

**Transportation Safety Concerns and Actions
in the Mohawk Valley, Lane County, Oregon
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by
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Introduction

Shortly after the County published its Transportation Safety Action Plan (TSAP) in 2017, there was a fatal crash on Marcola Road that especially shocked our small community.¹ Since then there have been other serious and fatal crashes in our valley. Partly as result of the community's loss, Laurie Smart, a member of the Marcola School Board and Helen Kennedy, President of Friends of Marcola Schools Media Center/Library partnered with Lane County Senior Transportation Planner Becky Taylor to hold a Deliberative Dialogue on Transportation Safety in the Mohawk Valley. This report describes the deliberative dialogue process, and summarizes the major findings, results, and recommendations for both the process and traffic safety in the Valley.

What is Deliberative Dialogue? It is a structured discussion which aims to find the best course of action. Its "purpose is not so much to solve a problem or resolve an issue as to explore the most promising avenues for action."² Its structure provides a forum for "thinking together" rather than debating or arguing. It allows us to listen and think together about the pros and cons of the means to attain desired ends.

When it comes to traffic safety, public opinion tends to minimize the value of safety measures and the consequences of eliminating or ignoring them. The fatal crash in our community brought home to us the high human costs of unsafe traffic on our roadways. In the dialogue, we examined options from the TSAP, with an focus on three specific action items -- (1) educational efforts to inculcate positive driving norms, (2) adding rumble strips to roadways, and (3) adding additional enforcement staff to the Sheriff's office.

¹ Since then, there have been two more traffic fatalities on Marcola Road. In the past 12 months, the Mohawk Valley Rural Fire District had transported 13 people to hospitals from crashes. It has responded to 33 crashes where it did not transport injured people - about one a week. (Fire Chief Steven Wallace).

² London, Scott. 2018. *Thinking Together: The Power of Deliberative Dialogue*, adapted from "The Power of Deliberative Dialogue," published in the book, *Public Thought and Foreign Policy*, edited by Robert J. Kingston. <http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/dialogue.html> .

Major Finding, Results, and Recommendations

Deliberative Dialogue Participation and Process

We held three dialogues - July & September of 2017, and January of 2018. The first two focused on specific engineering, educational and enforcement action items. The third focused solely on the costs of reinstating sheriff deputy traffic patrols. It resulted in a community meeting with Sheriff Trapp, which is discussed below.

Twelve people attended the first meeting, fifteen the second, and thirteen the third. A total of 22 community members attended at least one of the three meetings, with new attendees at each of the second and third meetings who had not attended the first one. The population of the Mohawk Valley is about 4,500: having fifteen people show up for any meeting demonstrates a high level of interest. Each participant contributed his or her views on the pros and cons of the specific action items of positive driving norms, more deputies for enforcement, and rumble strips.

The deliberative dialogue process successfully increased audience participation compared to traditional government-to-community meetings. Over the course of the three meetings, community members remained engaged and participation actually increased, demonstrating both the effectiveness of the process and the high level of concern in our community surrounding road safety.

Regarding the deliberative dialogue process, we recommend:

- Use the Deliberative Dialogue Process in Lane County outreach programs.
- Train county staff to lead Deliberative Dialogues(e.g., Lane Community College).³
- Conduct Deliberative Dialogues on transportation safety in other rural areas.

Transportation Safety in the Mohawk Valley

As stated in the TSAP, effective traffic safety is a three legged stool -- Education, Engineering, and Enforcement. Without all three, Lane County will not make significant progress towards its goal of zero traffic fatalities and minimal severe-injury collisions. A summary of the major findings, results and recommendations for each area follows.

Education

Every community member was surprised to learn that Lane County has one of the highest (highest in 2014 and 2015) annual traffic deaths in Oregon, and that Oregon has one of the highest crash fatality rates in the USA. Moreover, they were alarmed

³ Ms Smart and Ms Kennedy received their training at an LCC seminar, contact Daniell Henry

that 54% of the fatalities from 2007-2014 were in rural Lane County, even though it is home to only 30% of the County's population.

They were also surprised at the economic costs of crashes in Lane County. From 2009-2014, the average annual cost exceeded \$308 million. That equates to about a \$3,500 average annual cost per household of four. Everyone thought that additional outreach on these impacts and costs were needed in the Valley and Countywide.

The attendees were open to a positive norms approach to educating the public about traffic safety. As a result, Ms. Taylor provided an article for the Valley's quarterly newspaper, the Mohawk Messenger, and now sends flyers on educational programs such as designated driver encouragement, to the Friends of the Media Center. The Friends then share these on local bulletin boards and community Facebook groups.

