

“Just the Basics” –

The Columbia River Crossing Project

August 4, 2004

What is happening with the Columbia River Crossing Project? How does it relate to the earlier I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership? How does the current phase (2004-2005) relate to a potentially larger project in the longer term? See information inside on:

- Carrying forward I-5 Partnership recommendations on freeway, transit, finance, and environmental justice – pre-EIS technical analyses to answer outstanding questions
- Geographic scope of project
- Joint WSDOT/ODOT project team structure
- State and regional decision-making structure
- Communications and public outreach approach
- Near-term guidance and decisions needed from DOT management

Carrying Forward I-5 Partnership Recommendations

Where Did These Ideas Emerge?

The I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership involved regional leadership in Washington and Oregon between 2001 and 2002 in examining the I-5 corridor and related freight facilities. A diverse group of people – citizens, business and freight interests, neighborhood organizations, and local, regional, and state governments – participated actively in the I-5 Partnership Task Force. A wide range of corridor-wide improvements and traffic management solutions were recommended in the resulting *I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan*. Two specific recommendations, the subject of the Columbia River Crossing Project, were:

- to add capacity in the I-5 corridor across the Columbia River.
- to consider high-capacity transit improvements in the area of the I-5 Columbia River Bridge.

Recommendations that also are being addressed in this project included study of financing options, and consideration of low-income and minority populations within the corridor.

The region remains very interested in taking the next steps – converting this subset of its overall recommendations into action and regional improvements. Business, government, and neighborhood interests continue to demonstrate commitment to solving regional economy, safety, congestion, and quality of life issues playing out in the crossing area. They have questions about what will happen and when; the project is poised to answer those questions.

Why Do Technical Analyses Now?

The recommendations were just that, conceptual recommendations. Questions remain about how to translate those recommendations into more detailed project development and environmental review. Between now and mid-2005, the project is answering critical questions and preparing technical analyses, building a sound foundation for project scoping and environmental review. The figure on the following page illustrates the flow of recommended options from the I-5 Partnership, and key questions to be answered before we go out and formally scope the project alternatives:

- What is the current traffic and travel demand situation on the corridor, and what travel demand forecasting assumptions will be used in the DEIS?
- What are the most important engineering and environmental issues that will help shape the project concepts? What other project concepts should be studied?

- What financing options should be explored in the DEIS, and what are the possibilities for tolling a new facility(ies)?
- What are Oregon’s and Washington’s administrative and regulatory environments for a potential project, and are any changes needed?
- How should the project be organized, and what are the bi-state intergovernmental and decision-making structures?
- What are the right strategies to achieve context-sensitive and sustainable solutions in the corridor, through informing and involving the range of interested parties in the project in meaningful ways?
- What low-income and minority populations live and work in the study area, and what outreach will help bring them into project activities?

With this information compiled and developed, both DOTs can define a reasonable and promising set of alternatives to take into scoping and the DEIS process.

WHAT IS THE PROJECT’S GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE?

The I-5 corridor between Clark County and Portland faces increasing pressures of congestion, safety, and delays in freight and commuter movement. The Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River, actually two side-by-side bridges built in 1917 and 1958, is a critical connection. However, effects of growth are felt not only in the area of the bridge itself. This project, the Columbia River Crossing Project, will focus on the area of “bridge influence” – from north Vancouver to Lombard St in Portland to the south, reaching further to the west and encompassing the railroad bridge, and east as far as the I-205 corridor and that river crossing. The map below (insert locational map) shows the area that the project will study.

JOINT ODOT/WSDOT PROJECT TEAM STRUCTURE

Chartered as a bi-state project team, and to be operated under a memorandum of understanding between the two agencies which is under development, the Columbia River Crossing team members are working together to frame the project, conduct the analyses described above, and lay the groundwork for broad participation by all interests. The organization of the project includes:

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Policy Guidance: Joint Subcommittee of the Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions

Management Leads: Don Wagner, WSDOT Regional Administrator, and ~~Matt Garrett, ODOT Regional Administrator~~
John Rosenberger, Deputy Director, ODOT

Co-Managers: Dale Himes, WSDOT, and Rob DeGraff, ODOT

DOT Support: Bart Gernhard, Amy Echols, Mary Legry, WSDOT

Other names from ODOT?

Contractor Leads: Geoff Larkin, the Larkin Group – Technical Analyses
Ron Anderson, David Evans and Associates – Traffic Analyses
Marc Butorac, Kittelson and Associates –
Environmental and Conceptual Engineering
Steve Siegel, Financial Analyses
Mary Jo Porter, Jeanne Krikawa, Underhill Company, Policy and
Communications
Pat Serie, EnviroIssues, Public Outreach and Communications

Specifics of project communication protocols, operating procedures, reporting formats, etc. are under development by the team, led by Rob DeGraff and Dale Himes. Decision-making will be done jointly, with concurrence by each regional management team, and consultation with headquarters agency management and the Commission Subcommittee as needed.

