



Columbia River Crossing Focus Groups

A REPORT FOR

Columbia River Crossing

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This report highlights the findings of two focus groups with Washington and Oregon residents who regularly use the I-5 Interstate Bridge. Conkling Fiskum & McCormick, Inc. (CFM), a public affairs, strategic communications and research firm located in Portland, Oregon, conducted the study. The objectives were to assess awareness of proposed changes to the I-5 bridge corridor between Interstate Blvd. in North Portland and SR 500 in Vancouver, to learn what changes are most important to commuters, discuss funding options to pay for construction, including tolling, and assess expectations of the benefits that should result from improvements to I-5 and bridges across the Columbia River.

The sessions were held in a focus group facility on January 17th, 2006. A group of Washington commuters met at 6:00 PM and a group of Oregon commuters met at 8:00 PM. Screening questions were used to select individuals who cross the Interstate Bridge along I-5 at least three to five times per week and who are “trusted communicators” – those who are comfortable talking with others about issues. Fourteen people were recruited for each group to ensure at least 8 attended each session. All participants received a \$75 cooperation fee. Tom Eiland, CFM partner and director of research, moderated each session.

SUMMARY

Key findings from focus groups with Washington and Oregon commuters are:

Commuters know improvements are needed in the I-5 corridor.

- Planners won't need to justify why changes in the I-5 Bridge area are being considered.

Residents are frustrated with the delays and congestion in the I-5 corridor between Vancouver and Portland.

- Washington residents are more frustrated than Oregonians, primarily because Clark County residents experience more traffic congestion during peak commuting hours.

Businesses along the I-5 Bridge corridor are probably losing customers and revenues due to the traffic congestion.

- Commuters don't want to stop and shop in the Jantzen Beach area. Traffic congestion adds commuting time and there are perceived safety issues with on-ramps.
- Companies who conduct business between Portland and Vancouver may be modifying their operations to accommodate for traffic delays, particularly during rush hours. More research is needed in the business community to identify how local economies are affected by current I-5 traffic and the potential economic benefits of bridge/road improvements.

Public transportation is a divisive issue.

- Oregon residents want public transit, bikes lanes and pedestrian walkways included in the bridge/highway designs.
- Washington residents don't see the value of public transit and oppose including it in the project

Tolling is an acceptable, and, perhaps, preferred financing option to pay for bridge/highway construction.

- The general consensus is that those who use the bridge should pay for improvements.

- Commuters expect to pay a \$1 to \$2 toll but are uncertain whether the toll should be one way or both ways on the bridge.

Some are concerned that tolling will cause additional traffic delays.

- Many, but not all, participants are familiar with transponder or EZ Pass tolling systems. Residents will need to be informed about the system and why its use will not result in additional traffic delays.

There are mixed opinions about charging tolls on the I-205 Bridge.

- Most say I-5 commuters won't change travel patterns to avoid tolls.
- Lower toll rates on I-205 may be a viable option.

Flexible toll rates, such as premium tolls for express lanes and peak/non-peak tolls, may be acceptable.

People want assurances that tolls will be used as promised.

- Tolls should only be used to pay for I-5 corridor construction.
- A sunset clause for tolls should be considered.

When construction is completed commuters want shorter commute times. At a minimum, they don't want their commute time to increase as population growth in the area continues.

Residents are wary of large projects and the ability of agencies to meet promises. They want project managers to be honest about construction costs, potential delays due to construction and completion dates.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Awareness of Possible Changes to Interstate Bridge and I-5 Corridor

Most respondents have heard that there may be changes to the Interstate Bridge and I-5 corridor between Portland and Vancouver, but few knew any details.

Frequently mentioned changes included:

- Widening I-5 between Vancouver and Portland;
- Widening the I-5 bridge;
- Building a replacement to the I-5 bridge;
- Adding a new bridge in another location;
- Modifying traffic flows; and
- Extending MAX or adding a commuter train to Clark County.

Problems with Current Situation

Both Washington and Oregon residents are frustrated by the traffic delays and congestion in the I-5 bridge corridor. However, tension levels vary dramatically between groups.

Washington residents expressed a much higher level of frustration compared to Oregonians. Most of the Washington participants work in Portland and must travel I-5 during peak commute hours. They are deeply bothered by the congestion, the lack of alternative routes and driving safety issues.

Oregonians are notably less concerned about congestion on I-5 than the Washington group. Delays on I-5 are more of an inconvenience than a major problem. Those who travel this route for work are doing a “reverse commute” and are not impacted by the usual rush hour delays.

Respondents who are not in the workforce (retired or stay-at-home), but still frequently used the I-5 Bridge, show the least concern with issues on I-5. They don’t have to travel at specific times and are usually able to avoid the peak commute hours.

The Washington and Oregon groups mentioned similar concerns with the Interstate Bridge and I-5 corridor. However, the Washington residents expressed a stronger sense of urgency around their concerns.

The length of time required for the commute is a primary issue.

Participants repeatedly expressed concerns and frustrations about how long it takes to get across the bridge and through the I-5 corridor.

"I've heard people say it's more aggravating getting back and forth to work than actually doing their job."

Congestion restricts use. Residents are frustrated that they are unable to travel when they want. The congestion and delays experienced in the I-5 corridor force participants to modify their commute and travel plans, such as leaving for work early or staggering work hours.

"Friends of mine will leave half an hour to an hour earlier so they can get to where they work and sit there for 45 minutes before they begin work, rather than sit in traffic for 45 minutes. It's a lot of time wasted."

"I stagger my [work] hours to avoid traffic. Today, it was a quarter to ten and traffic was still backed up. I can't stagger my hours any more than that."

The lack of alternative routes to I-5 is frustrating. Residents say if there's an accident or other delays along the I-5 corridor, there is no other viable route. Using I-205 is not convenient. The I-205 route adds miles and time for a typical I-5 commuter. On a broader level, people wonder what they would do if a manmade or natural disaster put an I5 bridge out of commission for an extended period of time.

Uncertainty increases anxiety for commuters. Participants said they never know how long their commute will take from day to day. Drawbridge use exacerbates the concern. Commuters expressed anger that the drawbridge would be used during rush hour. Participants don't understand why such an important, heavily used travel route has a drawbridge.

"You don't know how long to plan for. If you have someplace you need to be, you don't want to waste your time by going really early, but if you don't plan ahead, you never know what you're going to run into once you get on there."

Driving safety is an issue. The on and off-ramps near the bridges in Oregon and Washington are dangerous. Participants said the current

design contributes to congestion on I5 and its arteries since drivers are not able to merge at the speed of regularly flowing traffic. The on and off-ramps were described as being too short for safe merging and are confusing for those unfamiliar with the traffic patterns.

"The northbound lane to Camas is totally obsolete. It's a 90-degree exit to get off there. It's dangerous."

"There's no buffer way for the [Jantzen Beach] traffic to flow in and be absorbed into that area to keep it from backing up on the bridge."

"All the on-ramps along the I-5/Delta Park corridor are very poor. You'll sit in them for 30 minutes before you even get to the freeway mess."

Congestion affects business activity. The slow traffic has a negative impact on local businesses. Participants said they are not inclined to stop and shop during rush hours. Others added that friends avoid the Jantzen Beach/Delta Park area to stay out of the traffic. One Washington business owner has to modify her production and delivery schedules for Oregon customers to avoid traffic delays in the corridor.

"I used to stop at Jantzen Beach and do shopping on the way home. I don't do that anymore, because it takes me 45 minutes to get off and another 45 minutes to get back on."

"We try to tell businesses we don't want any emergency work after 2:00. It's going to add at least an hour. We'd have to come from Vancouver, go to Portland, pick up the emergency, bring it back to our shop and take it back sometime later. It would be a lot of commuting for us. We try to do all our running after 8:00 a.m. and before 2:00 p.m., but that's not necessarily possible."

Desired Improvements

Washington and Oregon residents made several similar suggestions about what improvements they'd like to see in the I-5 Bridge corridor.

"The I-5 bridge is obsolete. It was obsolete 20 years ago."

"We live on the east side of 205 and we go across [the bridge] and over to Troutdale. We look back and see what we've traveled to get right across the river. We go all the way over west and come back east. We wish there was another bridge."

Increase highway capacity. Participants said widening the highway and adding lanes would alleviate some of the congestion.

“Expand the highway at the southbound Delta Park area, where it goes down to two lanes. No matter what time of day, that’s a bottleneck.”

Improve the design of the on- and off-ramps. Existing ramps are considered dangerous and poorly designed. They cause traffic congestion.

Some additional ideas mentioned include:

- Modify the traffic flow by adding alternating express lanes similar those in the Seattle area; and
- Build tunnels under the river like those in New York City.

Construct additional bridges across the Columbia. Given the size of Vancouver (geographical area and population), the existing I-5 Bridge is considered too small, obsolete and inadequate. Additional bridges in other locations, such as between the I-5 and I-205 bridges, would relieve congestion and make travel to some areas more convenient.

Eliminate the drawbridge. The use of the drawbridge disrupts traffic flow and is unacceptable to most.

Carpool lanes are not supported. The Washington group discussed carpool lanes as an option, but most viewed them unfavorably. They argued that traffic slows down as a result of many cars crossing lanes, left and right, to enter and exit the carpool lane.

