

## WHAT DID THEY SAY?

*Highlights of Leadership Committee Findings, Stakeholder Interviews, the Public Opinion Survey, and Feedback from the Community Forum and the public.*

*February 20, 2001*

### Introduction

The purpose of the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership is to develop a bi-state strategic plan for managing and improving the I-5 corridor between I-84 in Oregon and I-205 in Washington. This public planning effort was initiated in response to recommendations of a bi-state Leadership Committee. The Leadership Committee consisted of 14 business and civic representatives; they met over a nine-month period in 1999 to determine whether, for the sake of trade, the problems and potential solutions in this corridor merit conducting a full-scale study of the alternatives.

This document presents highlights of the findings of the Leadership Committee in December 1999, responses from a series of Stakeholder Interviews that were conducted in the summer of 2000, responses of a telephone public opinion survey that was conducted in the summer of 2000, the input of Community Forum members and the public in January and February 2001. For a brief description of these groups see the "Additional Background" section on page 12.

The highlights are organized around the following questions:

- 1) What is the magnitude of the problem?
- 2) What are the costs of inaction?
- 3) What are your concerns if action is taken? (asked of Community Forum and the public only)
- 4) What improvements are needed?
- 5) How can they be funded?
- 6) What are the next steps? (asked of Leadership Committee and Stakeholders only)

# Highlights of Results

## ***Leadership Committee Highlights on #1***

- (1) The Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor is critical to regional, state, and national economies.
- (2) I-5 is a critical chokepoint; without attention, it will only become worse in the future.

## ***Stakeholder Interviews Highlights on #1***

- Community and business members alike refer to this corridor as the “life line” of the community.
  - Industry representatives stress that all forms of shipping meet in the corridor
- Community members rely on the corridor “twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week,” as workweek commuters and to reach services, recreational areas, shopping and event facilities.

## ***Opinion Survey Highlights on #1***

- Respondents’ concerns about transportation problems are at a level with education quality and funding, sprawl and crime. 85% of respondents felt that problems in this corridor are serious to very serious, and more residents named I-5 than any other facility as the most congested, overcrowded segment of the area’s freeway system

## ***Opinion Community Forum and Public Highlights on #1***

The general consensus of the Community Forum and the public was that the problems in the corridor are significant.

The Community Forum spent significant time discussing the problem and identified two primary ways in which the problem impacts the community:

- Quality of Life - Quality of life concerns included such factors as congestion in the corridor results in spillover traffic in neighborhoods, encroaches on family time, increase stress, increased accidents, and negative impacts on alternative modes of transportation.
- Economic - Concern was expressed about the cost of congestion to the trucking industry, the increased cost of goods to consumers due to congestion, the heavy trade dependence of the region.

Several reasons for the problem were identified by the Community Forum including:

- Jobs/housing Imbalance in Clark County - there is an increased need for commuting between Portland and Clark County because there are not enough jobs in the County for the number of residents living in the area.



- Differential Taxation - increased use of the bi-state transportation system results from the fact that Washington has a sales tax and Oregon doesn't, creating an incentive for Southwest Washington residents to shop in Oregon.
- Lack of Alternatives in the Corridor - while there is bi-state transit service there are too few options to driving in the corridor.
- Constraints of the Corridor - the corridor passes through a built environment, this section of the corridor is the hub of much transportation activity, and there are parts of the system that create bottlenecks that cause congestion such as the Interstate bridge and some interchanges.

A few of the comments from the Community Forum participants indicated that some members do not believe there is a significant problem in the corridor. Those expressing this view say that the problem will be self-correcting.. People will find other ways to get around. They point out that other congested cities have continued to thrive economically.

## **Question 2: What are the costs of inaction?**

### ***Leadership Committee Highlights on #2***

- (1) Without improvements, future congestion in the I-5 corridor threatens the economic promise of the Portland/Vancouver region.
  - (a) 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.
  - (b) 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.
  - (c) 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.
  - (d) 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/Vancouver region.
  - (a) 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. Almost 50,000 Clark County residents are employed in Oregon and commute to work. Retaining access for commuters is important to support employment growth in Oregon.
  - (b) Increased spillover traffic from I-5 on parallel arterials, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Interstate Avenue, will adversely impact neighborhoods and will diminish the opportunities for more neighborhood business development in these areas.



