

Purpose and Need – Internal Review Draft 2

Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide more transportation capacity across the Columbia River between Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington, within the existing corridors, to improve mobility and access for people and goods.

Need for the Proposed Action

System Linkage

The Columbia River crossings between Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington provide a critical link connecting all of the region's industrial, commercial and residential development. The crossings provide access to the Columbia River Ports of Portland and Vancouver and to Portland International Airport. The crossings provide a critical link for people and goods movement between the states of Oregon and Washington, well beyond the immediate region. Interstate-5 runs from the Canadian border to the Mexican border, through Washington, Oregon and California and is a major north-south trade route.

Capacity and Demand

Average daily traffic across the I-5 bridge crossing in 2000 was 125,000 vehicles including 10,000 trucks. Currently, the I-5 bridges operate at peak capacity for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. Demand in 2020 is projected to be 180,000 vehicles a day, lengthening both the morning and afternoon peak periods to four hours each.

The I-205 bridge in 2000 carried 132,000 vehicles including 7,800 trucks daily and is also approaching capacity.

The nearest parallel river crossings are approximately 50 miles up and down-river (100+ mile round trip) and do not provide alternatives for the I-5/I-205 corridor.

The lengthening of the bridge peaks affects trucking, narrowing the off-peak window for truck operations. The I-5 bridges are lift-span and open for barge traffic 20-30 times per month, in off-peak periods, bringing all traffic to a halt. Currently traffic takes 25 to 30 minutes to clear after a bridge span lift; it is projected that by 2020 it will take 30-35 minutes for the northbound queue to clear and 50-60 minutes for the southbound queue.

With no alternate routes, a traffic incident in the river crossing corridor results in gridlock across the region; this happens almost daily.

The railroad bridge is the only railroad crossing of the Columbia River within 90 miles (one-way). Currently, 63 freight trains and 10 passenger trains cross the river daily. Yard capacity on both sides of the river is currently the greatest limitation on total rail capacity in the corridor. The average delay per train is 41 minutes.

Transit travel times across the river are expected to grow, under no-build conditions, from approximately 27 minutes in 2000 to 55 minutes in 2020, with commensurate increases in transit operating costs.

Project Status

The first Columbia River bridge between Portland, Oregon and Vancouver, Washington opened in 1917 with a toll of five cents. The bridge was the property of Multnomah and Clark Counties, on either side of the river. In 1929 the two states acquired the bridge, removed the tolls, and paid off the remainder of the bonds with tax dollars. In 1958 a parallel bridge opened – splitting northbound and southbound traffic. In 1960, after refurbishment of the original bridge, tolls were reinstated to pay off the new bonds. In 1967 the debt was retired and the tolls ended.

The second Columbia River vehicle crossing between Portland and Vancouver is the Glenn Jackson I-205 bridge to the east of the I-5 bridges, which opened in 1982 and has always been toll free.

A two-track railroad bridge, now owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) also crosses the river, just to the west of the I-5 bridge. It originally opened in 1908.

The 87 years since the first highway bridge opened has been one of tremendous growth in the region – in population, economic activity, and travel. The corridor is one of the nation's most important north-south links and one of a few continuous border-to-border trade routes. Today, the river crossing is increasingly a regional and national bottleneck.

In 1999 the governors of the two states appointed a bi-state leadership committee to examine the problems in the I-5 Trade Corridor and to recommend next steps. In its *Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor Study Summary Report* published in December 1999, the committee concluded:

- Doing only the current planned projects in the Corridor is unacceptable.
- The magnitude of the problem requires new freight and passenger capacity across the Columbia river.
- Funding for major improvements cannot be accomplished within existing resources.

The committee recommended the Portland/Vancouver region initiate a public process to develop a strategic plan for improvements in the corridor that:

- Is multi-modal;
- Includes new funding mechanisms; and
- Considers land use, providing a better balance between housing and jobs on both sides of the river.

The partners in the Trade Corridor Study included both states, the two metropolitan planning organizations, the two ports, and the cities and counties on each side of the bridge. The partners acted on the committee's recommendations by forming the *Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership*.

A 28-member bi-state task force, again appointed by the two governors, led the partnership's work. The task force, comprised of appointed and elected officials, and business and community representatives, completed and adopted a *Final Strategic Plan* in 2002. Echoing the conclusions of the previous work, the *Strategic Plan* finds:

- Doing nothing in the I-5 Corridor is unacceptable.
- There must be a multi-modal solution, there is no silver bullet.

- Paying for improvements will require new funds – tolls are not new; tolls were used to construct the original I-5 bridges.
- The region must promote transportation-efficient development.

The *Strategic Plan* defines a Bridge Influence Area as the I-5 corridor, between Columbia Blvd in Oregon and SR 500 in Vancouver. Plan recommendations address transit, highway and bridge capacity, rail capacity, land use, transportation system management, transportation demand management, environmental justice and finance.