“As soon as they added the carpool lane (in Washington), traffic started backing up.”

There were notable differences between the Washington and Oregon groups when it comes to building capacity versus adding public transportation.

The Washington group was more interested in increasing capacity (both bridge and road). They focused on widening the highway and building more bridges across the Columbia and gave little thought to adding public transportation options.

The Oregon group volunteered public transportation was a viable way to improve traffic. Although they agree that highway and bridge expansion

would help alleviate some traffic problems, they were significantly more interested than Washington residents in improving public transportation between Portland and Vancouver and adding alternative transportation options, such as bike lanes and pedestrian crossings.

Reactions to Transit

The topic of public transit was probed in both groups and there was clearly a major difference of opinion between Washington and Oregon residents.

Washington residents viewed public transit as an uneconomical and ineffective. They said:

Commuters won't use public transit. Participants noted current CTran bus transit options are not widely used by Washington commuters. Washington residents doubt new bus lanes or a MAX extension to Clark County would be widely used.

"If we don't have ridership now, why would we spend billions more?"

Public transit is inconvenient. Washington residents said MAX does not take people where they want to go, unless the destination was downtown or the Lloyd Center. If MAX were extended to Clark County, commuters would still need to walk, or take another bus, to get to their destination. Also, the location for the 'park and rides' is problematic. People don't want to go out of their way to park and then take public transportation.

"The parking and the location of the parking are really important. When I was living in Portland last year, I would have had to go a few miles in the opposite direction to park my car and get on light rail. I tried it and didn't like it."

Recent MAX extension viewed as a failure. Washington residents used the recent MAX extension to Interstate Avenue as the poster child for failed transit planning. They said the extension made traffic worse and businesses on Interstate haven't benefited from the expansion.

"...They'd have to do a much better job than they did on Interstate Avenue. All that has done is added to the traffic problem on Interstate Avenue."

On the other hand, Oregonians support public transit and consider it an inevitable part of any plans for growth. They view public transportation as a long-term investment in improving travel between Portland and Vancouver. They also recognize that Washingtonians don't support the transit option.

Observations about transit among Oregonians include:

Public transit is a part of the culture. Portlanders are accustomed to using public transit options and have realized benefits from using it. They say attitudes in Washington are different.

"I think the culture is really different. Light rail and mass transit is part of our culture and it's not part of theirs."

"She's right when she says the cultures are different as night and day."

Providing transit options is an important part of any growth plan. The Portland area has a history of incorporating transit into development plans and there's a sense that this planning has benefited the area by helping to guide the concentrations of population growth and traffic flows.

Recent MAX extension viewed as a success. Oregon residents said the recent MAX extension to the North is a success. They said the Interstate Avenue expansion has stimulated the local residential housing market and invigorated the area's economy.

"I see where the Interstate MAX goes and that area's booming. I can't believe how fast it's growing."

How to Pay for the Improvements

Respondents in both groups quickly concurred that tolls were the preferred option for paying for bridge/highway construction. There was general agreement that the bridge should be paid for by the people who use it rather than funding it through broader tax measures.

A few other alternatives were mentioned and discussed, but none garnered much support. Other tax options included:

- Increase gas taxes;
- Reinstate the recently eliminated car registration fees in Washington;

- Apply some Washington tax dollars to this project. The general sentiment with the Southwest Washington respondents is that they don't get a lot for their tax dollars; and
- Implement fines or fees on employers for 'rush hour' jobs.

Estimated Toll Amount

When asked how much they expected to pay for a bridge toll, the general consensus was \$1 or \$2. However, there was debate around whether the toll should be collected one way or both ways.

There was surprisingly little debate about the tolling amount. In fact, concerns about delays caused by tolling generated a longer discussion. Some feared the toll collection would cause additional traffic delays and congestion. Participants said they want the collection process to be designed and executed in a way that will not cause traffic delays or increase travel time.

"If they built a new bridge, I'd pay the toll."

"A toll seems like more reason for congestion to me. Where are you going to stop and pay?"

Several participants were not concerned about toll collection, explaining a transponder or "EZ Pass" system would probably be used. They explained transponders in cars would tabulate tolls without commuters slowing or stopping. Some of those concerned about toll collection liked the transponder system after learning more about it. The system is considered a big improvement over the 'old-fashioned' tollbooth collection. Others were still confused by the transponder system and were skeptical about its operation.

Some participants suggested flexible-pricing plans, such as higher tolls for peak travel hours or fee-for-use express lanes, such as the Chicago Skyway. Several participants think some commuters are willing to pay a premium to avoid traffic.

"An EZ Pass it will click off \$2 in rush hour, \$1 in non-rush hour."

A couple of the Washington participants said they would change commuting patterns to avoid paying a toll. Alternatives included using the I-205 Bridge or starting a car pool, if HOV commuters were exempt from tolls. However, most say they would not change their commute just to avoid a \$1 or \$2 toll.

Adding a Toll to I-205

Participants had mixed opinions about tolling both I-5 and I-205.

Some think it's acceptable to toll both bridges since getting across the river is everyone's problem. Participants said everyone who crosses the river should help pay for the solution.

Others are opposed to tolling both bridges. If the problem is the I-5 Bridge, participants said it's unfair to make the I-205 commuters pay for the I-5 problems.

Assuming that both bridges were tolled, commuters were divided about the toll amount that should be charged. Some want the same toll on both bridges with revenues earmarked for new bridge construction. Others would prefer a higher toll on I-5 and have a lower toll on the less congested I-205 Bridge.

More about Tolling

A toll is more palatable when there is a "sunset" clause. Participants advocated for the toll being eliminated when construction costs have been paid. Yet participants were skeptical that government would actually eliminate the toll, even if a sunset were promised.

"I'd be willing to pay a toll if the toll was installed the way the Interstate Bridge toll was installed originally. Once the bridge was paid off, it would be free and clear."

"In New York, the George Washington Bridge started off with a \$0.75 toll. When it was paid off, the toll was supposed to go away. Instead, they tripled it."

Some participants suggested starting to collect tolls now to accelerate construction financing. After some discussion it was evident participants preferred implementing tolling after construction was completed.

"To pay \$2.00 to go over the I-5 Bridge such as it is, you're looking for a riot."

Concerns about Project Administration

The issue of trust was probed when participants expressed skepticism about governments fulfilling promises about construction and tolling. When asked about trust, participants:

Expressed a general lack of confidence in government. They said they didn't know if their tax dollars were being spent well or that promises would be kept.

"I just know I'm not confident that our tax dollars go to what we intended them to go for."

"Administrations change and they change the rules."

Said large government projects have a reputation for being delayed and costing more than originally estimated. Escalating Portland tram construction costs were cited as an example.

"We want the project to be well planned and budgeted – do not go into overrun, don't be like the tram!"

"If they say it's going to cost X amount of dollars, don't come to us and say, "We made a mistake; we're running over budget; now it's going to cost this much."

Wanted assurance the toll revenues would be spent appropriately and effectively.

"You've got the public on your side to institute some form of collecting money....we don't want administrators making \$250,000 salaries....or having \$250,000 parties. We need accountability about who handles the funds."

Expectations from I-5 Bridge and Corridor Improvements

When asked what they expected or hoped to see after the changes had been completed to the I-5 corridor, participants wanted:

A shorter commute time. Several Washington residents want their commute time to be cut in half during peak commute hours.

"From the center of West Vancouver to downtown Portland, you should be able to get there in half an hour."

More choices and routes for commuting. Washingtonians in particular would like to have more options or routes for their commute.

"I'd expect more choices on my way home, rather than just one route. If there's something wrong with one route, I could go over

here without adding an hour to my commute. Or leave my car home and take something else.”

Safer on and off-ramps.

Less congestion on arteries in the I-5 corridor.

Some respondents wanted assurances that construction plans and designs would take into account the region’s forecasted population growth. Participants said planners should account for this growth when they are designing bridges and highways.

“People will continue to move to Vancouver. That will have to be built in as we progress and do more positive things to reduce the time. I still think it will be better, but there will be more people that weren’t there before getting on and off the bridges.

Information sources

When asked about where they get information, the participants in both groups offered a standard list of sources. No new or useful information came from the short discussion. Information sources mentioned were:

- TV news
- Newspapers, including the Oregonian and Columbian
- Radio. Some mention that they listened to the radio a lot when they are commuting.
- Talking with neighbors and colleagues
- Internet

Columbia River Crossing
January 17, 2006
6 PM, Washington Residents, 8PM Oregon Residents

This is [name] from CFM Research. May I please speak with [person on list]?

We are a research firm in Portland, and are recruiting area residents to participate in a focus group on transportation issues related to the I-5 Bridge. Other men and women from your area will be participating. The group will be held in Portland, Tuesday January 17, 2006 at 6 PM (Washington), 8 PM (OREGON). The focus group will last for about 90 minutes and those attending you will be paid \$75. Are you interested in participating in such a session? IF YES CONTINUE.

Great, I have just a few qualifying questions.

