



# PORTLAND/VANCOUVER I-5 TRADE CORRIDOR STUDY

## SUMMARY REPORT

December 1999

### THE FUTURE OF THE INTERSTATE 5 CORRIDOR

#### Leadership Committee

**Vern Ryles, Chair**  
*Poppers Supply*

**Peter Bennett**  
*K-Line*

**Mike Bletko**  
*Fred Meyer Stores, Inc.*

**Margaret Carter**  
*Urban League*

**Anthony Ching**  
*Wafertech*

**Wesley Hickey**  
*Tidewater Barge Lines*

**Bill Hutchison**  
*Tooze, Duden, Creamer,  
Frank & Hutchison*

**Phil Kalberer**  
*Kalberer Food Service  
Equipment*

**Steve Madison**  
*Can Realty*

**Bill Maris**  
*Market Transport, Ltd.*

**Ken Novack**  
*Schnitzer Group*

**Dick Pokornowski**  
*Vancouver Citizen*

**Carl Talton**  
*Portland General Electric*

**Keith Thomson**  
*Port of Portland*

Traffic delays touch every aspect of our lives. We miss appointments. We change the time of day at which we receive important goods that our business needs. We hire additional employees or pay higher wages to attract employees to congested business locations. We move our business to more convenient areas. We decide to stay at home. We move or change our job, all in the hope of improving the quality of our life, the profits of our business, and the satisfaction of our employees with their work.

Nowhere in the region is the cost of delay more apparent than on Interstate 5 from Portland to Vancouver. Interstate 5 is critical to the regional, state, and national economy. It is the most significant freight freeway on the West Coast linking markets in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It is also the busiest commuter roadway in the region, linking the region's two largest cities.

The impact of congestion in the I-5 corridor on the bi-state economy is a growing concern to the public and private sectors. Because of this, the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation, in cooperation with regional policy-makers, initiated the Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor Study. The study examined transportation and economic consequences of investments in the I-5 Trade Corridor



*"This decision will be one of the most important for the region in the new millennium."*

- Dick Pokornowski

from the I-84 interchange in Oregon to the I-205 interchange in Washington.



The region's transportation policy-makers appointed a 14-member Leadership Committee of business and civic leaders and asked them to examine the problems in the I-5 Trade Corridor and to recommend next steps (see box below). This report is the Leadership Committee's response to the charge.

#### Charge of Leadership Committee

The region's transportation policy-makers charged the Leadership Committee to address the following questions:

1. What is the magnitude of the problem?
2. What are the costs of inaction?
3. What improvements are needed?
4. How can they be funded?
5. What are the next steps?

This report addresses these questions.

# 1 WHAT IS THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM?

## Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor

Leadership Committee Findings:

### 1. The Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor is critical to regional, state, and national economies.

- Interstate 5 is the only continuous interstate freeway on the West Coast. It links international, national, and regional economies in Mexico, California, Oregon, Washington, Canada, and the Pacific Rim countries.
- The Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor intersects the Columbia River, connecting the Interstate highway system with deep-water shipping, up-river barging, and two water-level transcontinental rail lines. The convergence of transportation and port facilities in the Portland/ Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor makes it a crossroad for both north-south and east-west trade, and an international gateway.
- The Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor is home to the region's largest industrial areas, including the Ports of Portland and Vancouver, which together export the second largest volume of



goods among West Coast ports. Over 40 percent of U.S. wheat exports move through the Columbia River system for transshipment to international markets through the marine terminals in the I-5 Trade Corridor.

- Portland/Vancouver is the number one origin and the number two destination for tonnage moved by commercial vehicles within the 17 western states. The I-5 Trade Corridor is the primary route for much of this freight movement.

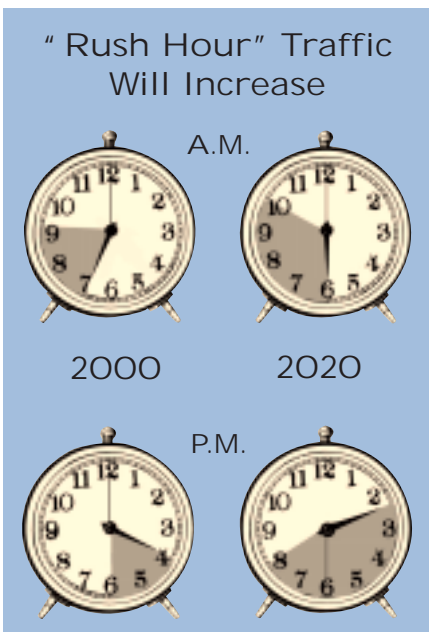
*"As moving goods becomes more difficult, it is the smaller businesses that will suffer most."*

- Phil Kalberer



**2. I-5 is a critical chokepoint; without attention it will only become worse in the future.**

- The I-5 Trade Corridor is currently the most congested segment of the regional freeway system.
- By 2020, congestion will grow significantly worse in the corridor:
  - It will take about twice as long to commute from Downtown Portland to Downtown Vancouver.
  - Congestion will be a problem in the corridor for most of the day and well into the evening.
  - Back-ups on I-5 will cause back-ups on many regional freeways, including I-84, I-405, SR 14 and SR 500.



