Emergency Management has a well-established communication and notification/alert program in place. Maurice (Mo) Goodall, Director, is the best person to talk with in Phase 1 about how to approach broader community-based engagement in Phase 2 in terms of outreach and effective messaging. He will also have useful insights on scoping from the perspective of emergency management and response.

8. Okanogan County's rural network includes public use roadways that should be considered as appropriate. These roads are open to the public and dedicated to public use, but they are not necessarily owned by the County or maintained as such.

9. This process among the various land management agencies may stimulate interest in some kind of coordination of maintenance activities. At a minimum it should result in agreement on standards and maintenance activities for the primary network. It could also identify ways of coordinating across agencies in order to complete work more efficiently. Be open to new ideas.

10. Utility providers maintain their own access roads and corridor easements throughout some of these areas. They have a vital interest in protecting their facilities during a disaster and may be willing to come to the table as partners in this effort. Reach out to them to gage their interest and try to obtain data for roads, pipelines, and corridor easements. Look for possible partnership funding opportunities with utilities, which will be a very different set of opportunities from those of the land management agencies. The Methow Valley Emergency Plan identifies communication facilities that must be protected via designated access roads. There may be something comparable for the land management agencies that won't show up in the traditional "transportation planning" framework.

11. Cold storage in the apple warehouses in Brewster is powered by anhydrous ammonia, a volatile gas. Not only must these facilities be managed in the event of a disaster to avoid explosive fireballs, they must also be avoided in evacuation strategy.

12. A strategy for the long-term maintenance of the composite database should be considered at the outset of this process. Each agency maintains a database with characteristics specific to their mission and requirements and uses the terminology of their organization; those individual databases are maintained on schedules defined by each agency. This primitive roads effort is going to identify select characteristics from all of those datasets with value to this project and combine them into a composite dataset using agreed-upon terms that may be specific to this project. As those individual datasets are updated over time by each agency, corresponding updates to the composite database should be seamless. A data "crosswalk" between the individual agency datasets and the composite dataset can ensure the composite dataset always reflects the most current individual data while reconciling differences in terminology without requiring duplicate efforts by the partners.

13. A Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) call for projects will be released in July. Per conversations with staff in the Federal Lands program, this implementation effort would be a prime candidate for a FLAP grant. Thera will provide an outline of the ask along with other application details to Soo for consideration and approval by the OCOG Board in June, enabling application in a timely manner.

The work session concluded with a presentation of the new Okanogan Council of Governments website, www.OCOG.org . This website will provide a convenient way of storing and sharing information and large data files via cloud-based storage and will be a vehicle for communication and outreach with the general public during Phase 2 implementation efforts. In addition, it provides an on-going portal for OCOG information concerning meetings, plans, and processes. The site is configured to allow public access just to basic OCOG information while the composite database being built requires a password to access. Edits and comments on the basic site are appreciated as it goes through final development.

SCJ Team Contacts:

Charity Duffy – Project Manager | charity.duffy@scjalliance.com | 509.886.3265

Hans Shepherd – GIS and Data Analysis | hans.shepherd@scjalliance.com | 360.352.1465

Thera Black – Stakeholder Engagement | thera.black@scjalliance.com | 360.352.1465