

History
Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan
(Greenhill Road to Huston Road)

Formal work on the Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan (Plan) began in May 2011, with an 18-month study to identify and explore a range of options to improve safety and function on a six-mile span of Highway 126 between Huston (Veneta's eastern UGB) and Greenhill Road (Eugene's western UGB).

A mix of roadway users—local, commuter, freight, and tourist—log an average of about 14,500 vehicle trips daily, with summer usage calculated at approximately 18,000 trips per day along this two-lane highway. Existing multimodal, safety, and operational needs are expected to increase over time.

This section of highway has an overall crash rate slightly higher than similar facilities throughout the state resulting in an average of two fatalities or debilitating injuries each year. Pedestrians and bicyclists have been involved in five collisions in the study corridor over the past 15 years. Emergency response times are delayed during traffic incidents, which are more numerous at access points to properties, businesses and public lands. Opportunities for vehicles to pass are limited. Other issues include narrow shoulders, railroad alignment along the south side, Fern Ridge Reservoir on both sides of the middle section, closely spaced driveways at the west end, lack of left or right turn lanes, and pavement ruts.

The primary purpose of the Plan was to identify corridor improvement options to safely and efficiently accommodate the needs of all roadway users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, freight, and traffic. In addition, the Plan was intended to provide a financially viable transportation system for all users between Veneta to Eugene that avoids or minimizes environmental and community impacts, support the economic viability of the region, and be consistent with state and local plans and policies.

A team of consultants hired by ODOT led a planning effort to identify the most viable alternatives to improve the safety and function of this section of roadway. The team incorporated extensive public input, and conducted corridor field reconnaissance with ODOT, Army Corps of Engineers and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, as well as carried out additional environmental screening and scoring.

Based on this, and other groundwork, the draft Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan evaluated and identified a range of alternatives to enhance the safety and function of Highway 126 between the cities of Veneta and Eugene. Input on the draft Plan involved the general public, highway users, local city and county representatives, state and federal regulatory agencies, and other interested stakeholders in developing this Plan.

The process started with eight alternatives, which were whittled down to five for further consideration. Based on that analysis and the 2035 traffic forecast, the final project alternatives included:

- Four-lane causeway alternative (on dike or piers) with multi-use path (adjacent to Hwy 126 or southern Cantrell/Perkins alignment)
- Spot improvements (as phased improvement to four-lane alternative) with a multi-use path
- Required no-build alternative

The long-term objective of the Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan is to build a four-lane highway with a separated multi-use path. Cost estimates range from \$15 million for spot improvements and a multi-use path to \$130 million for four lanes on dikes and a separate multi-use path. With these projected costs, a complete rebuild may not occur for a number of years or when expanded federal or state funding resources become available.

In February 2013, two components of the Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan took a major step toward inclusion in the 2015-18 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), receiving the Lane Area Commission on Transportation (LACT) recommendations for STIP funding in Lane County. The City of Veneta's \$140,000 application to fund the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) environmental review and design the Highway 126 Southern Route multi-use path emerged at the top of the LACT's priority list. Fifth on the list was \$2.7 million for Highway 126 spot improvements sponsored by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). On February 12, 2013, the County Board of Commissioners adopted the Highway

126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan and in the spring of 2013, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) adopted the Plan as well.

If funded, all projects require roughly 10 percent matching funds from each sponsor. The multi-million dollar match that would be required for implementation of the entire Plan, which includes a four-lane upgrade, is beyond the means of the City of Veneta; however, the City Council determined that construction of the multi-use path is an affordable project that will enhance safety, livability and economic development for Veneta and the Fern Ridge community. As well as help to build momentum for the realization of the Plan as a whole. Public testimony on the Fern Ridge Corridor Plan overwhelmingly favored a separate multi-use path connecting to the Fern Ridge bike path. Construction of the path will be a lengthy process, taking six to nine months just for the study and pathway design.

With LACT's recommended funding for spot improvements and the OTC's subsequently final adoption of the 2015-2018 STIP cycle, \$2.6 million in improvements will begin in 2016.

Some of those near-term spot improvements solutions include: paving improvements, turn lanes, sidewalks, intersection upgrades, warning signs, and lighting installations as incremental improvements. These short-term fixes can mitigate deficiencies until funding can be identified for a road widening project. None of the spot improvements would be lost when the four-lane upgrade occurs.

The **proposed** multi-use route would essentially run parallel to Highway 126 between Huston Road and Greenhill Road. It would travel along Territorial to Perkins Road, then north on Central Road before turning east on Cantrell Road. It would then travel down K.R. Nielson Road, eventually going under the railroad tracks. It would then follow the tracks on the south side all the way to Green Hill Road. At Green Hill Road, it would become a bike lane within Green Hill Road or it would be a separate path, eventually arriving at the Fern Ridge Path, which connects to the Amazon Trail.

As the Highway 126: Fern Ridge Corridor Plan works its way through the adoption process, the multi-use path gives the plan momentum and continues to move the improvement process forward. Both State Senator Floyd Prozanski and State Representative Paul Holvey, as well as Lane County Commissioner Jay Bozievich, are on record in support of the multi-use path project but all parties are wanting to see the next phase of the Fern Corridor Plan implemented.

The City of Veneta and the greater Fern Ridge area would like to see the proposed four-lane buildout take place in the next ten years. We would propose that the NEPA funding of 5 million dollars be included in the 2018-2021 STIP cycle, final design and right of way acquisition take place in 2021-2024 STIP and full funding for construction to take place in 2024-27 STIP cycle.