

Willits Transportation Future

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Note taker: Jason Bradford

Ann Weller Introduction

Format, 10 min presentations by each panelist. Glena Blake, MTA; Janet Orth, REDI and MCOG; Alan Falleri, City of Willits; Ellen Drell, WEC and One Town, One Vision; Richard Jergensen, MCRS and NCRA

Current automobile, personal transport, can we have one that is more public, non-auto-centered. This is what we will discuss tonight.

Ann Weller Presentation "Alternative Transportation: Beyond cultural expectations and limitations...what is possible?"

Amish, still use horse and buggy. Bikes at Green Festival, about 1000 bikes parked. India, bikes used to transport people and goods, Hong Kong and fish sales, wagons pulled by oxen. Lots of small motorcycles, often with multiple passengers. Horses still used to farm, pull sleds in winter. Rail is a big part of the infrastructure in Europe. Light rail in urban parts of U.S., more difficult in a rural setting. But small electric vehicles plus solar charges could be part of our solution.

Transportation inventory facts from WELL Energy Report. 28,000 vehicle trips through downtown Willits each day. Each person averages 28 miles per day. 50% of our local energy consumption is in transportation fuel. This costs us \$17 million per year, or 12 to 15% of after tax median income.

A car share group was started. A large binder exists of info. Would love to see this process restarted. Difficult to share vehicles in a rural area because people more spread out. Where to keep the cars? More common now in cities.

Glenn Blake

What is currently available as far as public transportation, I will let you know. I am a benchmark, reality check.

MTA is a joint powers agreement agency with the county and 4 cities. Grew out of the transit development act of 1972, funded via sales tax. Bulk of TDA money goes to MTA. Funding tied to the local economy, via sales tax. Operating

budget is about 3.5 million per year. Also have a capital budget through federal funds.

Services include. Dial a Ride, curb to curb service. Intercity bus routes, 6 round trips weekdays from Willits to Ukiah, one per day Willits to Laytonville. Mendocino, Ft. Bragg, Willits, Ukiah, Santa Rosa, daily service trip. Will also take someone around within a 3 mile radius in Santa Rosa.

Currently have a transportation grant to gather community input. Hope to come up with alternatives. Please fill out a green survey form. Hired consultants to work with them. On Jan 17th will have a community forum at WISC to review consultants "styles of service" and compare to community input.

Don't have a lot of money. Going to come up with a service plan with same funding as today but serves us better.

Bypass: MTA doesn't have a position on the bypass. A north south corridor on east side of 101 would be great for MTA service.

Position on alternative vehicles. Looking into this as current vehicles need replacement. These options are important to the staff and board. Actively discussed and on our agendas. A diesel hybrid is available for large coaches, but cost double standard diesel. Currently equipping large diesel coaches with emissions traps. Not set to replace large coaches for another 5 years. For smaller vehicles, just now starting to look at alternative fuel vehicles, but again, price is double. Lots of pressure to make these alternatives being applied to manufacturers.

Janet Orth

A lot of unknowns. Will give perspective as part of a planning agency for 10 years. Have handouts regarding Zero Emission Vehicles and transportation agency web sites, and MCOG newsletter.

Concerns: official planning efforts don't recognize Peak Oil. Planning efforts based on status quo, and if we don't plan will have a crash. Also, trend is not to conserve fossil fuels, need to conserve these to build alternative energy infrastructure. Hopeful new congress will help. Also, climate change and need to be carbon neutral, not included in planning.

Thinks cars will be around, but fewer cars in future. E.g., peak oil, as decline sets in will have fewer. Will probably work hard to maintain and recycle the vehicles we have, not as much manufacturing of new cars, less affordable. Need to bring back vocational training to do this.

Assets are our transportation corridors and road system. Looks like bypass will be built because of passage of the 1B bond. The EIR of the bypass will be finalized in Dec. Followed stakeholder input under CEQA process (but didn't incorporate peak oil and climate change—jb question). Reduced median width and community route desires. Doesn't think will change given have money and EIR done. Public safety concerns regarding size trumped some environmental concerns.

Will let Richard talk more about railroad.

1B bonds will also be used for public transit. Money for local streets. Internet a communication technology, considered by Caltrans as negamiles, drive less is important.

Smart Growth or Transit Oriented Development. A planning term about developing in a compact way to encourage people to walk/bike more, reduce need for cars. Common in Europe, will show slides. After a bypass can better develop the Willits core for walkability.

