

Why This Report?

After six years of discussions and preliminary planning, the I-5 Columbia River Crossing Project is now beginning formal environmental analysis under the guidance of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). One of the first steps in the NEPA process is called “Scoping”. The Scoping process is an opportunity for the region’s citizens, businesses, public agencies, and jurisdictions to help determine what project alternatives will be studied during the environmental analysis and how they will be evaluated.

This Concept Report has been prepared as a project summary to assist with the scoping process. It is a reference tool to help people get up to speed quickly on the project work already done, and to describe the context for the upcoming environmental analysis.

What Work Has Already Been Done?

1999 ~~A committee of community leaders examined the I-5 Columbia River Crossing Trade Corridor Partnership was established~~ to consider how to address growing congestion in the I-5 corridor between Portland and Vancouver. The ~~committee’s Partnership’s~~ report emphasized the need for action.

2001 A Governor’s Task Force was appointed to guide the development of a strategic plan for the corridor. The Task Force engaged the public, affected communities, businesses, and other stakeholders to ensure that a broad range of viewpoints was reflected in their work. The Task Force developed 20 possible concepts, and conducted a fuller analysis on nine full corridor options.

2002 The Governor’s Task Force issued its *Final Strategic Plan for the Interstate-5 Corridor* with the following recommendations for further study:

- ❖ I-5 operating with three through lanes in each direction, including southbound through Delta Park.
- ❖ A phased light rail loop operating in Clark County in the vicinity of the I-5, SR500/4th Plain and I-205 corridors.
- ❖ A new bridge or bridges to supplement or replace the existing bridges with three through lanes in each direction plus up to two additional lanes in each

direction to serve merging traffic, plus two light rail tracks.

- ❖ Interchange improvements and additional merging lanes where needed between SR500 in Vancouver and Columbia Boulevard in Portland, including a full interchange at Columbia Boulevard (now under construction).
- ❖ Additional analysis of possible improvements in a Bridge Influence Area (BIA), defined as I-5 between Columbia Boulevard and SR500.

2004 Under contract to the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation a consultant team prepared additional analysis of Columbia River Crossing project concepts, including traffic and transportation performance, financing issues, [statutory/regulatory issues](#) and engineering and environmental review.

Where Are We Now?

The current status of the Columbia River Crossing Project is:

- ❖ There are 11 [multi-modal](#) concepts for the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) illustrated on page X. These include options for: supplementing or replacing the current bridges; single- and double-deck concepts; single or multiple bridges as well as a supplemental tunnel; and fixed-span or lift-span bridges.
- ❖ There are four roadway alignment strategies for I-5 on the Oregon and Washington sides of the river, also illustrated on page X.
- ❖ [While each of the illustrations represent the transit component of the concept with railroad tracks, the environmental process will study a range of high capacity transit options, including but not limited to enhanced bus service, bus rapid transit and light rail.](#)

As the environmental process proceeds, the concepts developed to date may be considered as pieces of a puzzle for developing NEPA project alternatives.

In addition to the physical configurations of river crossing and freeway elements, the upcoming work will also look at project financing. At least some options are likely to consider bridge tolls to finance project construction and operations.

- ❖ Tolling I-5 Only: This study option would assume that travelers pay a toll on the I-5 bridge in both the northbound

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and southbound directions. The I-205 bridge would provide a toll-free alternative.

- ❖ Tolling I-5 and I-205: This study option would assume that travelers pay a toll on both bridges, but only in one direction. That is, both bridges would be tolled either northbound or southbound.

In addition to evaluating tolling as a financing option, the Environmental Impact Statement would also study tolling related facilities and impacts, including toll plazas, the freeway widening to accommodate the plazas, and the associated buildings, lighting and other features.

What Happens During Scoping?

The Scoping process is a series of meetings with agencies and jurisdictions and with interested citizens, organizations and businesses. Well-publicized public meetings will be scheduled at convenient places and times to encourage people to attend.

At the scoping meetings this report will be supplemented with additional display materials and presentations. Staff from the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation and other agencies and jurisdictions will be available to answer questions, engage in discussion and record comments. Comments can also be submitted in writing.

Next Steps

Based on all of the work done to date, and the discussion and comments received during the scoping process, the project sponsors (both states and the federal government) will establish screening criteria and select alternatives to carry forward into the NEPA environmental analysis. Partner agencies, jurisdictions and the public will continue to be involved in the project work throughout the NEPA process, from beginning to end.

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Environmental and Engineering Considerations

In the work that has been completed to date, the I-5 Columbia River Crossing project extends from the Victory Boulevard interchange in Oregon to the SR-500/39th Street Interchange in Washington.

As the project evolves, the geographic project limits will be developed consistent with the requirements of NEPA.

Improvements at the Columbia Boulevard interchange are currently underway as part of a different project.

Figures 4 and 5 show potential footprint impacts for Interstate 5. This has been estimated, for discussion purposes only, as an area within approximately 200 feet of the current right of way. This potential footprint is not certain but is shown here for the purposes of identifying possible impacts.

Environmental Considerations

Figure 4 illustrates the currently known environmental considerations that need to be explored. The considerations include possible neighborhood and business impacts, fish and wildlife impacts, and potential wetland and park impacts. These and many other issues will be raised and discussed at the agency, jurisdiction and stakeholder/public scoping meetings.

Engineering Considerations

Engineering considerations are shown in Figure 5. Vertical clearance requirements (that is the space under and over the bridge(s) to accommodate river traffic and aviation) will directly influence the type of crossing and the connectivity between Interstate 5 and SR 14, Marine Drive, and Downtown Vancouver.

The distance between current interchanges is relatively short on both the Oregon and Washington approaches – this will influence the possible interchange forms, possible connections between the interchanges, and the degree of connectivity to the surrounding roadways.

These and many other issues will be considered as part of the project scoping process to ensure that the environmental impact study team has sufficient knowledge to develop a project plan that appropriately addresses all critical issues.

[NOTE: I believe we still need a disclaimer on each of the concept illustration pages \(figures 2 & 3\) related to transit – see below:](#)

[These drawings were developed as part of the I-5 Strategic Plan. Representing High Capacity Transit \(HCT\) components of these concepts by rail tracks is for illustration purposes only and not an indication that light rail is the only HCT option that will be considered as part of the Columbia River Crossing Project](#)