



**DATE:** July 9, 2004  
**TO:** Dale Himes and Rob DeGraff  
**FROM:** EnviroIssues  
**CC:** Amy Echols

**SUBJECT:** Columbia River Crossing Project, Public Communications Plan

Attached for your review and comment is the public communications plan for the Columbia River Crossing Project.

WSDOT communications staff as well as public involvement consultants, with experience on both sides of the river, led the development of this plan. While the Columbia River Crossing Project's goal is to ultimately select and make highway and high-capacity transit improvements to the Interstate Bridge, this plan covers only the first phase of that effort. The first phase encompasses alternatives development and environmental scoping.

As you review this plan, there are several key decisions that are outside the scope of the communications team, but may influence the implementation of the plan. These decisions include:

- How is the Columbia River Crossing Project defined?
- What is the schedule of the alternatives development and environmental scoping phase? As you review the plan, you will note no specific reference to schedule. While we understand the workflow and what outreach activities will occur to support it, we need further direction on the exact schedule of activities.
- What role and involvement will regional decision-making structures have in the project? How will these entities communicate with each other, and how will their respective authorities be defined? What are their respective roles and functions, how will their coordinating mechanisms be established, and how will they impact the communications plan?
- How will WSDOT and ODOT work together to make decisions? Will the two agencies co-locate?
- What technical products will be available, when, and what information will be included?
- What role will the communications team will play in addressing the above decisions?

We will review the public communications plan to determine how the decisions outlined above will affect this plan. The plan may be modified to take on additional communications responsibilities, but at this time focuses entirely on external public communications.

*Please send your initial comments on this plan to Amy Echols by Friday, July 16.*

**REVIEW DRAFT**  
**Columbia River Crossing Project**  
**Public Communications Plan**  
**Alternatives Development and Environmental Scoping Phase**

**Introduction**

The Columbia River Crossing Project is a collaborative, bi-state effort, led by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), to evaluate highway and high-capacity transit improvements in the area of influence of the Interstate Bridge. The purpose of these improvements is to reduce congestion, increase safety, and contribute to the regional economy and interstate commerce.

These potential improvements address a portion of recommendations that were made in the *Final Strategic Plan* of the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership (June 2002). The *Final Strategic Plan* reflects substantial study done since 1998, when WSDOT partnered with ODOT and other local stakeholders in Washington and Oregon to plan and implement improvements along the I-5 corridor from I-84 in Oregon to I-205 in Washington.

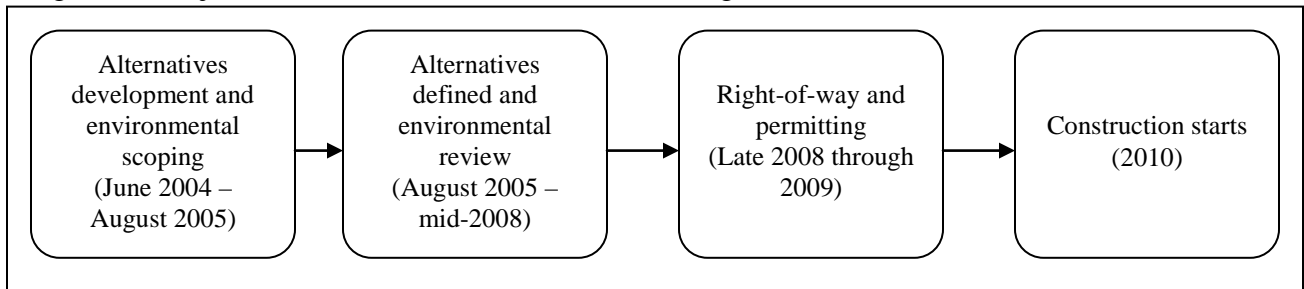
The Columbia River Crossing Project will take place under the guidance of a joint subcommittee of the Oregon and Washington State Transportation Commissions. Key participants also include:

- Bi-State Coordinating Committee
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Portland Metro
- Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council
- TriMet
- C-Tran
- Cities of Portland and Vancouver
- Counties of Clark and Multnomah
- Ports of Vancouver and Portland

Two studies, the *Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor Freight Feasibility and Needs Assessment Study* (2000) and the *Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Study* (2002), served as the basis for developing the *Final Strategic Plan* recommendations. Other *Final Strategic Plan* recommendations addressing freight, rail, and land use are being advanced by a range of regional partners, in coordination with this effort.