Most of the attendees were in favor of making drivers education for teens more affordable and accessible. Currently, Superintendent Bill Watkins and Helen Kennedy are working with Ms. Taylor, other rural school districts, and the Lane Educational Service District to find financial assistance for driver education fees, and to train county residents to be certified driver education instructors. At the same time, most attendees supported the "Every 15 Minutes" teen program, which simulates the high shock effects that stem from fatal and severe-injury crashes.

Regarding education, we recommend:

- Continue sharing outreach and educational materials with the Friends Group, who will share these in the community.
- Educational outreach campaigns should include the number and rate of fatal and severe-injury crashes, and the economic costs of crashes.
- Commit more county staff and funds to drivers education in rural communities.

Engineering

The attendees were more in favor of the rumble strips than not, and had a number of other ideas which they shared with Ms. Taylor. The Department of Public Works has either implemented or committed to implement a number of these, while others are pending. Most significantly, Public Works has scheduled installation of rumble strips on sections of Marcola Road in 2018. *Appendix A* provides a list of many projects, along with the status of each as planned, pending or completed.

On Engineering, we recommend:

- Continue to implement engineering actions in the Mohawk Valley. (*Appendix A*)
- Over the long term, add shoulders or pull outs on Valley roads.

Enforcement

We learned that rural Lane County has virtually no traffic enforcement whatsoever. Sheriff Trapp and the Tax Assessor provided additional information for use in our third dialogue. At least \$3 million is needed to fund 20 additional deputies (including a traffic team of 10). A special levy of approximately \$0.10/\$1,000 assessed value would raise \$3 million. The participants agreed that a \$20 annual levy on a \$200,000 property was acceptable -- the sheriff's office would meet standards of regular call demand and have a full traffic team. But, we did not know the specifics of raising the revenue.

Consequently, we held a traditional community meeting with Sheriff Trapp to get more details. On a snowy and icy February evening, over 20 community members attended (again out of a small population of about 4,500). In addition, a video of the meeting was posted on a community Facebook page. It has had over 450 hits, about 10% of the population.

Sheriff Trapp explained the 93% drop in federal timber funding since 2001, which resulted in the elimination of the Traffic Team. He stated that the County needs another 20 deputies to meet the norm for deputy services. Based on a county-funded study, and the jail levies voting results, rural voters apparently do not support law enforcement.

Several funding options were discussed, including funding from the existing revenues, a county-wide levy (\$0.10/\$1,000 for \$3 million, \$0.16/\$1,000 for \$5 million), a levy on rural properties only (\$0.30/\$1,000 for \$3 million, \$0.50/\$1,000 for \$5 million), and a special public safety district for the Mohawk Valley. The sheriff outlined challenges.

Clearly, additional revenue is needed for traffic enforcement. Moreover, chances are high that rural voters have opposed increased taxes for law enforcement because they are uninformed. They do not know the high number of and economic costs of fatal and severe-injury crashes in rural Lane County versus the metropolitan area, and that the Sheriff's office lacks the staff to meet standard patrol norms.

On Enforcement, we recommend:

- The County Commissioners find a way to fund traffic patrol in the rural areas.
- Educate the electorate of the cost of NOT enforcing traffic laws (*i.e.*, the high costs of crashes, and the number and rate of fatal and severe-injury crashes).

Conclusions

Use of the Deliberative Dialogue process increased public understanding of what is needed for the County to reach its goal of zero traffic fatalities and minimal severe-injury crashes. Traffic safety is a three legged stool -- Education, Engineering, and Enforcement. Without dedicated traffic enforcement deputies, the three-legged stool remains broken and significant progress impossible. The County desperately needs to

fund a sheriff's traffic team, continue roadway improvements, and educate the public about the emotional and economic costs of traffic fatalities and crashes.

Appendix A
List of Engineering Actions for the Mohawk Valley

On all major roads and arterials:

1- Long term -- add shoulders or pulls outs.

Marcola Road south of the Wendling intersection:

- 1- Rumble strips to boundaries. *Public Works will install in 2018.*
- 2- Remove the crosswalk paint at the Wendling intersection. *Done in 2017.*
- 3- Make a no passing zone close to the Mohawk Valley Fire Station. *Pending.*
- 4- Add “congested area” signs at Hill road and Parsons Creek road intersections. *Pending*

Marcola Road north of Wendling Intersection:

- 1- Add a flashing sign for the south bound lane to slow before the curve approaching Wendling Road. *Pending*
- 2- Install shoulder lane to the County line. *Pending*
- 3- Additional signage or re-engineer the blind turn at the Shotgun Creek Road intersection. *Pending*

Hill Road and Mckenzie View Drive:

1- Additional Speed limit signs and no passing signs. *Pending*

Wendling, Parsons, and other arterials

- 1- Speed limit signs at curves and “no shoulder” signs. *Pending*
- 2- Consider 45 MPH speed zones for arterials (e.g., the rest of the 4 miles of Wendling Rd. after the 25 MPH and the school zone). *Pending*