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# Update on the Oregon Information Highway

“Oh, what tangled webs we weave.”

by Jim Schepcke, State Librarian

In 1991, the Oregon Library Association unanimously adopted its long range strategic plan to move Oregon library services forward to the next century. OLA's *Vision 2000* addressed a wide range of library development issues, not the least of which was the need to provide for more effective sharing of library resources to benefit the citizens of Oregon.

*Vision 2000* committed the library community in Oregon to the “basic vision,” that “by the year 2000 ... every library will participate fully in a coordinated statewide network that will provide every Oregonian with access to all of the library resources in the state.”

In the fall of 1993, the State Library began to consider what might be done to accelerate efforts to realize this goal. In a meeting between the State Librarian, Jim Schepcke, and Peggy Forcier, Coordinator of the Washington County Cooperative Library Service, the idea emerged of undertaking a broad based planning process in 1994 that would develop strategies toward the goal of improved statewide library networking.

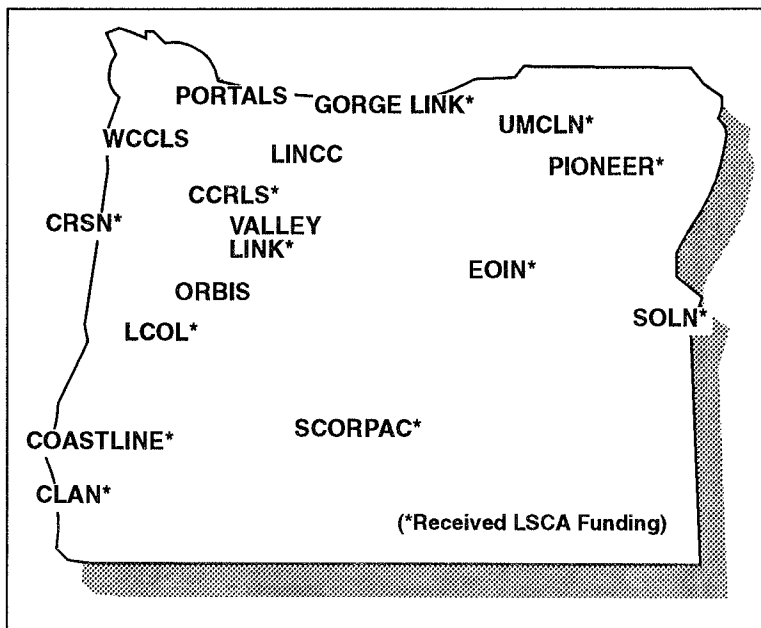
## The Planning Process

There were at least four reasons why the time seemed right to undertake the planning process that came to be called the Oregon Information Highway Project. First was the *Vision 2000* goal that needed attention if it was to be realized by the year 2000. Second was the fact that in the 1993 Legislative Assembly, the Oregon Library Association and the State Library were successful in securing passage of Senate Bill 20, the Oregon LINK library resource sharing bill.

In working for passage of this bill that freed up federal Library Services and Construction Act funds from the State Library budget, OLA and State Library leaders had committed to use these federal funds to implement ORS 357.005(2)(d), which calls upon the State Library to “provide a network whereby the library resources of this state are made available to all the people of this state under reasonable conditions and subject to appropriate compensation to libraries providing library services ... beyond their primary clientele.”

A third reason to begin to plan for better statewide library networking was the success of regional efforts to share library resources. The State Library has been encouraging and providing seed money for regional library networks for the past two decades. These efforts have resulted in some of the most successful regional library networks in the country. These regional networks now cover nearly the entire state, as Figure 1 indicates:

Figure 1  
Regional Library Resource Sharing Networks: 1994



Having reached such a high level of development of these regional networks, it seemed the time was right to begin to think about connecting these regional networks in such a way as to better serve the entire state.