This plan describes the public communications that will occur during the alternatives development and environmental scoping phase of the project. Once WSDOT and ODOT project managers, as well as the Bi-State Coordinating Committee staff have reviewed this strategy, a detailed work plan will be developed.

Figure 1. Project Schedule (based on available funding)



## **Alternatives Development and Environmental Scoping – Activities and Timeline**

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The alternatives development and environmental scoping phase of the Columbia River Crossing Project involves consideration of scoping, funding, and implementation studies that were not previously addressed in the *Partnership Study*. This public communications plan will support the following tasks that will be accomplished during this phase:

1. Define a bi-state project delivery and decision structure, and agree on a bi-state working agreement to guide the project.
2. Conduct technical and policy studies to provide background information needed to define realistic, fundable river crossing options for environmental review, including:
  - Compiling existing and new information on traffic and travel demand,
  - Investigating tolling and other funding options,
  - Comparing preliminary engineering concepts,
  - Defining early cost and schedule ranges for a field of project options, and
  - Building the procedural basis for beginning the environmental review process in mid-2005.
3. Consult with regional decision makers and community leadership to facilitate an understanding of the project process, and to support framing the economic, technical, environmental, social, and community values and parameters that will lead the project through its next steps.
4. Conduct outreach with the public at large to continue those discussions as above, analyze the communities to identify tailored outreach to low-income and minority populations, scope the issues and ideas to be addressed in the environmental review process, and define a detailed EIS-phase communications and outreach plan.

The project approach will incorporate the principles of “Context-Sensitive and Sustainable Solutions” as defined by federal transportation bodies (*Flexibility in Highway Design, FHWA-PD-97-062*, and *Building Projects that Build Better Communities – Recommended Best Practices, WSDOT 2003*) and emerging as policy guidance in both Oregon and Washington. Both agencies will also comply fully with federal regulatory and guidance to ensure that minority and low-income populations are appropriately involved and protected in implementation of the project. Applicable guidance also exists from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration, and will serve as a foundation for the project’s analysis of and outreach to environmental justice communities.

## **Public Communications Plan -- Goal and Objectives**

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The overall goal of the communications plan, in support of the alternatives development and environmental scoping phase of the project, is to involve key bi-state constituencies through a variety of mechanisms by building on the existing relationships, level of interest, and momentum already demonstrated during the work of the I-5 Partnership Task Force.

Specific objectives for communication during this phase of the project include:

- Engage actively and systematically with representatives of affected communities and a representative spectrum of interested citizens to create understanding of the project’s goals and strategic importance.

- Clearly describe the objectives of the alternatives development and environmental scoping phase and the options to engage the affected communities in an interactive and meaningful way to understand and address public ideas and preferences.
- Provide forums for discussing issues and opportunities identified during this phase of the project, weighing potential tradeoffs, and developing promising options.
- Create a feedback loop to demonstrate how public input shapes project activities and decisions in this phased project approach.
- Systematically gather and document input to help shape project options and influence project decisions, setting the stage for the next phases of design, environmental review, and funding discussions.
- Lay the groundwork to develop an understanding of the communities' histories, values, and priorities for the future, in accordance with the principles of designing context-sensitive and sustainable solutions.
- Assemble the communications and outreach tools needed to inform and involve a broad set of interests, including tailored outreach to low-income and minority populations within the project area.