1. How often do you travel across the Interstate Bridge along I-5 between Washington, and Oregon? Is it....

At least three to five times/week	CONTINUE
Less than three times/week	TERMINATE
Several times per month	TERMINATE
Several times per year	TERMINATE
Never	TERMINATE

2. Please tell if the following statements describe you (Rotate 1-4. Check all that apply)

1. I tend to talk with friends, family, coworkers and others I know about products I have tried and liked
2. People often come to me for advice
3. I am active in the community, school, volunteer or social groups/organizations
4. I am confident in expressing an opinion to others
5. I generally keep my opinions to myself (TERMINATE)

6. NONE/REFUSED (TERMINATE)

IF TWO OR MORE OF RESPONSES 1 TO 4 CONTINUE. IF ONLY ONE OF FIRST FOUR, TERMINATE.

3. What is your age?

- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64

5. Which of the following ranges best describes your income?

- Less than \$25,000 (TERMINATE)
- \$25,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 or more

6. Gender (by observation)

- Male
- Female

If you have some paper and pencil, I can give you the address of the session. We will also send you a confirmation letter that includes a map. It will be held at Consumer Opinion Research in the Lloyd Center. The address is Suite 2225 Lloyd Center Portland, Oregon 97232. This is on the third floor.

FOR 6PM GROUP: A light meal will be provided.

FOR 8PM GROUP: Snacks and refreshments will be provided.

I would just like to confirm your address so I can send you a letter about the focus group and a map to the facility.

NAME _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ Or _____

PHONE (DAY) _____ NIGHT _____

Discussion Guide CRC
Focus groups, Jan. 17, 2006. 6PM Washington 8PM Oregon

1. First, tell me what you have heard about possible changes to the I5 Bridge over the Columbia River? Where did you hear that?
2. What improvements or changes to the I5 Bridge are most important to you?
 - a. If necessary: Some Washington and Oregon citizens have advocated for transit, including light rail to Clark County, as part of the transportation mix for changes to the I5 bridge? What is your opinion about including transit in the project? Why will people oppose transit as part of the project?
3. There are not enough federal, state and local funds available to pay for improvements to the I5 Bridge and corridor. What other ways should be considered to pay for the project? (MAKE LIST PROBE EACH OPTION. KEEP TOLLING LAST)
4. Let's talk about tolls. You are commuters and use the I5 Bridge frequently. Why would you favor or oppose the use of tolls to fund construction? What is a reasonable toll amount? There are two bridges across the Columbia River, along I5 and I205. Should tolls be instituted on both bridges or not? Why?
 - a. IF Necessary: Tolls will be paid by transponders. EXPLAIN. How does knowing this impact your opinions of tolls?
5. OK. Let's say time has passed and the I5 road and bridge improvements are complete. How would you expect your commute to be different than it is today? Of all the changes to your commute, which is most important to you and why?
6. Where do you get information and news about things going on in your community or daily lives?

Columbia River Crossing
Focus Group
January 17, 2006
6:00 p.m. — Washington

I'm interested in what you've heard about changes in roadways and bridges leading up to I-5 and across the Columbia River.

That I-5 at Delta Park was going to be expanded, but I don't know when. Two or three years out.

I've heard that there are going to be changes with widening from Delta Park through the Interstate bridge. There would be changes to the bridge or widening to the bridge. I don't know beyond that. I heard that from either TV or the Oregonian or the Columbian.

There were a couple of flyers sent maybe just to businesses. My business received one. I don't know if it was business or personal mail. They were looking for opinions. There were meetings and forums. I was busy and wasn't able to attend. They were addressing the I-5 corridor expansion between Vancouver and Portland. I don't remember who it was from.

I've also heard about widening the Delta Park area and also talks of another bridge in the future.

I heard they were trying to get light rail service from Vancouver but I think that got voted down. They wanted Washington residents to come up with tax dollars for that, and I don't think that went over real well.

It was Washington businesses, which ultimately means Washington residents.

I read that, too.

I heard about the widening of the I-5 bridge, but I also was reading in the Columbian they were thinking about doing another bridge, two. That would be way down in the future, I'm sure.

I heard about something of routing traffic around Vancouver somewhat. Vancouver Lake or something like that. I didn't hear about any bridge. They did have plans for a commuter train, but I don't know how strong that went. It might be something to think about seeing a they have a train that goes through there.

Did anyone else get a flyer?

I recently moved from North Portland to Vancouver. In North Portland, I think quite a few of us received flyers. I do remember something about Delta Park. It might have said the I-5 bridge. But, to be honest, it probably said a couple of years away, so I didn't keep it in my head. I want to say it came from a committee of some kind, but I'm not sure.

Talking about the area of Delta Park, Columbia Blvd and SR 500, tell me what improvements to transportation you'd like to see.

I liked the carpool lane that was there. I got right on I-5 from SR 500. Maybe a month or two after that, I started carpooling because of that lane and seeing how empty it was. Where I merged on the downtown Vancouver side. It didn't help trying to get over that many lanes, but when I did, it's smooth sailing. Then they took that away. Even when I wasn't carpooling, it seemed like it slowed traffic down further north and opened it up a little more freely.

You're talking about the Washington side, because it still exists on the Oregon side.

I'd like to see it go away on the Oregon side.

I agree.

Me too.

The reason is when that lane was expanded in 94 or 95, it was open to all lanes, initially. Traffic flowed real well. As soon as they turned it into a carpool lane, traffic started backing up. It just got worse, and it's been worse every since.

Yes. I agree. It's horrendous.

Part of the problem is that the people who want to get into the carpool lane have to cross over two lanes of traffic, go down three exits, then have to cross over two lanes of traffic again to get off. Either the carpool lane is on the wrong side or they ought to eliminate it altogether.

I believe they ought to eliminate it altogether.

I do, too.

I think it hasn't solved any problems. It has caused accidents and people trying to cheat the system are trying to dodge in at the last minute. It's very frustrating. I run a business in Vancouver and deliver work, jobs we've completed, into Portland. I'm not taking anyone extra. It is costing the company a lot of time. It's very expensive for my business to sit there. It would move much more smoothly without that.

I've wondered for years, were there any statistics? Have they ever been shared? It was an experiment. I don't recall reading anything that said this is going to stay or go because of what reasons.

They did do counts on the Vancouver side, which is why they eliminated it. There weren't that many people carpooling. Statistics said it was mostly single-occupant cars going over there.

They seriously need to consider two new bridges across the Columbia River, at minimum.

Yes.

The size of the geographical area in Vancouver, all the hills in Washougal, Camas, Prunehill, a lot of building going on there. A lot of new areas being added to the City of Vancouver. Annexing. Also, expansion in Portland. It's an absolute obsolete system. The I-5 bridge is obsolete. It was obsolete 20 years ago. They seriously need to do some core planning. They need to do it pretty rapidly. It's very frustrating to a lot of people to commute back and forth over that bridge.

Huge amounts of us have left Portland to move here for various reasons. Are they taking that into account?

And the fact that the I-5 bridge is a drawbridge compounds it. It's idiotic to not have more alternatives across the Columbia, where one is a drawbridge.

I've been noticing they're opening it during rush hour. I've noticed it twice. Why would they pick during that time to do that?

When you say two bridges, are you saying in the same location? What are you thinking about?

If they were going to have a rail system, even the railroad bridge that comes across below the I-5 bridge, it's obsolete. That would be an ideal place to upgrade the railroad bridge and auto traffic. It's a commercial and industrial area; there's not a lot down there, there are already adequate highways to connect to that area.

Speaking of the railroad bridge, I work right by there in Portland off Terminal 6. We work with automobiles. We transport them on trains across there. Numerous times, we've wished there were a bridge that went on the west side. The same way, I go skiing with some friends from work. We think it's ridiculous, where we live on the east side of 205, off 162nd, we go across and end up over by Troutdale and Sandy, we look back and see what we've traveled to get right across the river. We go all the way over west and come back east. We wish there was a bridge.

You're getting into the Gorge.

It would serve interstate commerce, for trucking. It would facilitate economic development. We have to include the whole Metro area. I think that's a big concern.

I think Gresham would grow some if there was a bridge over there. You'd see a shift.

We need a third bridge, I think.

Let's think about the I-5 corridor.

Indirectly, it does affect it, because it would take some pressure off the I-5 bridge.

I'm not disputing that, but tonight, the issue is I-5. What other changes would you like to see?

Two things. Expanding the highway there at the southbound Delta Park area, where it goes down to two lanes. No matter what time of day, that's a bottleneck.

It's true.

I gave myself 45 minutes to get here tonight to make sure I got here on time.

It's dangerous to people who don't know the highway; who are from out of state, Seattle or Canada. All of a sudden, there's no slow lane.

It goes from four down to two. It's pretty bad.

By expanding, I mean more lanes.

You need three lanes all the way through.

The other thing is to have express lanes that go — like in Seattle. You can't get off. No exits.

The one that goes one direction at a certain time of day?

It could.

It's like a mini-405. It bypasses a certain area and goes five exits down, and then you can get on.

So traffic that is just going to the states could just move on through. They don't need to be exiting.

Major express lanes.