**2**  
**WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF INACTION?**

Leadership Committee Findings:

**1. Without improvements, future congestion in the I-5 corridor threatens the economic promise of the Portland/Vancouver region.**

- Trade and freight movement on I-5 will be significantly more difficult as congestion moves into the mid-day period when the highest numbers of trucks are on the road (see graphic to left).
- Traffic congestion will increase costs and uncertainty for businesses, and will influence the willingness and ability of firms to continue to operate or expand at their current locations.
- The Portland/Vancouver region's ability to profit from the timely delivery of high value or time-sensitive goods to national and international markets will be affected. Even a few pennies more in transportation costs can make the high volumes of wheat, wood, and scrap metal moving through the region, non-competitive in the global market.

*"We are at the brink of either keeping our economy strong or allowing the kind of disastrous gridlock that is going on in California and Seattle."*

- Margaret Carter



- The lack of accessibility in the I-5 Trade Corridor will adversely impact the ability to attract future jobs to areas such as the Columbia Corridor and central Vancouver.

**2. Maintaining mobility in the I-5 Trade Corridor is key to supporting quality of life in the Portland and Vancouver region.**

- Regional land use plans depend on movement between Portland and Vancouver. A significant portion of the labor market for Oregon jobs is located in Vancouver. Every day almost 40,000 Washington residents commute to Portland for jobs. Retaining access for commuters is important to support employment growth in Oregon.
- Increased spillover traffic from I-5 on parallel arterials such as Martin Luther King Blvd., and Interstate Avenue will adversely impact neighborhoods and will diminish the opportunities for more neighborhood business development in these areas.
- Increased congestion on arterial roads through the industrial corridor leading to and from I-5 will dampen the region's ability to meet its job growth goals in the North Portland and Vancouver industrial areas.
- Traffic avoiding congestion on I-5 is overloading I-205, which limits opportunities for continued growth in the I-205 Corridor.
- Congestion at the Interstate Bridge threatens development in downtown Vancouver. Such development is critical to increasing employment in Clark County and therefore reducing demand for commuting trips to Oregon.

# 3 WHAT IMPROVEMENTS ARE NEEDED?

Leadership Committee Findings:

## 1. Doing only the currently planned projects in the corridor is unacceptable.

- Without additional transportation investments, congestion on I-5 and corridor arterials will greatly increase. This will dramatically affect access to important port and industrial property, and access to jobs and housing in the bi-state region.

## 2. The magnitude of the problem requires new freight and passenger capacity across the Columbia River.

- Addressing congestion in the corridor will require addressing the bottleneck created by the existing Columbia River Bridge.



## 3. The complexity of the problem requires that the new capacity be multi-faceted.

- It should include highway, transit, rail, and demand management, while also supporting the vitality of the river-based economy.



*"Our regional ability to meet every other social, economic, and environmental challenge depends on economic*

*strength, and our economic strength absolutely depends on efficient, multi-mode freight transport throughout the I-5 Corridor."*

- Bill Maris

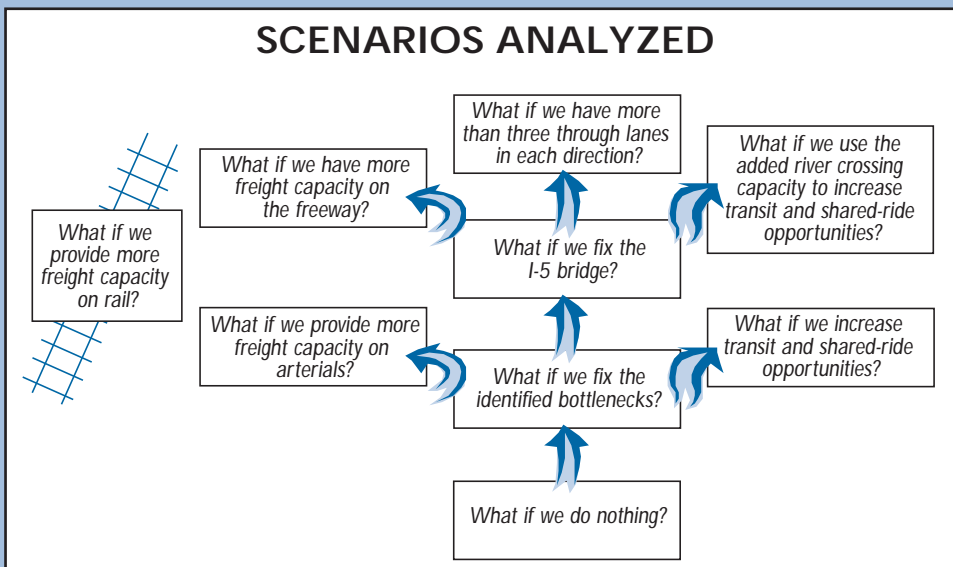
## 4. The region should maximize the capacity of the existing system.