A final reason to begin a planning process for statewide library networking was the strong potential for obtaining funding to seed these efforts. In late 1993, the U. S. Department had just awarded a \$2 million competitive grant to the State of Louisiana to help build a statewide library network. Another round of this grant competition was planned for 1994. The Department of Commerce was also planning a round of grants to seed projects that would contribute to building the country's “information infrastructure.” Charitable foundations in Oregon had shown their interest in library resource sharing with several major grants, such as that awarded by the Meyer Memorial Trust to begin the Orbis project at the University of Oregon. And SB 20 would possibly mean that more LSCA funds would be available in the future to use for statewide library networking projects.

The planning process that was launched in early 1994 consisted of several phases. In January and March, the State Library held two meetings of "major stakeholders," that is, major libraries that could be expected to be key participants in any future statewide library network. It seemed important for these major libraries to buy into the idea of a statewide library network, before any further planning could be seriously contemplated. The results of these two meetings were very encouraging. The major stakeholder libraries endorsed the idea of improving library networking to benefit the entire state. A set of draft goals, planning assumptions and planning parameters were developed. A broad-based task force was appointed and charged with continuing the planning effort. Finally, it was decided that the next phase of the planning process should involve meeting with as many groups of interested library staff as possible, in all parts of the state, in order to test the need for a statewide library network project, and to listen to specific needs and concerns that would need to be addressed in the plan.

The task force that emerged from the stakeholders meetings proved to be an extremely committed and capable group. The members of the task force were Ernest Perez, Gary Jensen, Joanna Rood, Charlene Grass, Alice Allen, Phyllis Lichenstein, David Bilyeu, Patty Cutright, George Happ, Jim Scheppke, and Doug Bennett. Doug Bennett, then the Executive Director of PORTALS, made a particularly strong contribution to the early planning efforts, before leaving the state to take a new job. He was replaced by Maureen Sloan, who was the Acting Executive Director of PORTALS.

The task force made a presentation on the Oregon Information Highway Project at the OLA Conference in April, followed by an unprecedented series of meetings with fourteen different library groups over the summer and into the fall:

#### **Oregon Information Highway Project Regional Meetings**

- OLA Academic Division/ACRL Board
- Metro Area Librarians
- Interinstitutional Library Council
- Mid-Coast Librarians
- NAPCU Librarians
- OEMA Board
- OSHLA Board
- Polk, Yamhill, Marion Librarians
- Oregon SLA Chapter Board
- Southern Oregon Library Federation

- Eastern Oregon Library Association
- Public Library Directors
- Linn, Benton, and Lane Librarians
- Central Oregon Librarians

The regional meetings were very valuable in clarifying the needs of Oregon libraries for improved networking. The task force worked hard to listen to what the library community said they wanted, and the input received by the task force had a profound influence on the final plans that emerged.

It should also be mentioned that the task force had benefit of expert advice from Rob McGee of RMG Consultants, Inc. in Chicago. McGee made two trips to the state, the first to facilitate the first stakeholders meeting, and the second to meet with the task force in the early fall. McGee's insights into the directions that library automation and networking are heading also had a profound influence on the final plans.

The final phase of the planning process was to convene a meeting at the Salem Public Library on October 28, 1994. This meeting was open to all interested librarians, trustees, and citizens. The purpose of the meeting was to have the task force present their proposals, including project goals and the outlines of an implementation plan. The Anderson Auditorium was filled to overflowing, and responses to the proposals from the attendees were very positive. The task force was very gratified to receive confirmation that they had indeed listened to what the library community wanted from a statewide library networking plan, and that they seemed to have devised an approach that could be broadly supported by the library community.

#### **The Plan**

The goals for statewide library networking that were presented and received support at the Salem meeting were as follows:

- To encourage and educate Oregon library staff to effectively use the information highway.
- To encourage and educate Oregonians to effectively use the information highway.
- To make the knowledge and information in Oregon's libraries available to every Oregonian.
- To use emerging technologies to improve access to information and materials, and to promote efficiency in the use of resources.
- To provide a framework for continued planning and development of statewide library cooperation.