### **Public Communications Approach**

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The project team will work with regional and local leadership as an early activity, through focused interviews, to determine issues and ideas that exist today within the bridge influence area, and to update project information in terms of parallel and contributing activities that may be under way. Through those interviews and other research, the team will build on the existing base of identified public segments, adding depth to the contact database for short-term and longer-term outreach activities. Input will be sought on how business, local government, interest groups, and community leadership view the project and how they prefer to participate as the project moves ahead.

Two basic information and outreach “waves” of communication and outreach activities will occur during this phase of the project. During the first “wave,” as basic project information is under development, communications and outreach will target regional and local leadership. The project will also work with local and regional media to build a base of understanding of how some of the I-5 recommendations are being implemented. An important aspect of this targeted outreach will be to communicate the scope of the Columbia River Crossing Project relative to the total scope of recommendations included in the *Strategic Plan*. Targeted groups will include:

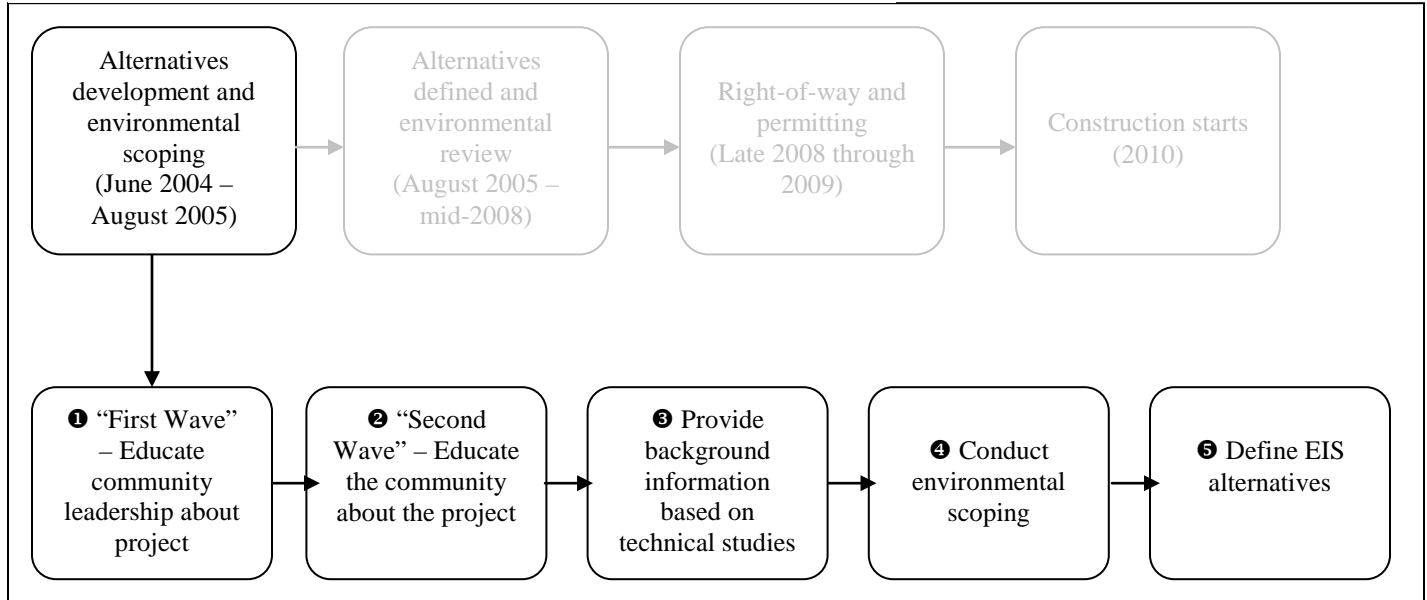
- Federal officials
- Tribal governments
- State and local officials
- Business and economic development interests, including ports
- Transportation and land use interests
- Community leadership

During the second “wave,” the focus will broaden to include the general public and other interested groups, in addition to interests involved earlier. By this point, the project developmental work will have answered some key technical questions, and framing the public

discussion will have a strong basis in current information. As technical information becomes available, environmental scoping will begin, followed by the definition of the EIS alternatives.