Public transit is a challenge for rural areas to deliver.

Costs 7 to 9 K per year to own a car. Maybe don't need to own so many cars per family. A lot more we can do, e.g., car sharing.

Bike and pedestrian planning in various parts of the county, funded by MCOG and Caltrans.

MCOG has an unmet transit needs forum on Dec. 4th.

Renewable fuels for transportation. Biodiesel, ethanol, magnagas (using waste). My favorite is electricity from renewable energy. Will need all these options to make up for loss of fossil fuels. Into ethanol in the Midwest, lots of solar in CA. Cut down via fuel economy and driving less. Still skeptical about hydrogen, not made from renewables, poor net energy, think electricity better. Can't wait for hydrogen to develop, don't use hydrogen as an excuse to delay.

General motors CEO stated ending GMs electric vehicle division was his worst decision. Maybe they are coming around? Are designing an electric based platform vehicle.

Most excited about the plug in hybrid vehicles, next best thing to pure electric. Managed 3 year test plan here, thought it worked great. Can plug in to utility grid and recharge at night, off peak. PG&E can actually use car batteries as back-up for the grid. Technology is already available, lots of independent companies improving on this. Expect to see these vehicles in a couple of year.

Other vehicles will come in appropriate sizes for their purpose. Need to develop safer corridors around here.

People will not give up their mobility without a struggle. We are geographically challenged and will want some vehicles to get around. Rather hold that vision of ingenuity in mind rather than some dark vision. Like David Korten's The Great Turning, a great notion in this context.

Alan Falleri

Transportation is a big part of city government. People rely heavily on autos to get around. Will give some history of how planning has revolved around transportation issues.

What you think about transportation depends on where you live. Coastal zone has a state hwy, but voters kept it as a scenic, 2-lane road. Planners typically think of how to make it move more efficiently, meaning faster. Often means freeways. But voters went for the beauty of the coast instead.

Also includes pedestrians, bikes, trains, aircraft. Multimodal is a term used to recognize there's more than cars. But nearly all the money has been going to support the auto industry.

Original Willits was established without thinking about cars, before cars. Most communities had a lot of small alleys and streets, now we work to move cars through them. Houses were oriented towards the street to interact with neighbors. After WWII, Futurama world's fair expo outlined a vision by GM for America that promoted suburbia. It changed the face of development in America for decades. The "wisdom" of planning that I grew up with followed that, based around the automobile. Now we are stuck with this dependency on the car, would like to ride a bike. Am trying to work on a way to include a bike and an electric vehicle in my job.

Difficult to undo the street patterns developed over the years. We have drive thru almost anything. Car has become a really weird position in society.

Think we need to overcome a lot of stupid growth to do this. The bureaucracy around transportation is huge. Money coming from Federal government and state has lots of strings attached. Local government can't just do what it wants with the dollars. Need to keep on presenting our view to higher levels of government. They are changing, but we don't always see eye to eye, but need to work on this.

Our general plan has a transportation and circulation section. Downtown specific plan is in there, and we are working to get it implemented. Especially bike and

pedestrian planning. Americans with Disability Act limits how you can design some sidewalks. Did a nice job with the RR Ave Baechel Corridor study.

City is on board, would like to do a lot of these forward thinking ideas, people need to hold government to it. We do have an electric vehicle charging station at city hall.

Ellen Drell

We are all addicted to cars. This addiction will be very difficult to break. Even though we realize it is not health for us, the community and the planet. These habits could very well end life as we know it on the planet. Even so, we are planning a huge bypass, even so we try just a little bit to change.

So a suggestion. Think about the kids in our community. They like to be out and about without restrictions, like independence, but they are not addicted to driving. As we think about making these changes about a less car dependent, car free lifestyle, think about whether a 10 year old kid can make use of this transportation system we are planning. If we can say yes to this, then maybe we will find that even the adults can use it too, and like it.

Planning is justified when it preserves and fosters informal communal activities.

Will show some ideas from the citizens of Willits or planners sought out and hired by citizens of Willits.

1992 document

1999, One Town One Vision community organization. Have brochure.

2003, Baechtal Rd and RR Ave booklet.

Look at these pictures and think about the 10 year old kid or senior citizen, would they be comfortable.