No Camas exits, no mall exits. That's the other thing:

The mall, during holiday seasons, Jantzen Beach, it's terrible. Maybe Jantzen Beach itself, if they made cars circle all the way around the whole thing before they got into the parking lot, maybe that would ease the burden. Maybe it wouldn't do a thing. I don't know. Certainly, that's a very short exit for what takes place at that time of year. Every single lane is affected. I'm talking about southbound. Camas can't get off of 14 to get onto I-5 southbound.

Even the northbound lane to Camas is totally obsolete. It's a 90-degree exit to get off there. It's dangerous. Let's face it. You're paying a lot of liability in either state to have something of that nature. Same thing with Jantzen Beach. There's no buffer way for the traffic to flow into and be absorbed into that area to keep it from backing up on the bridge. Some people get onto that bridge and just panic. There's not from here.

Specifically, what are the biggest challenges you face commuting across the Columbia River bridge every day?

Time.

Time.

Aggravation. People are trying to go fast; they're uptight; it's not a real relaxing scenario to go into Portland in the morning. You can feel it's tense.

Not having alternatives. If there's an accident on that bridge, the only choice we have is to turn around and go back to 205. I work on Swan Island. For me to go all the way out to 205 and turn around and come back, there just aren't any alternatives.

It's an hour loop.

Cost to the business. We try to tell businesses we don't want any emergency work after 2:00. It's going to add at least an hour. We'd have to come from Vancouver, go to Portland, pick up the emergency, bring it back to our shop and take it back sometime later. It would be a lot of commuting for us. We try to do all our running after 8:00 a.m. and before 2:00 p.m., but that's not necessarily possible.

Just the worry about, am I going to get rear-ended? There's worry and concern.

The traffic in general.

The uncertainty of it. You don't know how long to plan for. If you have something you need to be to, you don't want to waste your time by going really early, but if you don't plan ahead, you never know what you're going to run into once you get on there.

One concern is the public awareness of the tsunamis and earthquakes. He mentioned we have no alternatives. What is going to happen if we had something major happen to our bridge? We had a barge hit it a couple of years ago. Have we considered tunneling under the river, like they have in New York and some other places? Is that an alternative? I'm not an engineer; I don't know what they've studied. What would happen? Let's look at the long-term future, not just

our immediate relief. We need immediately relief, but it would be nice to have a long-term goal.

The tunnel wouldn't obstruct boating. It wouldn't require repainting, repair, opening, those sorts of things. They talk about the Holland Tunnel in New York City. They built it, dropped it in there, and that's it.

Across the Hudson River, there were four bridges and four tunnels. Not that Portland is as big as New York, but it's doable. I'm glad you brought that up.

Any other problems?

Everybody starts work at the same time. We've tried starting an hour earlier, getting off an hour earlier. A year ago, you'd leave at a certain time and it would be okay, and then suddenly it doesn't help anymore. You have to leave ten or fifteen minutes earlier, and by then you get into work too early. If more businesses could do something about it themselves...

I stagger my hours to avoid traffic. I've been commuting from Battle Ground to Swan Island for 21 years and it's just gotten worse every years. Today, it was a quarter to ten and traffic was still backed up. I can't stagger my hours any more than that.

Any other problems or improvements?

A pet peeve. Having worked in Portland for the past 21 years, I'd like to see more for my tax dollars than what I'm getting. People in southwest Washington don't get much for the income tax they pay.

To Oregon. It's like taxation without representation.

We're ignored by Seattle, and Portland just takes our money and says, "Thank you very much. We'll give you a carpool lane on the way home."

All the on-ramps along the I-5 Delta Park corridor are very poor. It's an industrial section that our business uses a lot. You'll sit in them for 30 minutes before you even get to the freeway mess.

Especially in the summertime.

Anytime.

One alternative that has been suggested is light rail. What do you think about that?

My thoughts are, the bus systems we have in Portland and Vancouver aren't well used. I think we still have a lot of rural people crossing the bridge.

They want to use their own vehicles.

If we don't have ridership now, why would we spend billions more?

That's true.

Some of you have received flyers. The departments of transportation in Washington and Oregon, along with some other groups, are currently looking at making changes to I-5 and the bridges across the Columbia; what's called the bridge influence area. One thing they're thinking about is light rail, as a component, not the only change. In that context, what would you think about adding light rail?

I would say they'd have to do a much better job than they did on Interstate Avenue. All that has done is added to the problem on Interstate Avenue. It's made a mess. I get off on Swan Island, and that exit ramp is backed up many of the times because of the light-rail traffic on Interstate Avenue. It should not make the traffic situation worse for those people that are still driving.

It might be a good idea to put it on the west side near the Port of Vancouver, where there's not a whole lot of traffic right now.

I could see it being a nice alternative for people going into downtown or any of the sporting events at the Rose Garden, if it connects there. If it connects to the major places, maybe there would be the ridership. But as others have said, Vancouver doesn't have a huge ridership as it is. From what I'm hearing, people need their own vehicles to get to work and deliver stuff. Light rail doesn't provide that.

I agree. Even though light rail wouldn't be useful for my business for me to ride and accomplish anything, if enough people were using light rail, it would still help my business. But I think light rail needs to be secondary to a bridge or more lanes. Let's face it: Very few people are going to take that alternative, particularly in the beginning. It's not going to be relief fast enough.

It's a patch.

It's a partial patch.

I'd use it just to avoid any chance of getting stuck in an accident or a bridge lift. A lot of our employees get in trouble. You're allowed so many tardies or absences. Bridge lifts and accidents aren't excused. If we can jump on light rail or MAX, you have a better chance of not getting stuck.

There's problems associated with that, also. There's problems with any kind of train system: accidents, strikes or electrical outages.

Why would you favor adding light rail to the system? More convenient, less congestion, avoid delays are some examples.

Maybe cheaper for the public; for leisure, not so much as a commuter. If you wanted to go to an event in Portland, you wouldn't have to pay for gas or parking. It's more economical in some ways. Not if you're a business person.

A weekend.

Don't we have buses right now that make that trip?

It has one rider on it.

It's the same concept. Light rail would be quicker, because they wouldn't be in the main flow of traffic, but you'd have to look at how many people are riding.

Let's focus on why you'd favor it.

It's an alternative to the bridge, as long as you don't link it to the bridge.

Now, why would you not favor including light rail? We've already talked about people aren't using current bus systems.

Taxes. My understanding is that the first time they tried to pass light rail, the local businesses that were going to be along the strip, because they were going to benefit, because light rail supposedly went in front of their doors, they were going to pay more taxes than the rest. Well, on Interstate Avenue, what benefit is it to

those businesses? I'd say those businesses are avoided more than other areas. I don't see light rail as a benefit to businesses. We're a welding shop. We do industrial welding repair. It would not be any kind of benefit to my business. People aren't going to bring me products on light rail. That's just what happens to us, personally. I'm not saying it wouldn't help others.

The parking and the location of the parking is really important. When I was living in Portland last year, I would have had to go a few miles in the opposite direction to park my car and get on light rail. I tried it and didn't like it. I would vote against light rail. I'm sorry, but a lot of people are like me, and we're still pretty into convenience.

You have the same problem on the other end. If the station where you get off is not right in front of your business, you have to concern yourself with how you are going to travel that last distance, whether it's two blocks or two miles. A bus or a taxi? Once you get off light rail, you still may have a ways to go.

Which is a safety issue.

They are talking about light rail going all the way out to the amphitheater in Battle Ground. If I could take it from there to Interstate Avenue, that would be great, all the way across the I-5 bridge. But once I get off, I still have a mile and a half to my desk. How do I travel that? In the rain and the snow? I think that's a reason people will avoid buses and light rail. They want their own cars.

The convenience or lack of it.

I don't get a sense of frustration from you about commuting across the bridge.

I'm frustrated.

Maybe we're just so beat up.

I've been driving it for 21 years. Maybe I've gotten to the point where I've gotten used to it, and I'm retiring in five years and I see a light at the end of my personal tunnel. But I'm very frustrated by it, and it gets worse every year.

I've heard people say it's more aggravating getting back and forth to work than actually doing their job. That's pretty bad. It's not as bad as Los Angeles. I know people down there that do a five-hour commute every day.

We will, if we don't solve our problems.

We're all frustrated. We're just nice people.

I have huge frustration, which is why I moved here. But I've only been here in Vancouver a month. Living in North Portland used to be 4:00 you'd better be in the Delta Park area. Then it was 2:00. Now it's noon. It's horrendous. You can spend 30 minutes going bumper to bumper before you get anywhere near the freeway. It starts way out by Interstate. I'm retired. I don't have the frustration everybody else does. But coming north? It's just terrible.

Especially from Delta Park.

It's totally frustrating. I have to leave two hours early to get across the bridge. I don't like that bumper-to-bumper traffic. People out there get really angry. I had a gun waved at me one day.

Isn't amazing there isn't more aggravation and hostility, if you're sitting for as much as 30 minutes between here and there?

There isn't anything you can do about it.

Friends of mine will leave half an hour to an hour earlier so they can get to where they work and sit there for 45 minutes before they begin work, rather than sit in traffic for 45 minutes. It's a lot of time wasted.