These “waves” of outreach and the subsequent project activities are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Current Phase Activities



On the following page, Table 1 summarizes public events, information materials, and outreach tools to be developed and used during this phase. These strategic communication products will dovetail with plans and timelines for technical work products, regional decision making, and project planning activities. The activities and products summarized in Table 1 may bear adjustment as management policy and/or technical progress is made, and input from targeted group interviews and other project inputs are assimilated.

### Communications Team Organization

WSDOT and ODOT staff, the technical team, and the communications team support the project. The communications team will consist of WSDOT and ODOT communications managers and communication consultants with experience on both sides of the river. The communications team coordinates through weekly conference calls or meetings, sharing of electronic communications, and other dialogue as needed. Communication team leadership will consult with the agency project staff and the technical team through regular meetings and monthly written status reports. As the project moves ahead, the team will seek input and participation from communications and outreach staff at partner agencies.

**Table 1. Public Communications Plan**

	① “First Wave” -- Educate community leadership about the project	② “Second Wave” -- Educate the community about the project	③ Provide background information based on technical studies	④ Conduct environmental scoping	⑤ Define EIS alternatives
<b>Events</b>					
Community Leadership Interviews	Conduct interviews to determine issues and ideas, update project information, and establish how to involve leaders				
Community Leadership Forum	Establish project approach to address context-sensitive and sustainable solutions and environmental justice				
Speakers Bureau	Establish target groups and speakers bureau plan, and prepare presentation materials and speaking points (building on “Just the Basics” packet)	Begin speakers bureau	Continue speakers bureau	Continue speakers bureau	Continue speakers bureau
Environmental Justice Outreach	Compile and analyze existing demographic information. Conduct interviews with community leaders to develop environmental justice strategy.	Begin implementing environmental justice strategy	Continue implementing environmental justice strategy	Continue implementing environmental justice strategy	Continue implementing environmental justice strategy
Project Tours	After project has been defined, develop project tour route and content for community and business leadership. Begin offering tour opportunity to interested parties targeted in first wave.	Begin to offer tour opportunity to corridor resident organizations and other interested parties, and continue to offer the tour to community and business leadership.	Continue to offer tour opportunity to all interested parties.	Continue to offer tour opportunity to all interested parties.	Continue to offer tour opportunity to all interested parties.

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Agency Scoping Meeting				Hold scoping meeting to involve all relevant resource and permitting agencies.	
Public Scoping Meeting				Hold public scoping meeting to share available project background and information and gather scoping input.	
Post-Scoping Communications and Outreach					Develop package of materials that analyzes key themes heard during the scoping process, explains how the alternatives will be structured, and what information will be available as the EIS begins. Identify groups and venues to share material, and develop an outreach schedule.
<b>Materials</b>					
“Just the Basics” Information Packet	Prepare core set of existing information describing the project, schedule, decision process, context-sensitive and sustainable solutions principles, environmental justice, frequently asked questions, and opportunities for involvement		Update existing “Just the Basics” information packet with information from technical studies, as appropriate	Update existing “Just the Basics” information packet to reflect scoping information.	Update existing “Just the Basics” information packet to reflect EIS alternatives.
Project Newsletter				Publish newsletter to announce scoping period	Publish newsletter to announce EIS alternatives
Technical Information Summaries			As technical studies become available, and as appropriate, a 2-page summary of results will	Continue to prepare summaries of technical studies as they become available.	Continue to prepare summaries of technical studies as they become