- (c) 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.
- (d) Traffic avoiding congestion on I-5 is overloading I-205, which limits opportunities for continued growth in the I-205 corridor.
- (e) 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.

### ***Stakeholder Interviews Highlights on #2***

Again consistent with the Leadership Committee findings, the majority of stakeholders interviewed stressed that congestion and the unpredictable nature of the corridor pose a serious and growing problem for the region and that action should rank at or near the top of the region's transportation priorities. Most interviewees pointed to the growth in commuters as the primary source of the problem, but many also discussed the growth in shipping. The key costs of inaction cited by interviewees were:

1. Economic health and livability will suffer if we don't provide trucks and commuters with more direct and timely routes to their destinations.
2. Specific problem spots – such as where the number of freeway lanes decreases from three to two lanes and the Interstate Bridge – are the primary cause of congestion and will get worse with time.
3. Environmental and livability issues will be of great concern to the community. The most common neighborhood-related problem cited was the growing presence of freeway-related freight and commuter traffic on residential streets and local arterials. Other concerns cited included noise and air pollution resulting from heavy traffic.
4. If the transportation infrastructure is not put in place, many feel the region can not achieve its land use plans on either side of the river – neither for the commercial areas in the downtowns and Lloyd Center, nor for the industrial areas.

Although most interviewees focused on the problems that need to be addressed, some were equally or more concerned about the potential consequences of action, particularly displacements, air quality, noise and land use impacts.

### ***Opinion Survey Highlights on #2***

Most Opinion Survey respondents felt there are economic impacts of the corridor problems and many feel there are personal impacts.

- A very high percentage agreed that freight movement and trade in the corridor is important to the economy, and most felt that the economy would be hurt if congestion is not addressed.
- Most respondents from the corridor felt that the problems in the corridor did impact them personally. Regional respondents were more evenly divided.
- More than not, respondents to the Opinion Survey felt that finding a solution to transportation problems would not create problems for the environment, their neighborhood, or population growth.

### ***Opinion Community Forum and Public Highlights on #2***

The Community Forum spent significant time discussing this question. Like the Leadership Committee, the Community Forum identified the impact to the economy as significant. The most prevalent concern was the impact of congestion on the ability to attract and retain high quality jobs.

In addition, they also highlighted several other impacts of not addressing the problem including:

- Quality of life and social impacts - Concerns centered on more cut through traffic in neighborhoods, loss of mobility, and less time with family. The social implications from this were identified as more road rage, stress, loss of community and isolation.
- Increased costs - Concern that the longer the problems go unaddressed the more costly it will be to solve them.
- Impact on emergency services - Concern that emergency response (fire, police, ambulance) would be impaired without action.

Again, there was a portion of the group who believed that doing nothing in the corridor might be a positive step. Their view was that the congestion in the corridor would cause people to start changing the commuting patterns, mode of travel and location of home and job.

### **Question 3: What are your concerns if action is taken?**

#### ***Community Forum and Public Highlights on #3***

As this project moved into the public planning phase, the Community Forum members and the public were asked to identify their concerns about taking action in the corridor. This question was asked to assist the Task Force in their deliberations about options that should be considered in the corridor and how those options should be evaluated.

The Community Forum and the public identified several areas of concern:

- Neighborhood and Community Impacts - concern about housing and business displacement due to construction of new transportation facilities.
- Environmental, Historical and Cultural Impacts - Concern about environmental impacts such as noise, air pollution, storm water runoff, and concern about the impacts to historic and cultural resources in Vancouver (downtown, Fort Vancouver, Pearson Airpark).
- Cost - Concerns in this area surround how much will improvements cost and who will pay, and what are the tradeoffs in terms of other public activities such as funding for parks, police and community development.
- Land Use and Growth Impacts - Concern that certain improvements could encourage sprawl, and draw more people to the region.



- Multi-Modal Options - Concern that this process will only focus on cars and not focus on demand management and alternative modes of transportation.
- Highway Capacity - Concern about the ability to control congestion, that no matter how much road capacity is provided it will be quickly filled up again.
- Ability to Implement - Concern about the political will to take action in the corridor and the ability to get the public to support the plan.
- Construction Impacts - Concern about construction disruptions to neighborhoods and stress on people stuck in construction delays.
- Scope and Coordination Issues - Concern that the scope of the project may be too small, and that a more regional approach to solving transportation problems is warranted. A concern that the project will not look at the big picture.