Gas. The time and gas you waste while sitting. On both sides. Coming home. Getting on at the Expo Center, on that loop to get onto the bridge, you just sit. You're fighting to get a spot just to sit again. It's amazing on the days you work when the majority of people don't — like Martin Luther King Day — how free flowing and nice it is. You go straight there and wish it could be like that every day.

The businesses between the Fremont and I-5 bridges on the Oregon side all suffer. I used to stop at Delta Park and do shopping. I used to stop at Safeway at Jantzen Beach and do shopping on the way home. I don't do that anymore, because it takes me 45 minutes to get off and another 45 minutes to get back on. All those business have to be losing business.

I agree. I don't work in Portland, so I can pick and choose when I go. I've found it doesn't really matter. I go more on weekends than during the week. The weekends can be terrible. Especially when the weather's bad. I'd go to Portland more if I didn't have to be concerned about making it back in time. That influences my buying decisions.

People have recognized changes need to be made. One challenge is paying for it. There's not enough state, federal or local money to pay for the improvements needed to last 30 years from now. One method is tolling.

I've heard about that.

It was a toll bridge 30 or 40 years ago.

If it's a toll, that means people are stopping before crossing the river.

Not necessarily.

Are there other taxing methods you can think of besides tolls?

It would be nice if they slated some of the income tax from Southwest Washington people for that purpose. We don't get much services for our income tax dollars. It would be nice if they slated income tax dollars toward improving transportation.

If it was a toll, they could have a sticker on your windshield. They have a light that strobes through it that knows if you're current with your toll. You could pay it monthly, like a utility, rather than stop at a tollbooth and pay it.

My husband says if there were a toll lane, he'd be more than happy to pay the cost to save the dollars of time he spends in traffic. Businesses don't want the whole burden. They can't afford the whole burden of putting this in. Certainly, as I've been buying buildings in Vancouver and looking at building a building, businesses build your roads, not your tax dollars you think. Every new business has to pay traffic studies and traffic impact fees. One concern is if businesses were picking this up, there's a point at which businesses can't survive if you tax them to death. The businesses that would benefit more, we'd pay the fees to use it. If we had a dedicated lane, just one lane that just got you from one area, and pay for it. Businesses might be willing, if they'd benefit from this, to pay more. Businesses that wouldn't need it shouldn't be taxed unfairly.

Licensing of vehicles. My mother-in-law is in the Department of Transportation in Vancouver. She does rideshare and carpool. She saw a big cut in C-Tran buses; monies went to that and some of the roads. People liked not paying a lot to license their cars, but they lost a lot.

Would this be a statewide registration to pay for the I-5 bridge, or regional registration?

It could be either.

Multnomah and Clark counties to aid bridge construction.

Just because I see all the taxes that are being put on us, I'm trying to grow my business right now. Trying to do that in Clark County is hard to do, because I pay traffic impact fees, traffic study fees that were thousands of dollars in this business location. Businesses put in the lights and all those things. Tax a small business to death and you won't have anyone over here anymore. Where do our tax revenues in Washington go? Businesses are the ones building the roads and lights and all that stuff.

You pay those to Washington state?

Yes.

I'm talking about the income tax we pay to Oregon.

What about other types of solutions? Businesses in Portland could do a couple of things to reduce the amount of commuting. They could encourage employees that are able to telecommute via computer to work from home, rather than coming into Portland. If business were given some kind of incentive for the numbers of people who were telecommuting in, that would be a way to reduce traffic. Another thing would be if businesses in Portland were able to establish satellite locations on the Vancouver side without having to incorporate in Vancouver or Washington. They could set up satellite locations that could be tied into the Portland locations and reduce traffic.

Over time, growth will increase demand, and the age of the bridges is a factor.

If Washington state provided more employment opportunities in Southwest Washington, Oregon would suffer. All those people would be working over there instead of over here.

You can always throw in more gas taxes.

Just aggravate more people.

Anything that is done for the federal government, like the interstate freeway systems, is prevailing wage. Do you When I get called into a prevailing wage job, my business doesn't make any more money, but it costs me more to produce that job. It's out of perspective. All these roads are built on prevailing wage. A welder, instead of making \$25.00 an hour, he's \$47.00 an hour plus. They have to have a fire watch: one man comes out at \$47.00 an hour to stand and watch the other man to make sure he doesn't light anything on fire. The rules and regulations are why our bridges cost so much money. It's part of the problem.

You talked about a toll lane. What would your opinion be about paying tolls?

I'd be willing to pay a toll if the toll was installed the way the Interstate Bridge toll was installed originally. Once the bridge was paid off, it would be free and clear. It would be opened up.

Yes.

In New York, the George Washington Bridge started off with a \$0.75 toll. When it was paid off, the toll was supposed to go away. Instead, they tripled it.

What about a toll that does continue, that builds the next bridge? That money is dedicated.

Put a toll on that. The people who use that bridge pay for it.

Why shouldn't we have a toll on it right now, to build this bridge sooner?

Because this one's already paid for.

But you're going to get the funds.

I like the idea of having one lane dedicated, so people have a choice.

Yes.

If they don't want to pay the toll, and if they don't mind traffic taking up all their time, they're used to it anyway. If someone is willing to pay a little extra...

An express-lane fee.

Right.

What happens if there's an accident in that lane? Those people have paid to be in an accident lane and can't get off.

The nice thing about tolls is that people who are using it the most are paying for it. That's the fairest part.

As long as the flow remains.

You can't have tolls and not get anything for it.

You can't come to a complete stop.

Technology has gotten to the point where we don't have to stop.

Is there any precedent in the Portland or Oregon area where there are tolls?

The Astoria Bridge was once, at the mouth of the Columbia.

Tacoma Narrows Bridge is being built right now. It's going to have a toll on it.

Any concerns about tolls?

How does somebody from Seattle, going to Ashland, get...

Service?

There's have to be a lane where the collector is.

The issue is making sure everybody pays, not how they pay.

The one-time person will have to be stopped. They won't have something they've bought once a month. It'll stop traffic again.

In locations where there are tolls, or even like coming out of the airport, in order to deal with the flow, they have to have five or six access points that lead into two or three lanes. If we're talking about putting a toll on the current I-5 bridge, that

area would have to be widened to accommodate it. Right now, they just have three lanes.

You'd have a transponder. It's an electronic device that emits a signal. If you're prepaid, it deducts the amount; or you get a bill. There are ways to pay without slowing down.

How will paying tolls help traffic? If you started tomorrow, nothing would change. You wouldn't see a benefit for years down the road.

You'd be gathering funds for the future.

I don't know of any immediate plans to switch to a toll road. How much would you expect to pay in a toll?

We don't know the cost of the bridge; we don't know how many cars are going through; we can't figure it out.

Two bucks each way.

I was thinking a month.

A dollar each way.

That's what I think.

It's \$10 a week versus \$20 a week.

The majority of people I work with, if it were that much, we wouldn't go across the bridge. We'd get up earlier and go across 205. The majority are single-income, 20 to 30 year olds. That money is coming out of something else. If it were for a lane that I was going to see something happening right now, get me to work quicker, yeah, of course. If it were something down the road, where I'm not sure I'm going to be using that bridge then, I wouldn't do it.

205 is not going to be an alternate much longer. It's getting much worse.

To prevent that, they're thinking about tolling 205, too.

(Laughter)

They'll get you both ways.

Is it fair to toll I-5 and not 205, or is it fair to toll both?

I don't think you should put a toll on 205. It's not the problem at this point.

It's not related to the I-5 problem, so why should they pay the price?

I think we need to look at the situation as more of a whole. The whole is getting across the Columbia River. If we could trust whoever was handling the toll money, that it was going into our local issues of the river and crossing it, people would be willing to pay. If you're going to toll both bridges, reduce it to \$1 each way. You're going to get us either way we go.

What if I-5 was more? It's the established problem now. Let's say we pay \$2 now and 205 pays \$1 now until it was proven to the citizens that it was coming. Then they'd have to raise it.

I think you either put a toll on the existing bridges — both of them, and make it the same toll — to pay for additional bridge or bridges, or you leave those bridges the way they are, you put two bridges in where they're advantageous,

and people are going to want to use them, and put the tolls on those to pay for those bridges. One or the other.

You're saying the money doesn't exist to build the bridges.

What about user fees for interstate commerce? Trucking that's delivering stuff from Washington to Oregon. That's a source of revenue they could attach to pay for it. They could devote some of that directly to the I-5 bridge.

Is it true there are no federal funds available? When they did the expansion at Delta Park for the northbound lane, the federal government paid for 4/5 of that.

Not enough state, federal and local funds to pay for it. Someone said they'd feel a lot better if they trusted the organizations managing and constructing the project and the funds would be dedicated to local bridge access. What concerns do you have about tolling and funding?

Administrations change and they change the rules.

I haven't thought about that issue in particular. I just know I'm not confident our tax dollars go to what we intended them to go for. That would be an issue with this, too.

I'd worry initially about the accuracy of the computers giving information correct about how much they owe and following up with people paying. A lot of money would go to fixing those problems.

Logistics of billing.

Also, whoever is in charge of planning this project is good at budgeting and not wasting money. We know how those projects end up sucking up money.

Like the tram they have downtown.