- This can be accomplished by encouraging demand and traffic management strategies, including transit, car-pooling, flex time, ramp metering, and incident response.

The Leadership Committee analyzed seven improvement scenarios. These scenarios were designed to evaluate concepts that can be developed further in the next phase of the study.

The Leadership Committee began by looking at the four bottlenecks on the freeway today. The next scenarios added freight, transit, and highway crossings across the river. The last scenarios built on fixing

the I-5 bridge to add freight, freeway, and transit capacity. The Committee also looked at improving freight rail (see "I-5 Trade Corridor Study Final Report" for more information).



Analyzing these scenarios helped the Leadership Committee to make its findings regarding improvements needed for the corridor.

More work with the community, interest groups, and the region's transportation policy-makers will be needed to determine the specific improvements and corridor management techniques that should be selected for the corridor. This work will be done in the next phase of the I-5 Trade Corridor Study.



"The cure is not simply additional freeway capacity...a concerted, integrated, and intermodal effort is required."

- Bill Hutchison



**5. The region's decision-makers should begin now to pursue a phased approach to addressing freight and passenger mobility in the I-5 Trade Corridor.**

- The building blocks we recommend for further evaluation (not in order) should be:
  - Improving two-lane bottlenecks on I-5 at:
    - the Rose Quarter and Delta Park in Oregon, and
    - downtown Vancouver and 99th-134th in Washington.
  - Providing new highway and transit capacity across the Columbia River and in the I-5 corridor.
  - Improving critical freight arterials in the corridor such as Marine Drive and Columbia Boulevard.
  - Improving the freight rail system in the corridor, in cooperation with the private operators of the rail system.
  - The cost of individual improvements ranges from a few million dollars to several hundred



million. Together the cost of these elements could exceed \$1 billion. While this is a significant cost, not addressing the problems identified will have significant impacts on the region's economy and quality of life.



**6. Even with the above improvements there will be a capacity problem.**

- It is important for the future economic health of the region to look at other solutions including:
  - Managing additional demand through peak-hour pricing of new capacity.
  - Instituting measures that would promote transportation-efficient development, including a better balance of housing and jobs on both sides of the river.
  - Providing for further, longer-term highway express or HOV lane capacity in the corridor.



**Leadership Committee Findings:**

**1. Funding for major improvements in the I-5 Trade Corridor cannot be accomplished with existing resources.**

- The transportation needs in the Portland/Vancouver region far exceed available funding.
- In the Portland metropolitan area, the Regional Transportation Plan identifies almost \$7 billion in high priority needs over the next 20 years, yet only \$1 billion in state, federal, regional, and local transportation revenue is available.

*"This is a very challenging problem – the scarcity of funds, both federal and state, makes it even more difficult. We have to be creative."*

- Peter Bennett

- In Clark County, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan identifies approximately \$2 billion in needs over the next 20 years, yet only \$500 million in state, federal, regional and local transportation revenue is available. Ballot measures in both states have and could reduce available transportation measures even further.

*"The tax structures are very different on either side of the river. Portland and Vancouver must work together to develop a consolidated approach to the solution."*

- Anthony Ching



**2. The region should advocate strongly for federal participation in funding improvements in the corridor.**

- The I-5 Trade Corridor is a critical link in this nation's freight movement network.
- There is a national interest in ensuring that goods can continue to move through the corridor in an efficient and effective manner.
- Therefore, the region should seek funding to the fullest extent possible from all appropriate federal highway, transit, and rail programs authorized by Congress.

**3. Assuming the current structure of public funding, tolling will be required to pay for a new Columbia River crossing and other corridor improvements.**

- Improvements in the I-5 Trade Corridor are likely to be costly, particularly if a new crossing of the Columbia River is pursued.



- Funding for such bridges has historically been provided through tolls. This continues to be a viable means of financing such improvements.
- The region should consider tolls on other bi-state facilities if it is necessary to balance the traffic flow.

**4. Both states should make funding of infrastructure improvements in the corridor a priority.**

- Trade activity in the corridor benefits all of Oregon and Washington. Both state legislatures need to recognize the importance of this corridor and consider allocation of transportation and general funds to fund improvements.