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			be prepared and shared with appropriate audiences		available.
Scoping Notification			Develop detailed draft and final plan to support the scoping process and manage plan implementation.  Assist the technical team in preparing the purpose and needs statement and notice of intent to enter into scoping process.	Publish the purpose and need statement and notice of intent in local and regional publications.	
<b>Outreach Tools</b>					
Project Website	Update project website using information contained in “Just the Basics,” and include project calendar, project library, contact information, registration for project information, and comment form		Update project website with results of technical studies, as available	Update project website with environmental scoping information, including proposed purpose and need statement, scoping meeting, and opportunities for comment	Update project website with environmental scoping results, final purpose and need statement, and EIS alternatives
Project Toll-free Hotline	Establish toll-free hotline for project	Maintain toll-free hotline for project, updating as necessary with new project information and events	Maintain toll-free hotline for project, updating as necessary with new project information and events	Maintain toll-free hotline for project, updating as necessary with new project information and events	Maintain toll-free hotline for project, updating as necessary with new project information and events
Comment Database	Develop a database to compile all comments received and track responses	Continue to maintain comment database	Continue to maintain comment database	Continue to maintain comment database	Continue to maintain comment database
Public Opinion Survey					Conduct a statistically significant public opinion survey to support finalizing alternatives and funding options and identify strategic



	① “First Wave” -- Educate community leadership about the project	② “Second Wave” -- Educate the community about the project	③ Provide background information based on technical studies	④ Conduct environmental scoping	⑤ Define EIS alternatives
					project issues.
<b>Other</b>					
EIS-Phase Communications and Outreach Plan					Prepare an EIS-phase communications and outreach plan. Conduct interviews and a public involvement survey to assess efforts to date. Include analysis of lessons learned in EIS-Phase plan.
Evaluate Project Advisory Roles	Further analysis of corridor issues and of available models for working with representative advisory bodies will be conducted to determine whether a citizen/interest advisory structure is appropriate			Re-visit the potential need for a citizen/interest advisory structure.	Re-visit the potential need for a citizen/interest advisory structure.

As a bi-state project, the project will entail meeting all substantive requirements of both WSDOT and ODOT in terms of communications standards, protocols, and styles. Those requirements will be integrated and applied consistently, with regular oversight and feedback from communications management at both agencies. Project materials will be clearly identified as to their bi-state and partnership nature, with appropriate use of logos, contact information, etc.

A bi-state strategy team will be identified to assist in identifying type and content of public information materials and outreach, to help insure that communication and outreach activities meet both informational and protocol objectives. No materials will be distributed to the public without prior approval from both WSDOT and ODOT, and agency personnel will be primary “faces” for the public and speak publicly for the joint project and for their respective agencies.

### **Project Media Strategy**

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Print and electronic media will be important communication channels for the project. WSDOT and ODOT, and the joint project team agency members, will serve as spokespersons for the project and their respective agencies. The overall media strategy will consist of:

- Identify all relevant media in the project area and regionally, including localized publications that may be especially suitable for reaching local, minority, and low-income populations. Develop a database-driven system for outreach to media and track results.
- Identify key points in the process when media releases, press conferences, press backgrounders, editorial board visits, project area tours, and other events will be appropriate. Arrange and support media interviews and tours, as well as editorial board briefings (augmenting project personnel with appropriate officials as needed).
- Prepare media information kits and train a project policy level team to be media contacts, including maintaining and updating the information, preparing teams for the contacts, and debriefing and tracking the efforts.

At key points in the process (launching of scoping, release of developing information on issues such as traffic or tolling, agreement on alternatives, etc.) a specific media strategy will be developed, briefed to the project team, and support provided for agency implementation of the strategy.

### **Communications and Outreach Documentation**

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The communications team will consolidate and analyze all public involvement documentation prepared for earlier phases of work in the corridor to produce an administrative record of public involvement to date. Stringent documentation standards and systems will ensure that information and interaction records during this phase will supplement that base of public involvement documentation. As the project assembles more of a base of information on traffic and travel demand, engineering design concepts, tolling options, cost estimates, etc., that information will also be integrated into outreach activities.