In the public meetings there were also several people who were concerned about the expansion of the light rail system. Their concern is about the ability of light rail to reduce congestion and the cost of the improvements.

#### **Question 4: What improvements are needed?**

##### ***Leadership Committee Highlights on #4***

- (1) Doing only the currently planned projects in the corridor is unacceptable because congestion on I-5 and corridor arterials will greatly increase. This will dramatically affect access to important port and industrial property and to jobs and housing.
- (2) The magnitude of the problem requires new freight and passenger capacity across the Columbia River and this requires addressing the current Interstate Bridge bottleneck.
- (3) The complexity of the problem requires that the new capacity be multi-faceted; including highway, transit, rail, and demand management, while also supporting the vitality of the river-based economy.
- (4) The region should maximize the capacity of the existing system by encouraging demand and traffic management strategies, including transit, car-pooling, flex time, ramp metering, and incident response.
- (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.
- (6) The building blocks we recommend for further evaluation (not in order) should be:
  - (i) Improving bottlenecks and weaving problems on I-5 at:
    - (1) the Rose Quarter and Delta Park in Oregon
    - (2) downtown Vancouver and 99<sup>th</sup> to 134<sup>th</sup> in Washington

- (ii) Providing new highway and transit capacity across the Columbia River and in the I-5 corridor.
- (iii) Improving critical freight arterials in the corridor such as Marine Drive and Columbia Boulevard.
- (iv) Improving the freight rail system in the corridor, in cooperation with private rail operators.

#### ***Stakeholder Interviews Highlights on #4***

In the Stakeholder Interviews, opinions about how to address the problem were diverse; however, most people agreed that long-term strategies must be multifaceted and include a combination of transit and road improvements.

In response to a list of potential strategies, most people felt bottlenecks should be a priority. There was also considerable support for expanding or replacing the existing bridge. Other solutions that had less consistent support were building a new bridge in a different corridor, adding a fourth lane, and demand management. Congestion pricing received the least support, but those who did support it felt strongly about it.

Transit improvements were supported by most of the interviewees. However, some believed that alternative transportation systems have been promoted at the expense of necessary road improvements.

A range of additional options for addressing congestion in the corridor were suggested, including reversible traffic lanes, truck-only lanes, and shifting jobs to Vancouver. The creation of a bridge west of the Interstate Bridge and building a bridge for freight, were also common suggestions.

#### ***Opinion Survey Highlights on #4***

Results of the Opinion Survey, consistent with the Leadership Committee and Stakeholder interviews, indicate that people support a mix of solutions. *The four most-supported options were the same across all groups and subgroups:*

- Fixing bottlenecks and adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> lane
- Adding transit
- Providing a combination of road and transit improvements
- Providing incentives to reduce peak hour commutes.

In addition, more than half of respondents in both the regional and corridor groups supported adding a fourth travel lane in each direction and widening or replacing the Interstate Bridge.

The two preferred options for how new freeway lanes would be used were (1) allowing all vehicles to use a new added lane and (2) using the new added lane as an HOV lane during rush hour.

Additionally, one of the areas explored with respondents was transit options for the I-5 corridor. The clear choice in the regional and corridor groups was extending light rail to Vancouver; with 50% or more agreeing in both groups and in the corridor subgroups. Good bus service between



the light rail line and Vancouver and more express bus service on the freeway were other options.

#### ***Opinion Community Forum and Public Highlights on #4***

The Community Forum and the public identified several actions that should be considered for the corridor. Like the Leadership Committee there was an emphasis that some actions do not necessarily involve construction in the corridor. Non-construction suggestions included:

- Education of the public about viable options to driving
- Demand management as a way to manage the corridor to get the most out of the system now and the future.
- Incentives both for individuals and businesses to influence the time and mode of travel through the corridor.
- Changes land use zoning to minimize the need to drive long distances and to limit sprawl.
- Technology solutions to manage traffic through driver information systems, good incident management and better coordination of truck deliveries.
- Encouraging the development of more jobs in Vancouver to reduce the need to use the bi-state transportation facilities.
- Congestion pricing as a tool to manage demand of the road at peak periods.