*"The region's ability to develop, finance, and implement a strategic multi-modal transportation plan for this corridor will be the key to maintaining the livability and economic vitality of our area."*

- Wesley Hickey



**5. Private financing should be sought where appropriate.**

- There may be certain projects such as improvements to the freight rail system where funding should come primarily from the private sector.
- Further work will need to be done to identify specific freight rail needs in the corridor.



**Leadership Committee Findings:**

**1. The Portland/Vancouver region needs to develop a Strategic Plan for improvements in the I-5 Trade Corridor.**

- The Leadership Committee has identified the need for a multi-faceted solution in the I-5 Trade Corridor, including demand management techniques and improvements to the highway, transit, and rail system.
- The Strategic Plan should be developed with extensive citizen and resource agency participation in both states, and it needs to fully evaluate the environmental and social impacts of potential improvements.
- The specific improvements in the corridor and their phasing will need to be identified and formally accepted into the regional transportation plans in the Portland and Vancouver metropolitan areas.
- The Strategic Plan must take into account and be coordinated with

*"We need a united effort by Portland and Vancouver—both Oregon and Washington—to lead us to a solution."*



- Vern Ryles

*"Our planning needs to continue to support a balance of jobs and housing – this transportation corridor is a critical piece of that puzzle."*



- Carl Talton

regional economic development, transportation, and other relevant plans.

**2. The Strategic Plan should address several areas, including the following:**

- Highway, transit, and rail improvements in the corridor.
- Education and outreach about the critical nature of improvements in the corridor.
- Demand management techniques for the corridor.
- Local and regional land use impacts of corridor improvements in each state.
- Environmental effects of corridor improvements.
- Public/private partnerships that may accelerate improvements in the corridor.
- A finance plan for corridor improvements.

*"Yes, there are real constraints, but we can no longer put our head in the sand. We must think creatively and we must act now."*



- Keith Thomson

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**

- Interstate 5 is the primary economic lifeline on the West Coast. The most economically significant segment of I-5 in the Portland/Vancouver region is in North Portland and Vancouver, where the freeway intersects with the Columbia River. Here, the Interstate provides access to deep-water shipping, up-river barging, and two water-level transcontinental rail lines.
- Interstate 5 is currently the most congested segment of the regional freeway system in the Portland/Vancouver area. Without attention, future congestion in this important transportation corridor threatens the livability and economic promise of the Portland/Vancouver region.
- To maintain the economic competitiveness of the Portland/Vancouver region, and to maintain the high quality of life, this region needs to develop a Strategic Plan for managing demand in the I-5 Trade Corridor and making a balanced set of improvements in the corridor. To keep up with mobility needs in the corridor there must be highway, transit, and freight and passenger rail improvements, along with demand management. No single strategy will solve the problems in the corridor. There is no silver bullet.
- Improvements in the corridor will be costly and most cannot be funded with existing transportation revenue. It is possible, however, to fund public improvements in the I-5 Trade Corridor with a combination of federal funds, tolling, and state funding from Oregon and Washington.

**3. The region's local, state, and federal officials must work together to advocate for improvements in the corridor.**

ensure that the I-5 Trade Corridor, and the Columbia River Crossing issue in particular, is a priority for both states.

- The problem and the solutions we have identified will require cooperation at all levels of government in both states to

**PROJECT TIMELINE**

Phase/Task	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Phase 1: Corridor Planning	[Bar spanning 1999-2001]					
Task 1: Freight Feasibility and Needs Assessment	[Bar spanning 1999-2000]					
Task 2: Corridor Development & Management Plan		[Bar spanning 2000-2001]				
Phase 2: Project Development				[Bar spanning 2002-2004]		



## PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

Oregon Department of Transportation  
Washington State Department of Transportation  
City of Vancouver  
City of Portland  
Metro  
Regional Transportation Council  
Port of Vancouver  
Port of Portland  
Tri-Met  
C-TRAN

**QUESTIONS?** For further information or for a copy of the I-5 Trade Corridor Study Final Report call:



**Dan Layden, ODOT**  
123 N.W. Flanders,  
Portland, OR 97209  
(503) 731-8565  
daniel.f.layden@odot.state.or.us



**Brian McMullen, WSDOT**  
4200 Main Street  
Vancouver, WA 98663  
(360) 905-2055  
mcmullb@wsdot.wa.gov



## PORTLAND/VANCOUVER I-5 TRADE CORRIDOR STUDY

### SUMMARY REPORT

December 1999

*Interstate 5 is congested now and will be more congested in the future.*

*What transportation strategies should be considered for the I-5 Trade Corridor?*



Printed on recycled paper