We'd like to approve your plans. Sometimes we don't think far enough in the future. Things we didn't vote for, things we voted down, the City of Vancouver went around us. Everyone knows there's an issue here and it's not going to get better if we don't do something about it. You've got the public on your side to institute some form of collecting money to get this taken care of. But we don't want administrators making \$250,000 salaries because they're investing the money or having \$250,000 parties. We need accountability of who handles the funds.

Administrative responsibility.

If they say it's going to cost X amount of dollars, don't come to us and say, "We made a mistake; we're running over budget; now it's going to cost this much."

Wouldn't it take longer to collect the money by instituting something brand new, like a toll? Wouldn't that divert people from going across the bridge? I'd try to get people to carpool, so one person would be paying, or not use that bridge at all. Wouldn't it be better adding money onto the licensing fees or something already existing? Gas or something else that people will have to pay? If you have a toll, it will set it back.

Taxes would generate the money quicker.

Except that penalizes everybody, whether they use it or not. With a toll, the people that use it and are going to benefit are the ones paying for it.

It's kind of like schools. Everybody pays, but not everybody has kids who go to school.

I think it would be a small impact. The fact that people would carpool or change their habits to deal with \$2 worth of cost a day, I don't think it will modify people's behavior that much.

Now, time passes, the changes have been made, and you're still commuting back and forth across the I-5 bridge. What would you expect your commute to be like?

It would be half an hour. From the center of west Vancouver to downtown Portland, you should be able to get there in half an hour.

Which is what it was about 15 years ago.

Right now, it depends on how lucky you are. If you leave at 6:00, you could get downtown in half an hour. If you leave at 7:00, it could change to 45 minutes to an hour.

Or just a car stalls.

I'd expect more choices on my way home, rather than just one route. If there's something wrong with one wrong, I could go over here without adding an hour to it. Or leave my car home and take something else.

Shorter commute.

Save time.

More positives than negatives. People will continue to move to Vancouver. That will have to be built in as we progress and do more positive things to reduce the time. I still think it will be better, but there will be more people that weren't there before getting on and off the bridges.

It's never going to be enough.

It will be a continuous thing.

You're talking about a very short area. In Vancouver, we're homes built to the max, all the way out to the amphitheater. Then you get out to Battle Ground and Ridgefield, and they're getting built to the max. The whole I-5 corridor is getting so built up, I don't see that changing. Unless we have a minimum of three lanes all the way through to Woodland, I don't see widening as solving the problem if we bottleneck someplace else. It's like getting on 205 from the airport. There should be no light at all. You should be able to choose northbound or southbound without a light. Then you wouldn't have that problem there.

The on-ramps and off-ramps.

We have to look at how this main artery is going to feed into little arteries. Otherwise, the main artery is going to get backed up again.

The tolls would go away eventually.

I believe it would be a 20 or 30 minute drive, the way it is in the lightest portion of the day now. I left Vancouver at 2:45 and was to Cedar Hills Boulevard in 25 minutes today. That was great. It can happen.

The better planning, on-ramps and off-ramps will be taken care of. Along with the 30 minute commute, the flow. The stop-and-go will be eliminated.

Besides more lanes, we need to look at dedicated lanes as flow to get through. Maybe an early on warning for people who go to Camas, maybe a dedicated lane to Camas you could get into early, so there's not crossover.

More options. For someone who wants to stop off in Jantzen Beach and do shopping, realizing they could get back on more easily. It might improve businesses.

Why do we have nine bridges that cross the Willamette and only two that cross the Columbia? Is it because it requires both Washington and Oregon to agree? Portland seems to have plenty of money to work on the existing bridges they have.

I think it's the size of the river.

Someone said they wanted to approve the plans. Yet this conversation has been going on for awhile, and there is inconsistency about what you've heard about improvements. What's the best way to communicate? Where do you get information about transportation?

Television news.

That's right.

Newspapers.

The Oregonian.

I was reading the Oregonian every day. Now I read the Columbian.

Radio. I listen to it a lot while I'm commuting.

I wonder if the flyer thing was successful and how we could judge that?

I don't read those. I get so much junk mail that if I don't recognize it, I just toss it. I'd pay attention much more to the news.

Do you pay attention to family or friends?

Other business people.

I talk to people at work. A lot of people who work at Friehtliner live in southwest Washington. I work in the office. I talk about it with co-workers. Maybe 40 percent of the people who work in my building live in southwest Washington now.

I talk with my neighbors next door. That's probably the biggest one. Where I live, a lot of people moved from the Portland side. It's close to I-5 and they commute.

Do you talk over the fence, or at a neighborhood association?

We talk over the fence.

Neighborhood association; chambers of commerce meetings.

Other co-workers. I also talk to my neighbors.

Which of these sources do you trust the most?

Talk radio.

Talk radio.

TV news is pretty accurate and responsible. They participate with a lot of people. Talk radio is another.

Columbia River Crossing
Focus Group
January 17, 2006
8:00 p.m. — Oregon

I'm interested in what you've heard about changes in roadways and bridges leading up to I-5 and across the Columbia River.

Might be plans on a new one adjacent to the one that's already there. It's been some time, but when traffic seemed to be a concern, it was on the news all of a sudden. They were talking about the growth in Portland. I don't know if it was a study they were talking about or feasibility. Within the last year.

Interstate MAX extending across the bridge. I heard that within the last year, too. I think that's more of a rumor now since they stopped it at the Expo.

I've been a neighborhood association president and I've been invited to the I-5 Delta Park meetings. Basically, I haven't been able to go. There are three major options they're talking about. Bridges, HOV lanes. I think the fourth is do nothing. There's a meeting in a week or two.

I'd heard they were going to extend MAX if that might be an option after they nixed it for awhile.

To make a switch to three lanes northbound in the afternoon, three lanes southbound in the morning. Another bridge to do the same thing, to be a switchable bridge. Another bridge between I-5 and 205. The one bridge I definitely heard about was right next to the existing I-5 bridge.

There's been talk of another bridge for truck-oriented traffic.

The railroad bridge?

I think that's it.

I haven't heard anything except about MAX going across.

Is do nothing an acceptable option?

No.

Not really.

I don't think so, but they have it on the list.

It slows down commerce. People are already spending too much of their daily time, their daily lives, in traffic. It's only grow and it's only going to get worse. There's going to be more cars crossing. Relief has to come sometime soon.

I just read they want to annex a huge part of Vancouver, the cities around Vancouver, so by 2009, Vancouver will be the second-largest city in Washington state. If that really does happen, and it's the second largest ahead of Tacoma and Spokane, they have to do something.

The bridge is getting older. There might be a point when you need a second one just to do maintenance on the old.

Environmentally. There are a lot of old cars sitting there, blowing out smoke while you're waiting in traffic.

We need options to get across the bridge. I don't think you can bike across that bridge, can you? Only 205.

I've never seen any bikers. There's no alternative except C-TRAN. They need to increase MAX or have a bike lane.

If it's not funded properly, it makes sense to do nothing.

What kind of problems, concerns and frustrations do you have traveling across the bridge?

If I want to go to Vancouver, I'm sitting there thinking, "If I leave my house at 2:00 in the afternoon, is this a good time to get there?" At 2:00 in the afternoon, I'm going to hit the evening traffic anytime." That's crazy.

You know what seems the actual cause of real slow-down? For some reason, if you drive across the 205, there's no structure overhead. It's like wide open highway. People don't slow down like they're cautious or afraid of anything. But there's structure over the I-5 bridge, maybe the lanes get narrower, or the metal grate for suspension, but it makes them slow down, a little unnecessarily slow. They just creep along and traffic builds up so much. When you do get to the other side, it takes off again.

It does.

Yes. It's like there's an accident there, because it does slow down.

If you're going to Seattle, you have to think about the bottleneck here as well as from Olympia to wherever you're going in Seattle. You have to avoid two rush hours.

A couple of years ago, the bridge was damaged by a boat.

That goes back to having one bridge and maintenance.

I'm lucky. Most of my trips can avoid rush hour. I don't run into as much trouble as the regular commuters do.

I'm commuting the opposite direction of traffic at both times of day. I see the traffic. I know it's an issue. I will not even go out to Jantzen Beach or any of those places from 3:00 to 7:00. I just won't do it because of the traffic bottleneck.

I'll take MLK or Interstate up at those hours rather than I-5. If I'm going to Jantzen Beach and I also have some business elsewhere, I'll do it.

But that's what everybody else is doing, too. Now those streets are bottlenecked. You can't hardly get down Interstate anymore. It's crazy.

Right.

The frustration is, we can't travel when we want to.

I don't have a commute. I go there for friends or shopping in Jantzen Beach. I don't have to do it at commuting time, but it's still a major impact for me. I don't want to go and sit for an hour in traffic.

Danger. There's a real short on-ramp from Jantzen Beach to the bridge. I'm usually trying to turn off on Highway 14. I've got to be in that lane. People don't know how to enter it. Tourists, people that crawl up to it or speed up to it. Either one is dangerous.

Going up MLK is impacted, too. It might not be a shortcut.

And they have light rail there, too. You'd think it would help. You don't have alternatives anymore, except 205.