(To be developed further following 8/4 session)

State and Regional Decision-Making Structure

During this phase of the project (through mid-2005), there are few hard decisions to be made. The emphasis is on gathering and analyzing the adequacy of existing information, filling information and data gaps, and identifying characteristics of the options for the corridor that may make them promising for further evaluation. Nevertheless, this phase of the project sets the stage for longer-term decisions, and does include some points at which directions will need to be set – traffic and design assumptions, possibilities for tolling and other financing mechanisms, etc., all to be carried forward into the DEIS for full evaluation.

Discussions to date about decision making are evolving into a few key principles:

- Ultimate decision-making authority regarding the project rests with the respective Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions, as recommended by DOT management and approved by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.
- Intensive involvement in the near term by local and regional elected officials and their key staffs will enhance the quality of decisions made and build ownership of project outcomes. The project team is committed to working closely with electeds and staffs through the Bi-State Coordinating Committee as well as with individual jurisdictions and agencies as needed, bringing all pertinent jurisdictions and entities along with the process as it moves ahead.
- Similarly, early, direct and meaningful consultation with regional business, economic development, special interest, and neighborhood organizations will add to the quality of decision-making and create support for implementing project outcomes. Such interaction will be a keystone of the project. The planned business group that has been generated within Clark County will be encouraged to become and stay actively involved in parallel with DOT-managed advisory activities.

- Involvement of the general public, not only in the immediate corridor but also in the realm of corridor users and the broader interested region, will also receive significant attention. A coordinated strategy of providing project information will be appropriate early in 2005 as a prelude to the public scoping period.

Two models are suggested for consideration to interact with regional leadership. They include:

1. **Dual Bodies – Oversight and Input:** In this model, the project would rely on the Bi-State Coordinating Committee, with the addition of legislators from each state, to provide guidance and oversight as this phase of the project proceeds. They would be kept apprised, consulted for their preferences and opinions, and brought along with each step in the process. A second body, convened by the two DOTs in early 2005, would serve a citizens’ advisory role, serving as a sounding board and providing input to the project. It would include neighborhood, business, and special interest groups. The existing environmental justice working group would be considered as an adjunct to the citizens advisory group, though it would receive some tailored interaction to ensure adequate consideration of the issues that may particularly affect low-income and minority communities.
2. **One Big Body – Task Force Model:** In this model, a task force consisting of local and regional elected officials, legislators, business and freight interests, transportation and conservation interests, neighborhood groups, etc. would be convened. The makeup and structure would be similar to the previous I-5 Partnership Task Force. The group would provide advice and input, serve as a sounding board, and be brought along with each step in the process with the goal of improving project decisions and gaining support for project outcomes.

Pros and cons of these two approaches will be discussed at the DOT partnering session on August 4. Key to that discussion should be the distinction between “oversight” by elected bodies who may have permitting or land use authority in the future, and it is hoped will provide strong support for the project outcomes; and “advisory” functions, where people and groups with an interest in but no jurisdictional responsibility for the project will be asked to become informed, provide feedback and input, and will also hopefully provide strong support for project outcomes. The first model offers a more clear opportunity to make and maintain that distinction. In either case, it must be clear that ultimate authority for project decisions rests with each state and with FHWA and FTA.

Communications and Public Outreach

A detailed communications and public outreach plan is in development for the project. It mirrors the information provided above, with primary focus during the remainder of 2004 on community leadership --- business, neighborhood, and special interest groups --- and a move to add to that and communicate more broadly with the general public starting early in 2005. The objective will be to ensure clear

understanding of the scope and limitations of this pre-EIS work, to prepare people to participate effectively in the scoping and environmental review processes, and to elicit and prepare to resolve issues from the broad range of potentially affected public groups. The communications and outreach team will support development of project technical work products by consulting on format and style, developing and implementing product summaries, release strategies, and supporting information materials. Project scoping in [late winter](#)/spring of 2005 will be the launch of the most aggressive public communication and outreach, with the goal of defining the most promising and reasonable alternatives for DEIS analysis.

Near-Term Guidance and Decisions Needed from DOT Management

The project team has made significant progress in scoping and beginning work for this phase. All contractor support for this phase has now been brought on board, and the joint ODOT/WSDOT team is working in coordination to compile, analyze, and prepare to communicate project information. Guidance from DOT management that is needed to confirm project understandings and allow the work to move forward includes:

- Developing MOA to govern two-DOT management and decision-making, and reflecting that agreement in team structure and procedures
- Confirming geographic scope of project
- Deciding on project advisory structure
- Deciding on project decision-making structure, including Commissions' Subcommittee, DOT headquarters management, DOT regional management, FHWA and FTA, with input from Bi-State Coordinating Committee, potential advisory body, and other regional leadership, as well as general public
- Analyzing adequacy of project funding as it relates to project schedule, contractor scopes, etc.