## Oregon Information Highway Implementation Plan

The following project parameters were also presented and drew a favorable reaction from the Salem meeting:

### Parameters of the Oregon Information Highway Project

- We will connect libraries in the state to the Internet and ensure at least one point of access in every county and every local calling area in the state.

- We will set basic standards for libraries to participate in the network (automation, machine-readable records, staff support). Libraries that have these threshold capabilities and a willingness to share with others will be encouraged to participate in the statewide network.

- We will create a network or scheme of cooperation that allows libraries to participate at various levels, in keeping with their purposes, needs, and resources.

- We will further develop mechanisms that provide for equitable sharing of the costs of resource sharing and appropriate compensation for net lenders.

- We will build on the strengths of existing consortia and agreements, and proceed in a fashion conducive to further integration or cooperation among libraries.

- We will strive to make it possible to search library holdings across the state in a single operation.

- We will give high priority to making available a number of electronic databases and improved document delivery.

- We will share expertise and provide education and training for library staff, community leaders, and users, about the possibilities of the new information technology.

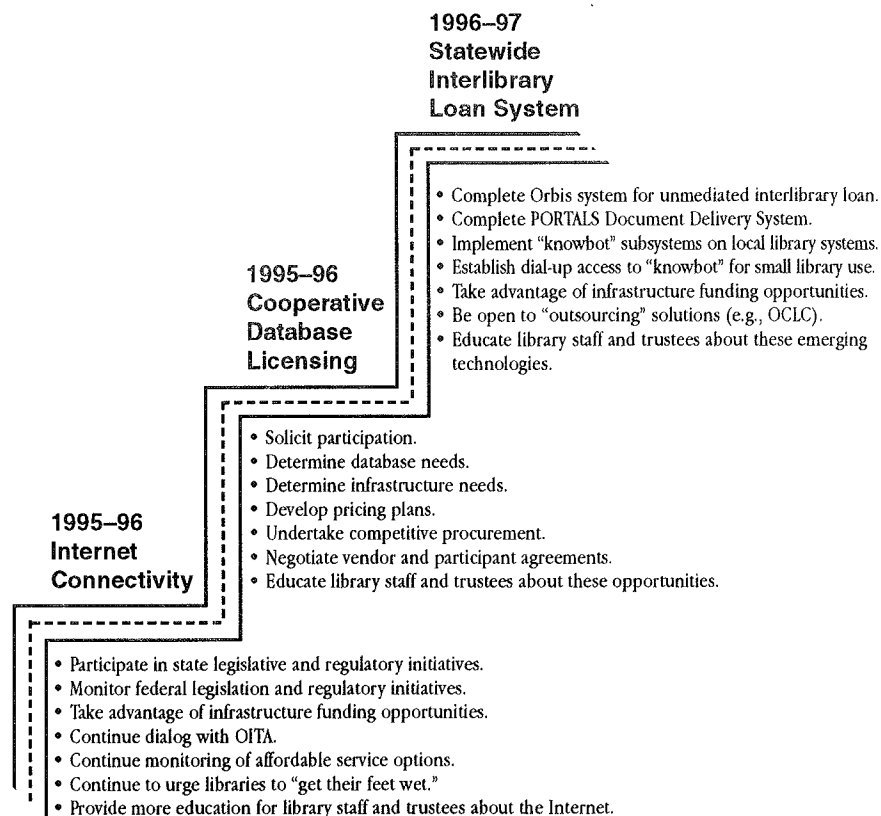
- We will maintain liaisons and work collaboratively with other initiatives addressing these objectives.

In order to achieve these goals and work within these parameters, the following implementation plan was presented at the Salem meeting:

### Oregon Information Highway Implementation Plan

The implementation plan consists of three stages presented in stair step fashion to connote the idea that each stage will build on the previous stage. Another connotation of the stair step plan is that as many libraries as possible will need to be brought along, and not be left out of these improvements to Oregon's "information infrastructure."