I'd live off MLK, so I'd go up MLK to Vancouver. My commute is frustrating, because I usually go during business hours. I have a grandbaby, and we go to Jantzen Beach when she gets out of school. It's not frustrating for me because I turn up the music and drive slow, so it doesn't bother me as much.

You can't count on it. It's a drawbridge. It doesn't have to be at commute time. Usually, it's not. If I have an appointment, I can't count on being on time if the bridge is up.

That's actually huge. If you have an appointment, you have to leave so early, and then you waste time on the other side.

I go all the way up MLK, get on the bridge, get off at Mill Plain. I'm only traveling over the I-5 bridge, and I'm going the opposite direction of traffic. Any other time I've gone over there, I time it so I'm not traveling with traffic at all. I hate traffic. I work over there. The heaviest traffic is coming into Portland, and I'm going into Vancouver in the mornings. Same thing in the afternoon: I get done at 3:30 and cross the bridge between 3:30 and 4:00. The heaviest traffic is heading back into Vancouver. I just jump off the freeway. No I-5 bottlenecks. So the traffic does not impact me, currently. I can't say it will always be like that.

Even on Saturday and Sunday, I'm surprised. It's random. You'll can be going along, and all of a sudden, you'll be stuck. You'll wonder, is the bridge up?

I agree. It's so weird.

You never see a reason for it.

You wonder if they're looking at sailboats.

You can't figure it out. You sit there. You never see an accident. You don't see the bridge was up.

Some people have advocated for making improvements to the I-5 bridge and the areas from Columbia Boulevard to SR 500. What type of improvements do you think should be made?

Something adjacent or expanded, but this time, build the bridge so it doesn't have to be raised for boats. High enough for boats to get under. Structured so on a nice day — people like to see the mountain, the beautiful view of the Columbia River. Don't make it convenient. Then they aren't slowing down and looking at sailboats. They just drive.

Put up blinders.

If they want a view, make a bike lane so they can ride a bike.

I'd like to see more cooperation between the public transportation systems, Vancouver and Portland. A smooth interface, so you could take a train or buses and connect to Vancouver buses.

I don't know how many people will get out of their cars.

There will always be people who drive their cars, but I think it's a good option.

They voted on it twice in Vancouver and voted it down.

But they cut C-TRAN, so there are fewer buses that run across the river. I'd like to see light rail, something that would take lots of commuters across the bridge. People heading to appointments. A public transportation system interface.

They won't do that until they build up downtown Vancouver more.

You've got two separate public transportation systems. I love Portland's Tri Met and buses

I don't know if it would be cheaper, but if they could do a bridge that would only allow pedestrians and bikes and MAX. The MAX would take the buses off I-5. Maybe more people would ride MAX. The bikes, you might get a lot of 20-somethings who would ride in.

With the price of gas, I see tons of people.

Plus if you tell me it will take an hour by car or ten minutes by MAX, I'll take MAX.

Give an advantage to MAX getting across, so it does make it faster. If it's slow, people aren't going to use it.

Some planning. There's an on and off ramp at the exact end each way. It means you've got people merging, slowing down or being dangerous. Traffic planning. The last time the Oregon side was looked at was when they re-did Jantzen Beach. Thirty years ago?

You enter right where you get on the bridge, and that's where the bottleneck is.

And some people come from three lanes over to get off.

They need exits and entries, not just side-by-side so everybody's feeling all the traffic in one spot.

It's the congestion right at that point.

Not a smooth entry.

Maybe instead of another bridge, a tunnel. Although it's horrendously expensive.

They've talked about that. It's an option.

When we talk about alternative routes, sometimes traffic backs up in odd places, like Delta Park. Or down to Columbia.

Interstate. Killingsworth.

Thinking about tunnels, the tunnel along 26 allows MAX to go. Nothing stops it. Highway 26 slows down, but MAX goes right through the tunnel, so it gains time.

Bottom line, what would be the result of all these improvements?

Wider lanes. A more modern superhighway. This area's going to continue to grow. When they planned it, they never planned on these people who are here now. You don't want to make the same mistake again.

Look ahead. With a bridge, you've got to talk about 25 or 50 years, minimum.

Yes. I see where Interstate MAX goes, and that area's booming. I can't believe how fast it's growing.

The city's going to up-zone that, so we'll see a lot more mid-rises.

You can't put a band-aid on it. You've got to do something.

I think it will go all the way to the river.

Expand for cars and put in public transportation.

How important is public transportation?

We don't just want more cars on the road. We need to have environmental options. We've got a river right there; two rivers. We can't just have more cars and trucks and whatnot crossing the river. It should be standard for all these one-year planning options to plan for mass transit.

Just in pure geographic space, if you have a million people in the region and add a million cars, where do the million cars physically go? If 100,000 of those people are using transit, they're taking less physical space.

And the emissions part of it.

Economics. You mention the Interstate MAX. I remember the Gresham line. The talk was that public transport directed growth. More people moved out there. And they have. Businesses came up out in that area and grew. Vancouver is going to grow and infill. It would probably be best served if you could provide public transport.

Also, when you add public transit, do things that will encourage more development and density along that. Then more people will live near transit and it's convenient for them. They won't have to use the car. The car is convenient.

Very convenient. I think people are not opposed to public transit if you give it to them and give them access. But don't make it more expensive. By the time you pay for your monthly bus pass and do all that stuff, you're not winning anything by taking public transportation. Encourage younger people to do that instead of buy a car. In this city, unless you want to go someplace outside the city, there's no reason to have a car. They could benefit from that and make it a real plus.

What do you mean when you talk about transit and public transportation?

Like light rail.

Light rail seems to be working well.

Part of it is connecting the light rail system to major things so people in Vancouver could connect to light rail and get to restaurants, downtown, the airport. Vancouver has a plan. They've built that new convention area and the huge Hilton Hotel, they're expanding Clark College. They're growing these two industries, college campuses and down by Salmon Creek, the Washington State campus, along with that should be public transportation. MAX makes the most sense because it connects to key centers.

You want to connect not just to housing and jobs but to park and ride. If somebody parks there and takes MAX downtown.

The Washington focus group's view of transit is a little different.

I sure it is. They're more of an auto-centered mindset. They're so close, Portland and Vancouver, but I think the culture is really different. Light rail and mass transit is part of our culture and it's not part of theirs, I don't think.

Other ideas about Washington being different?

It's been going on for so many years: "I don't get no respect" as a city next to Portland. There's been no cooperation with mayors. "It's better in the 'Couve."

Some of them don't want Portland people coming out on the MAX to them and telling them what to do. Like Metro.

They just haven't seen the benefits. We've lived and seen the benefits and made huge investments and seen the positive impacts. They haven't seen the benefits enough to pass the bond measure to do that.

They figure their taxes will go up.

Yes, because they just got their taxes lowered.

But if they're going to build Clark College, that's addressing younger people. I'm opposed to that. They're in favor of it. They should take advantage of trying to hit that target group of people.

Younger folks aren't paying taxes.

They will be.

A bridge for pedestrians and bikes sends a message: "We do want to improve getting more people across, not expanding more cars." I like that idea.

Another thing I hear from that is emergency vehicles can run along MAX and not fight I-5.

Why shouldn't we include the transit option?

Because Clark County voted no, and there's only so much you can do.

It's more expensive to build a rail line across than just add another lane.

They said people don't use the buses now, adding mass transit would increase our taxes, there would be parking issues around park and rides, the transit wouldn't benefit businesses, doesn't get people to where they want to be. What do you say?

Portland is a lot more bicycle friendly, one of the most bicycle friendly in the nation, as opposed to Vancouver. You can go right across the bridge, and I don't know if I've ever seen anybody on a bike over there.

I don't either.

She's right when she says the cultures are different as night and day.

But it's changing. The bike culture is starting to pick up in Vancouver. They have bike lanes on some of the roads.

It will take some time. First you have to build it. Then there's the mentality change over time. The first condo towers they built in downtown Seattle, they almost went bankrupt because people thought, "Single-family house." Now when you go to Seattle, it's loaded with housing downtown and people aren't all thinking, "I have to have a single-family house." It may take five or ten years.

Maybe they don't have any political support in their mayor or city council isn't pushing that. It takes that. It takes a congressional delegation in Washington to say, "Here's some options." Right now, they're just saying it will be taxpayer money only from Washington. We got a lot of federal funds to build ours.

In the past year, I've seen several friends go buy houses across the bridge because of housing prices in Portland. Now they're making that commute because their jobs are still here in Portland. I think the culture will change anyway, gradually.

They're always going to say, "Who's going to pay for it?" You can discuss the pros and cons, but where's the money coming from?

How do we pay for it?

They should pay their fair share. They come over here to beat sales tax.

I think they're every bit as eligible for federal funding.

One of the challenges is there won't be enough money to pay for improvements, combining federal, state and local funds.

For those who lived in the east, you've heard of the easypass, all over New York. It used to be you had to stop at tollbooths. With easypass, you drive through, it clicks, scans you, and it's charged to your account.

Yes.

In one sense, toll bridges hurt a lot of people who just can't go. They could take 205. If you want the premium one, you do the easypass. It's made it fast and easy. You used to have to stop and pay. Now you move right on through

But you pay more.