Median strip with trees planted, separates pedestrian from the street, safer, more pleasant, shadier, cooler, inviting, noise and pollution abatement. Parking bays included. Bike is safer because street is narrow, which really slows traffic.

Crossing streets is what makes parents nervous letting kids loose. So crosswalk and intersection designs important. Use piano key striking lines, easier to see, and pedestrian islands. Islands allow pedestrians to look only one way and be secure. Bulb outs narrow streets as cars approach an intersection they slow down. Fills in illegal parking spaces. Makes street crossing shorter and puts pedestrians in line of vision of driver.

Post office intersection is very unsafe now, but could be made safe. Valley St. as approaches 101 actually widens as it gets to 101.

Can put islands in 101/S. Main to allow safe crossing.

Round about going into Hopland and Caltrans allowing it. Can do this on 101 in Willits because it keeps traffic moving. Can accommodate more traffic than signals. The best engineering is our own judgment as we approach an intersection. A round about allows us to make these judgments.

When trying to turn left onto 101 at Brown's corner, for example, can take a long time to wait for a gap in both N and S traffic. With a round about, N and S bound traffic doesn't need to stop, but will slow down. To get into the round about only need to negotiate a single, small gap. Need to be engineered properly, can only go one direction.

Bill White, 30% fewer accidents in a round about according to Dan Burton, and no head-ons, only side swipes.

Connect Baechtal Rd. to Railroad, allow another N/S route for locals. Not meant to substitute for a bypass or meant as a truck route.

Bike paths discussed are great, but they need to take people from where you are to where you want to go. Connect residential areas to main shopping area, find direct routes for bikes and pedestrians, not necessarily cars. The key is putting in small bridges across creeks. The city would need to acquire right of ways through some private properties.

Alan F. again

What visions does the city have for transportation? A lot of what Ellen just showed is what we need to do. De-emphasize the automobile, make it safer to walk around, have healthier people. E.g., roundabouts reduce pollution.

Looking at our general plan and zoning policies. Ron Orenstein has been a key member of the Revite Ed committee at looking at these kinds new standards and changes.

Right now we always look at how to provide parking spaces? We provide a space for everyone's auto to park, but not a house for every person.

Can we have trolleys, a fleet of bicycles, a fleet of electric carts (paint them bright colors). Bike and pedestrian paths, have a grant application in now. A riverside trail segment, half mile, near new hospital site. Will have benches, educational signs too. Bridges across creeks part of that too.

Right now have limited funds. Seeking grants. Citizens passed a half cent sales tax, but debate now whether it can be used for more than just fixing pot holes, street paving.

Emergency vehicles needs, often large trucks, sometimes conflict with desires for smaller streets. Need to educate emergency personnel.

City responded to citizens desires to have a bypass. But from a planners perspective, is one of the worst designs imaginable. Doesn't solve problems for Brooktrails, or connected to hwy 20, is highly elevated, noisy, blocks view of east side of valley. Will take fill from Oil Hill.

Richard Jergensen

Paint a word picture of history of transportation in Willits.

First white settlers on horseback 1850s. Baechtel brothers set up a farm in 1855. 1861 town of Little Lake formed, Willitsville laid out in 1877. About this time a public road connecting to Ukiah made. Regular Stagecoach service in 1880s, population around 400. 1902 first train arrived. Lots of lumber going south. 1910 passenger rail to the Bay Area. 1911 first train from Ft. Bragg. Used mainly for lumber. Line built northwest of Willits to Brooktrails and Sherwood Valley. Great Depression shut down a lot of mills, impacted railroads. Post war boom got lumber and trains going again. 100 car train loads common sights in Willits. Auto arrived in the 1920's, highway use expanded rapidly. Willits had auto courts and resorts developing. Trucking industry came in big too. With personal auto freedom, railroad travel dropped sharply. 1971, last train service from Eureka to Willits and south. 1988 Mendocino County Railway Society held meetings, another in 89 and 90. The North Coast Rail Authority was born, board appointed by county commissioners. It is 2006, the entire 300 mile line has been out of service since 1998. But just last week the CTC approve 7.4 million dollars for repairs. Another 43.2 million in upgrades between Lombard and Willits dedicated. Limited freight service to the south possible by end of 2008. Track repairs to the north thru Eel river projected at at least 100 million dollars.

Willits light rail trolley from H.S. to new hospital site, west to Blosser Lane. Puts one within 3 blocks of most main attractions in Willits. Youth friendly. Possible vehicle being manufactured in Mexico, sold for \$100,000, a hybrid diesel electric. Carries 18 or another 40 with trailer coach. Could run on solar electric power.