Consistent with the Leadership Committee, the Community Forum and the public comments did emphasize that actions in the corridor should be multi-modal in nature (highway, transit, rail). Among the suggestions were:

- Transit and Commuter Rail Improvements: suggestions included light rail to Vancouver both on I-5 and I-205, express bus between the two states, commuter rail during peak periods, monorail, personal rapid transit, privatized transit, jitneys, and additional park and ride opportunities.
- Highway Improvements: suggestions included fixing bottlenecks, reversible lanes, high occupancy vehicle lanes throughout the corridor, a new transportation corridor, improvements to increase access to industrial areas such as Swan Island and Albina Rail yards.
- New Crossings of the Columbia River - suggestions for crossing the Columbia River included new highway/transit bridge, new heavy rail truck bridge, add lanes to the existing Interstate Bridge, add heavy rail bridge capacity, tunnels, new local bridge between Hayden Island and Vancouver and a new bridge for HOV, light rail, freight, bikes and pedestrians.



- Navigational Changes - suggestions included changes to the navigational channel between I-5 bridge and the railroad bridge so the Interstate bridge doesn't have to be raised so often, Columbia River channel deepening so port activities are not transferred to the highway, and the establishment of ferry service.
- Bike and Pedestrian Improvements - suggestions surrounded enhanced safety and convenience of alternative modes, on the Interstate Bridge.

### **Question 5: How can the improvements be funded?**

#### ***Leadership Committee Highlights on #5***

- (1) Funding for major improvements in the I-5 Trade Corridor cannot be accomplished with existing resources. 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 is available. In Clark County, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan identifies approximately \$2 billion in needs over the next 20 years, yet only \$500 million is available. Ballot measures in both states have and could reduce available transportation measures even further.
- (2) The region should advocate strongly for federal participation, to the fullest extent possible, in funding improvements in the corridor.
- (3) Assuming the current structure of public funding, tolling will be required to pay for a new Columbia River crossing and other corridor improvements. Funding for such bridges has historically been provided through tolls. The region should consider tolls on other bi-state facilities if necessary to balance the traffic flow.
- (4) Both states should make funding of infrastructure improvements in the corridor a priority and the legislatures need to recognize the importance of this corridor and consider allocation of transportation and general funds to fund improvements.
- (5) Private financing should be sought where appropriate, such as improvements to the freight rail system where funding should come primarily from the private sector for specific freight rail needs that will be identified after future study.

#### ***Stakeholder Interviews Highlights on #5***

The Leadership Committee Findings are consistent with the major themes from the Stakeholder Interviews regarding funding.

- User-pay approaches to funding improvements were widely supported, but there were critical distinctions made about which users should pay. Tolls were the most common suggestion, but many believed that tolls should be placed on both bridges in order to be effective.
- Other user-pay suggestions included employer taxes and fees targeted at the freight industry.
- There were concerns that tolls would have a negative impact on low-income users and small businesses or that they would not be equitable.
- Some people suggested that gas taxes would be a more equitable approach and would encourage use of alternative transit.

- Other ideas included creating a sales tax in Oregon or creating transportation tax zones in the Portland and Vancouver metropolitan areas to raise funds. Clear accountability is seen as critical with any funding.

### ***Opinion Survey Highlights on #5***

For the Survey, respondents were read a number of statements dealing with funding transportation solutions. Nearly half of regional respondents and more than half of corridor respondents agreed that Oregon and Washington have enough money to pay for improving transportation problems in the corridor, although 16% in the regional group were neutral. At the same time, nearly two-thirds in both groups agreed new funding will be needed to pay for a solution, while two-thirds also disagreed that we should get used to congestion rather than increasing taxes. The findings seemed to indicate some ambivalence about bridge user fees among a variety of subgroups in the regional survey, although on average more than half agreed with the concept.

### ***Opinion Community Forum and Public Highlights on #5***

Several funding suggestions were made by the Community Forum and the public. The ideas fall into four general categories:

- State: Suggestions included use of existing gas tax, vehicle registration fee and weight mile taxes, increases in those same taxes, new taxes such as vehicle miles traveled tax, a gas guzzler tax, parking taxes, sales tax in Oregon, auto excise taxes, tax windfall profits on oil companies, and Oregon income tax proceeds from Washington residents who work in Oregon.
- Regional: regional bond levy, regional transportation tax, property tax, additional port taxes
- Federal funds: grant funds from the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration.
- User fees: tolling, local improvement districts, impact fees
- Private: funds from private railroad companies

There was also a message of accountability present at the Community Forum meeting: ensuring that existing transportation funds are used wisely by state and regional governments.