The first stage in the plan is to get as many libraries as possible connected to the Internet, the so-called information superhighway, over the next two years. Strategies to accomplish this include monitoring and participation in state and federal legislative and regulatory initiatives that might present opportunities for



libraries to gain affordable Internet connectivity. A dialog that has already begun between the State Library and the Oregon Independent Telephone Association will continue to be pursued, in hopes that mutually beneficial solutions for affordable access might be found for at least some communities in the state. The Internet provider marketplace, which is changing rapidly, will continue to be closely monitored so that libraries can be aware of the most affordable access options. Other funding opportunities, from grants or by other means, will be explored. And libraries will be strongly urged to "get connected" - even if only minimally to a dial-up service - so that they can become more knowledgeable about the importance of Internet technology to their future. Other training opportunities will be pursued for both library staff and trustees.

The second stage will be undertaken concurrently with the first stage in 1995 and 1996. The objective of this stage will be to establish cooperative database licensing agreements for one or more electronic databases. The need for cooperative database licensing was a message that the committee heard loud and clear, particularly from public librarians. Librarians feel they are being asked to pay too much for CD-ROM or online access to

electronic databases such as the Magazine Index or The Oregonian. Because it would be possible to access these databases remotely mounted on a single computer system using the Internet, it seems prudent to try to do so. Doing so could not only bring the cost down for all libraries, it might make these resources available for the first time in smaller libraries. Reaching this objective will take lots of hard work to identify the most desirable databases, solicit quotations from vendors, and negotiate favorable agreements. There is also a training component to this stage of the plan, so that librarians and trustees can be fully informed about opportunities to have greater access to electronic information at lower costs.

The final stage in the plan was put off until 1996 and 1997, due to the need to see technology develop further. The task force spent much of its time researching options for improved statewide access and delivery of library materials. Methods of improved interlibrary loan are already being tried out in the state, most notably in connection with the Orbis project among college and university libraries, and with the PORTALS Document Delivery System project. Both of these projects suggest promising approaches that could be more widely applied in the state. Also, there are developments just over the horizon involving the Z30.50 standard that allows a high degree of interoperability among library automated systems. Task force members saw demonstrations of Z39.50 "knowbot" software products in prototype versions. The products will start appearing on the market in 1995. These products could revolutionize interlibrary loan by providing very capable, low cost ways for librarians, and even library users, to locate and request needed materials from other libraries.

Because of these new technologies that are just being applied in the state, and those that are just over the horizon, it seemed prudent to delay any strong commitment to one technology over another in the immediate future. The plan thus called for waiting until 1996 to assess these technologies, and then begin to move to apply one or more of them to serve the entire state. This will also allow time for the library community to think through some of the practical policy issues that the availability of this technology poses. For example, just because the technology would allow library users to initiate interlibrary loans on their own so-called "unmediated" interlibrary loan doesn't mean that we are ready to have this happen in all libraries. Clearly, more thought needs to be devoted to the implications of this technology before we decide to apply it.

#### **Next Steps**

To carry out this ambitious plan, the State Library has

formed two working groups made up of some of the former task force members and volunteers from the Salem meeting. Members of these two working groups are:

#### **Oregon Information Highway Project Working Groups**

##### **Working Group on Internet Connectivity:**

Margaret Barnes, Dallas Public Library  
Patty Cutright, Eastern Oregon State College  
Dale Edwards, Treasure Valley Community College  
Charlene Grass, Oregon State University  
Deborah Jacobs, Corvallis-Benton County Library  
Sue Jenkins, Driftwood Library of Lincoln City  
Phyllis Lichenstein, State Library Board of Trustees  
Mary McClintock, Roseburg High School  
Ernest Perez, State Library  
Jim Schepcke, State Library  
Steve Teich, Oregon Health Sciences University

##### **Working Group on Cooperative Database Licensing:**

David Bilyeu, Central Oregon Community College  
Sue Burkholder, Southern Oregon State College  
Karyle Butcher, Oregon State University  
Eva Calcagno, Washington County  
Cooperative Library Service  
Jeanne Goodrich, Multnomah County Library  
George Happ, Salem Public Library  
Gary Jensen, Western Oregon State College Library  
Millard Johnson, PORTALS  
Joanna Rood, Library Information Network  
of Clackamas County  
Sheryl Steinke, Eugene 4J School District  
Andy Swanson, Klamath County Library