RJ displays historic rail cars, many self propelled, meaning car has own power system. Rich history of train use in Willits. Even own embarking platform in Sausalito.

Phil Jergensen mentions the Rail Village concept. A car less development. 10 times more efficient than cars. A single rail line has the capacity of a 6 lane freeway.

GM and Firestone dismantled our rail system.

Questions

Impressed with roundabouts and railroads. Questions for planner. No sidewalks in parts of downtown. Think we get more people walking if more sidewalks. Are there plans to improve this.

Alan: Some funds to help merchants fix up fronts of stores, but in general these are private properties. I agree it is nice to have sidewalks, a lot of ours are narrow, the city is trying to improve pedestrian and bike paths, yes.

Now going into a phase where the county and city gains roadways as bypass is built. How will this happen.

Alan: Caltrans is going to resist funding improvements to existing roads. From early conversations they are not going to enhance anything.

Half cent sales tax, there has been an ongoing struggle about where this is spent, earn about 600K per year for streets. Some feel we should use this \$ for structural improvements, others for just paving streets. If you want these changes, let the city council know.

How much damage do trucks do?

Alan: I have heard one truck does as much damage as 50-70 cars.

Because 101 is Main St., does Willits have any control of traffic lights?

Alan: No. We can make suggestions.

What is the rationale for a 4-lane as opposed to 2-lane or boulevards.

Janet: Primarily public safety standards. Need for emergency vehicles, accident, collision, toxic spills. Primarily an inter regional transportation issue.

How many cars will it take off Main Street.

Janet: I don't keep those numbers in my head.

Annie: 28,000 through per day, 7000 to north of Willits.

Ellen: Lots of info at Environmental Center and can talk to me. Remember we are facing peak oil and climate change, and \$300 million going to a bypass that Caltrans own studies admit is not justified by capacity needs.

Should tax gasoline. We have funding woes for what we want to do, here's how to do it.

Janet: Other ideas include taxing vehicle miles traveled instead of taxing gas.

Ellen: Problem with 1A is that it goes back into highways. Not specifically for alternatives.

Farmland has a lot of value for us, so would like to see the value of farmland considered as a negative for the bypass. The freeways are the cause of sprawl, not the answer to getting people to where they need to go.

Half cent sales tax for repaving. How much is in the fund?

Ron: Up to 1 million dollars.

Mainstreet repossession if the bypass is built, my sense is that Caltrans will rebuild something they will do it as long as we provide the funding.

Brooktrails second access road is planned to be tied into the end of the bypass. Brooktrails second access has been identified as a priority project with a regional connector. So funding is now more likely for planning and building of the second access road.

MTA has a tiny vision that needs to enlarge is through public transportation. I don't buy the idea of a lot of little vehicles. It has to be good enough and convenient enough to that. Passenger usage of bus way in S. California is way above predictions. People use it. Have big vision. We need a big vision for transit so we have a world class transit system.

Glena: Need a population of LA to support transit frequency.

Ellen: It is a question of priorities, not a question of money. We just passed a 20 billion dollar bond. Richard told us that 50 million going to fix the railroad. It is a question of will. Need to prime the pump. MTA needs to have a much bigger chunk of the money to provide frequent service.

Is MTA planning any service to Brooktrails?

Glena: It is being considered. A challenge of how to serve Brooktrails is huge because of how it is spread out.

Park and Ride systems can be effective in Washington State. I can think of a van pool solution, sharing costs with the highschool, for example, for events or employees.

Glena: Happens a lot in urban areas.

But we were in rural areas going towards urban.

Alan: The politics of determining the prioritization of funding gets pretty ugly. MTA was always in there asking for money, but the politicians deciding where the money went listened to public coming in not wanting to subsidize public transit but instead wanted their potholes fixed. So it is a priority decision that gets made and people have to tell their officials.

Janet: I think we are beyond a lot of that. Funding for MTA has been going up. But funds are very restricted in their use.

What is going on to help the Covelo residents get to their medical needs?

Glena: I am not aware of any services planned to go to Covelo.

Alan: We have forgotten how to be neighbors and help each other out. In a rural area that is really important. Somehow we need to do better planning to get people to interact together, and care for each other.

Rural bus service in 1980s.