

JRH

June 6, 2006

Metro Policy Committee (MPC)  
c/o Lane Council of Governments  
99 East Broadway, Suite 400  
Eugene, OR 97401

It appears the WEP opposition will again win a victory in the form of a delay under the umbrella of "Finding a WEP Consensus Route". For the record, the history of the West Eugene transportation corridors includes many attempts for consensus. I've attached a copy of my article that appeared in The Register-Guard newspaper on April 28, 2006, for MPC's records.

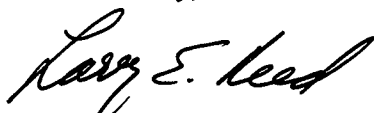
For over twenty years, this community's attempts at consensus have failed. Three major parkway alignments have occurred: the Amazon, the Amazon to the Roosevelt, then Roosevelt to the West Eugene Parkway (WEP). Prior to the WEP, numerous other alignments were considered. To find the least environmental impact alignment, the WEP shifted from the south to the north side of the railroad, which was disturbed agricultural wetlands. Consistently, environmental groups have had objections. Will one more try at finding consensus be a success?

At the core of West Eugene's transportation issues is a conflict over values. The long history of environmental opposition to any West Eugene transportation route (WEP) believes environmental issues trump the community transportation needs.

The win/win scenario in the West Eugene area should have been the City's saving and showcasing over a thousand acres of wetlands and building the WEP along the north side of the railroad. This railroad barrier already impacted the area wetlands since 1914. Widening this rail alignment has manageable impacts. One of the seldom discussed purposes of Eugene's saved wetlands was to mitigate WEP's wetlands impacts.

I could hope the regional government decision makers ignore the OSPREY report and build the parkway. If not, a future "consensus" route will again be objected to for reasons similar to today's objections to the WEP.

Yours truly,



Larry E. Reed

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## GUEST VIEWPOINT

New parkway: Ecological disaster or economic necessity? Pro: Lack of road has already caused damage

By Larry Reed

Published: Friday, April 28, 2006

Opponents of the West Eugene Parkway call it a boondoggle - they say it's unnecessary, too costly, would devastate rare wetlands and would contribute to urban sprawl.

They're wrong. Not building this long-needed project has already caused great economic harm and sprawl, and the damage will continue until the parkway is completed.

An east/west limited-access road through west Eugene has been planned since the 1950s. In 1960, the Roosevelt Freeway was conceived to connect Interstate 5 with Oregon Route 126 through west Eugene. Only the Interstate 105 segment from I-5 to Sixth and Seventh avenues was built, and that was to be a "temporary" link to Washington and Jefferson streets.

With the development of Valley River Center in the late 1960s, changing community attitudes and the adoption of the T200 transportation plan in 1978, the Roosevelt Freeway was replaced by a new corridor in the alignment of Sixth and Seventh avenues (the first concept of the West Eugene Parkway).

In 1983, the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee determined that the project should extend from the Oak Hill vicinity at the west end to Garfield Street on the east end. On Nov. 4, 1986, the voters approved the pursuit of the parkway.

In 1987, a biologist hired by the city identified nearly 1,500 acres of wetlands in west Eugene, more than a third of which had been designated for industrial development. Most of this acreage had been disturbed by agricultural activity. The Willamette Valley once had an estimated 360,000 acres of wetland prairie, which by 1985 had dwindled to about 13,000 acres.

The West Eugene Wetland Plan, approved by the city and Lane County in 1992 and by state and federal agencies in 1994, suggests that out of west Eugene's 1,278 acres of wetlands, 1,019 be restored and protected, while 259 be designated for development.

Since Eugene contains about 1 percent of the Willamette Valley's land, is it fair for the city to bear the cost of preserving 10 percent of the valley's remaining wetlands prairie? The urban growth boundary was not adjusted to make up for this loss of developable acreage. This limited land supply is already contributing to sprawl by moving growth to Veneta, Elmira, Junction City, Cottage Grove, etc. This growth is overloading the highway system, and in the future, getting people to their jobs in the metropolitan area will require spending more public money. The community needs the West Eugene Parkway now.

While opponents continue to assert there are better, faster, cheaper alternatives, they have yet to come forward with a feasible alternative that achieves the parkway's purposes, does not waste the millions of dollars already spent or delay construction an additional 10 years. Their rhetoric about a new project that solves traffic problems while protecting every piece of

wetlands is intellectually dishonest; it is known that there are no other corridors available that do not impact wetlands. The parkway route, paralleling the railroad built on a dike in 1914, has the least impact on wetlands.

Less than a mile of the parkway route would involve actually filling wetlands designated for protection in the West Eugene Wetlands plan. In addition, the wetlands already consist of several discrete areas, each ecologically distinct or undergoing restoration - so much for fragmentation. We've seen that wetlands can thrive next to existing major transportation facilities, some of which carry more vehicles than are projected for the parkway.

Supporters of the parkway have been depicted as developers who stand to gain from the project. But the parkway will be access-controlled, with connection points only at major intersections, and the land fronting most of the western portion is publicly owned. In what way, then, could the parkway benefit landowners?

None of what opponents offer is better, faster or cheaper than the parkway. Giving up \$17 million earmarked for the project for some unknown, ineffective alternative would be unconscionable.

With only a mile of the entire 5.8-mile project affecting wetlands originally designated for protection, and with two to three acres of new wetland replacing each one that is disturbed, the parkway cannot be characterized as devastating a rare national treasure.

The community's work toward restoring and showcasing wetlands, while constructing the parkway in an environmentally sensitive way, deserves to be showcased and recognized.

Every person who depends on transportation through west Eugene needs to send an e-mail to [johnhuyler@earthlink.net](mailto:johnhuyler@earthlink.net) expressing support for the West Eugene Parkway. Otherwise, the opposition will win by default.

*Larry Reed is a principal with JRH Transportation Engineering.*

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