The working groups will meet in early 1995 to begin to carry out their charge under the Oregon Information Highway Project Implementation Plan. At the same time, the State Library has already begun to consider potential funding for the plan. The plan was presented to the State Library Board of Trustees at their meeting in December, 1994, and to the LSCA Advisory Council at their meeting in January, 1995. The LSCA Advisory Council is expected to consider the idea of devoting an unspecified amount of LSCA funds to address the plan later this year. The State Library is also looking at other potential funding sources for the plan.

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Thanks to the hard work of the Oregon Information Highway Project Task Force, and the work that we expect to see from these working groups, Oregon is well on its way to meeting the *Vision 2000* goal of giving every Oregonian the ability to utilize the kind of top-quality information services that our libraries, collectively, can provide. Oregon has always been a leader in effective library resource sharing. Our highly successful regional cooperatives, and projects like PORTALS and Orbis are proof of that. The Oregon Information Highway Project points the way to combining and leveraging these past successes to achieve an even higher standard of information service for all Oregonians.

## What's in it for you?

Or why join OLA, ACRL, etc.?

by *Connie Anderson, ACRL President*

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It seems that we're all connected these days through the Internet. We subscribe to listservs and connect to colleagues we've never met on a national or international basis. Many critics of the personal computer phenomenon foresee a day when we don't interact with each other directly. They suggest that we'll all be so absorbed by what is on our computer screens that we won't need or want to talk with one another face-to-face. I hope they are wrong, but I wonder if they have a point ... Computers have made a huge impact on our working conditions in the past decade. Even if we aren't glued to the screen reading listservs, we are struggling with their impact in all areas of our libraries. I've often heard from my colleagues that they used to have plenty of time to put together subject bibliographies, read professional literature, and get involved in library associations. No more. Certainly, computers are just one change in our working environments, but it is true that we all seem very busy, harried and stressed out.

Unfortunately, what that has meant for the Oregon Chapter of the Association for Research Libraries and the Oregon Library Association is that fewer and fewer people are joining the organization and that a small group of people do a lot of work to organize the annual conference and keep the organization running. I've already suggested that computers and overwork may prevent you from getting involved, but you may not have consid-

ered the rewards that are there for you efforts.

When I moved to the state seven years ago, I knew one or two people outside of my immediate library. When I attended the annual OLA conference I felt that I was an outsider. Everyone else seemed to know each other. I didn't have a clue as to how to get involved. When OLA met in Ashland in 1991, I was asked to be in charge of local arrangements. I agreed. Little did I know all the work that was ahead of me... Lot's of work, but also lots of fun. And, something I hadn't considered, I now was friends with all the committee members who came from all parts of the state. We worked hard, we bonded, and we came away with a tremendous feeling of accomplishment.

Since that conference, I've helped to found two new OLA Roundtables—one for Business and one for Library Instruction. I realized that if I waited around for someone to sponsor programs that were of interest to me, it wasn't going to happen. I have since gotten involved with ACRL, first as a board member and this year as president. I no longer go to conferences and feel like an outsider. My best friend are my colleagues at Linfield and Willamette, OSU, U of O ... I don't hesitate to get on the phone to call them to ask for their help on a tricky reference question. In fact, two of them will be coming to SOSOC to do a workshop for us on teaching techniques in the near future. My life and library are considerably richer for having gotten involved in ACRL and OLA. It disturbs me when I hear that some libraries have only one or two members in OLA. Yes, money is always an issue, but I believe the rewards can be much greater than the investment. They certainly have been for me.

I challenge you to join if you aren't already a member and look for an opportunity to get involved. If you are already a member, volunteer for a committee. And, if you are involved to the max, photocopy this article and give it to a colleague and urge them to get involved. Believe me, it beats sitting in front of your computer any day.