I don't know that you pay more. The transit agencies love it because you don't have all the tollbooth people. No dirty, wet money. It's something in your dash.

A toll seems like more reason for congestion to me. Where are you going to stop and pay that?

It does create a problem. In New York, you have a four-lane road that widens out to ten because you have ten tollbooths. You still have a slowdown. With easypass, you slow down but you go through. You don't stop. It's made a huge difference.

The public would be more for this if they believed promises would be kept; if the toll would be there long enough to pay for the project. Then after the project, the toll would decrease. Maybe just for maintenance? If the public would believe it's not a lie.

Yes. (several agree)

Didn't the Astoria bridge once have a toll, and now it doesn't?

I think it still does.

There's some bridge around here where you can see the old toll booths. If they know it's temporary to build it, I think that's a whole different issue.

I think employers would scream. If you could give a tax advantage for jobs that stop and end off peak. That could encourage a few employers to start some jobs at 6:00 a.m. and get off at 2:30 or something. If it's 2 percent of jobs you get at rush hour, that could help. Maybe there's a tax on rush-hour jobs.

Incoming traffic pays in the morning. Outgoing pays in the afternoon.

We used to say, "It costs to go into San Francisco."

I think you only pay to go in.

Fares in Seattle are like that. You only pay one way.

To toll only during rush hour. One-way during rush hour.

It costs to go into San Francisco all day, but only one way. Going in.

This is small money. We need big money.

No, those tolls add up.

What about floating a bond? Is that an option? And float one both ways. It needs to be something that's joint. We commit in Portland to put up X million and Vancouver commits to do the same.

Pork. If you can get a bridge to nowhere in Alaska...

It should be tied to using the bridge. If people don't use it for shopping or anything, they shouldn't be saddled with that expense.

That's where the toll would catch it.

If the toll is going to cost as much as light rail, I'd probably take light rail.

Private businesses. The new Hilton they built for the convention center, they're a big chain with a lot of dollars. They could tap some of those big businesses or the state colleges. Maybe some private colleges. You'd have to hit up the corporations that would benefit from getting more people there. Private money.

The toll would make sense for trucks and cars. For light rail?

The MAX isn't going to pay a toll. That would be incentive to take MAX because you don't pay the toll.

If you've got an easypass it will click off two dollars in rush hour, one dollar in non-rush hour, and MAX is \$1.50. It then starts to give an advantage to MAX.

What amount of toll should they charge to pay for changes?

A higher price during rush hour to encourage spreading it out.

Would that be round trip? I'd be opposed to paying \$2.00 to go there and \$2.00 to come back. If you make it so the toll is more expensive than MAX, that's good. That way, people will take light rail.

How many cars go over there each day?

What are some of the other toll roads?

Bridge of the Gods is \$3.00 or \$4.00.

I'd say \$2.00 max, one way.

If I had to pay \$2.00 to go see my friend and \$2.00 to come back, I'd be discouraged.

To get on the Chicago Skyway, which avoided the free highway in, you paid \$2.00 to travel five miles. That was pretty high. It kept a lot of people off the Skyway without reason. But they used it because there wasn't as much traffic. But to charge \$2.00 on the I-5 bridge, which is a main artery, you're going to have a lot of dissent. It will cause a riot. That's a lot of money for a toll for something people don't see in the short term. It would be funding something better in the future.

I'm not saying get a toll to provide it for the future. I'm saying build it and put a toll on it so people are using what they're paying for. Then there's the cost overrun. "We've got to keep the toll another five years."

If they built a new bridge, I'd pay it, if it was new.

I think \$2.00 is kind of high.

You have to get something for it. There has to be improvements in the traffic. To pay \$2.00 to go over the bridge such as it is, you're looking for a riot.

What changes would you expect to see after the improvements were made?

More lanes. All the things we've talked about. It's not a drawbridge anymore. There's carpool lanes and traffic flows. That would be worth it. It would be worth it to charge two bucks.

Save time and aggravation. Less road rage.

Time's the big one.

If you're not sitting in traffic, you're saving gas.

Getting more cars off the road. That's the right thing to do.

Safety. We're not going to have a damaged bridge that we'll have to repair.

Easier for the boaters, too. They won't have to stop and call the bridge guy. There's a benefit if you're a boat enthusiast.

Let's go back to tolls. Some people said if there was a toll on I-5, they'd go to 205.

Let 'em.

I never think, "It's really crowded on I-5; I'll go to 205."

You burn \$2.00 more gas.

Exactly. And it takes more time.

And it encourages the same amount of traffic there. For me, 205 isn't an option.

There will always be people who will drive farther to avoid the toll.

That's not the problem.

It's the same thing as Skyway passing.

What if a \$1.00 charge on the 205 helps pay for the I-5 bridge?

Sure.

Why not?

For how long?

They're all doing the same thing. We're all trying to get to the same place. I don't see why people taking 205 shouldn't pay. That's good.

Yes.

Talking about MAX making that whole loop, that would give people even more options. It's more excuse to get out of your car.

I can see people complaining. I live in Camas. Why should I pay for this bridge I never use?

But if you're on the bridge, you pay the toll. That's the most fair.

I think it would encourage more carpooling. If I had to pay \$4.00 every day to cross the bridge to go to work, I'd carpool to share the cost.

And parking.

If we don't toll 205, people will go over there and it will be super crowded, so we'll have just shifted the problem from one bridge to the other.

Earlier, we talked about where you got information. Where would you get information about transportation issues?

The Internet.

Newspaper and television. Activists will get to neighborhood meetings. That doesn't cover people who don't get off the sofa.

Newspapers.

I think you'll have to go beyond newspapers.

You definitely have to hit TV.

More Internet, too.

I think radio.

With the Internet, you get more in depth. Everybody says, "For more information, go to this Web site."

If you don't read the paper on the day the article is in, but they could put billboards. "For information, go to." Then you can look it up.

Billboards are good. While you're sitting there on the freeway not doing anything, you could be reading the billboard.

And on the Internet, you can provide feedback that they're hopefully looking for.

What about an e-newsletter or e-mail?

I think it will go to the activists.

Or to the trashcan.

I think it's better you don't solicit them. They solicit you. I want to talk about it on my time and my terms, rather than you sending it to me.

With a billboard, you could just put the Internet address.

Same with light rail stops.

The fundamental issue is trust: How much it will cost; will there be cost overruns, etc. How big an issue is trust for you?

I think it's huge. If it says calculate how long it will take, pad it. Steel's gone up since they started building the tram, and now there are all these overruns.

We don't want the same mistakes as the tram.

Come up with a range on the price and then make it work. Don't come back and say, "Well, steel went up."

Don't pad it too much.

Not too much, but at least so people can say they came in on time.

If it's like a temporary tax in some form, put an expiration date on it. This automatically expires in 2012.

I don't know if tax is a good word because everybody can benefit from it. People, businesses. Later on, if people say, "I don't cross that bridge," that might be enough to turn them against it. I think a toll is good because you're using it. You can say, "Look, how much time are you stuck in traffic?" You get them to realize it.

The money is a trust issue, but the failed MAX line is who's telling me what to do? People in Vancouver don't want people in Portland telling them what to do. Or they don't know — or we don't know — who should tell them what to do.

That's why it's important for the two local governments to cooperate with each other.

It's not just the two governments. It's regional and national. It's an interstate bridge. They have on-ramps, so they have to deal with the state highway departments. That's five people.

If it's hard for them to trust, how hard is it for the citizen?

That's why you hear about places like Louisiana, arguing about who's going to fix the levies. The Corp of Engineers, state and federal governments are all saying, "It's not my problem."

This is different. Traffic is everyone's problem.

It is. People are coming one way from Washington and the other way from Oregon. Metro didn't address it very well. They can't get people to buy in with it. It didn't go over very well with Vancouver and Clark County. It's more than trust about money. I'm talking about transit and planning.

We live in a big city, and we're used to a really big, urban area. They live there because it's not. I think they live that. The idea of expansion, growth and more people, they go, "Eiuw, ugh." They've interviewed people on TV about the annexation of Vancouver. Most people said they didn't want to do that. They don't want to be big. Trust for them is the scary part because they're not really on board. They want faster traffic and they want it to be easier. I don't know that they want to bring more people over there. I don't think they want to be a big city.

If we put up this amount of money, are we going to trust the other side will?

That's got to be taken care of first.

I don't think they want to bring people over to build up the city, but they certainly want to bring people over if they have a big festival to promote. I think there's lots of activities they want people in Portland to come over and be part of. Just not the living piece.

If there's no trust, they don't have buy-in to agree, "I'm okay with the toll and the variety of options."

As long as you're sitting in that traffic every day, if you have it spread out through all the radio stations, informing them, it makes sense while they're rolling at two miles an hour. Those will be the people funding it with those tolls. They're gritting their teeth and wanting a solution. They're your captive audience.

Anything else?

People are happy the Vancouver HOV lane is gone.

I'm really happy that's gone. It seemed like a waste.

It wasn't working?

It backed up the other ones and it was sparsely used. Now that it's opened back up, it moves faster.

I like the idea, but if it's not working...

It wasn't being used to its maximum.

Seattle was three people in the car, and they dropped it to two.