## **Question 6: Next steps?**

### ***Leadership Committee Highlights on #6***

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



- (a) 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.
  - (b) 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.
  - (c) 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.
  - (d) The Strategic Plan must take into account and be coordinated with regional economic development, transportation, and other relevant plans.
- (2) The Strategic Plan should address several areas, including:
- (a) Highway, transit, and rail improvements in the corridor.
  - (b) Education and outreach about the critical nature of improvements in the corridor.
  - (c) Demand management techniques for the corridor.
  - (d) Local and regional land-use impacts of corridor improvements in each state.
  - (e) Environmental effects of corridor improvements.
  - (f) Public/private partnerships that may accelerate improvements in the corridor.
  - (g) A finance plan for corridor improvements.
- (3) The region's local, state, and federal officials must work together to make the I-5 Trade Corridor improvements a priority, especially the Columbia River Crossing issue.

### ***Stakeholder Interviews Highlights on #6***

While consistent overall with the Leadership Committee Findings, the Stakeholder Interviews revealed a few process concerns. The Interviews identified a need for the public to understand the connection between trucks on the road and the availability of goods in their communities. Also, neighborhoods in Vancouver and North/Northeast Portland expressed concern about the potential for displacement of homes and businesses. In North/Northeast Portland there was a stated desire to see added tangible community benefits in terms of economic opportunities. Various interviewees had concerns both about public agencies' abilities to use funds accountably, and having leadership that could successfully build consensus.

## **Additional Background**

The public planning process known as the Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership was initiated following the recommendations by the Leadership Committee in December 1999 which recommended that plan be developed for managing and improving the Portland/Vancouver I-5 corridor. In response to this recommendation, the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation had a series of stakeholder interviews and a public opinion survey conducted to inform the initial discussions about developing such a plan. The stakeholder interviews and public opinion survey are described in more detail below:

### ***Stakeholder Interviews***

In September and October of 2000, Jeanne Lawson Associates and The JD White Company conducted about 70 interviews with stakeholders and opinion leaders. These represented a wide range of interests, including: community groups and neighborhoods; local business, shipping and trade; civic groups; and environmental and other advocacy groups.

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about: the role and importance of the corridor; the nature of the corridor problems; how those problems may be addressed; key issues to consider; and funding.

Highlights of the key messages that emerged from those interviews are included in this document. For more detailed information see the *Summary of Stakeholder Interviews* (available on the website – [www.I-5partnership.com](http://www.I-5partnership.com)) or by contacting the project team.

### ***Public Opinion Survey***

Davis & Hibbitts, Inc. (DHI) conducted two telephone surveys, one was regional (the four-county metro area), and one was for the corridor. Both included residents on both sides of the Columbia River. This was the first of a multi-phase public opinion, research project. With 900 people surveyed, there is a 95% probability that the results of the sample taken are accurate. The survey questions did not include any specific cost estimates or information on environmental, economic or neighborhood impacts of proposed solutions. These and other factors have been shown to influence public opinion. Highlights of the survey are included. For more information see the *I-5 Trade Corridor Baseline Survey Report* (available on the website – [www.I-5partnership.com](http://www.I-5partnership.com)) or by contacting the project team.

A description of the Community Forum and the public meetings is provided below.

### ***Community Forum and Public Feedback***

In January 2001, the public planning process known as the Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership was initiated. The I-5 Partnership Task Force established a large stakeholder group (approx. 80 members) called the Community Forum to give the Task Force feedback as the strategic plan for the corridor is developed. The Community Forum consists of business, community,



neighborhood and environmental interests. On January 27, 2001 the Task Force and the Community Forum held their first joint meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to learn about the project, to learn about the corridor and to get input from the Community Forum about problems in the corridor, potential solutions and funding suggestions and potential concerns about action in the corridor. The week of February 5, 2001, four public meetings were held in Portland and Vancouver to get the same input from interested members of the public. Approximately 100 people attended the public meetings.

