

What another study?

Sunday, January 14, 2007

By Columbian Staff

Might have just sat down to breakfast Friday morning, seen the story in The Columbian about a new high-capacity transit study that will cost nearly \$2 million and promptly gagged on their eggs or spit their coffee. "Who needs another study?" our hypothetical breakfast eaters might have bellowed. "They're already studying a new bridge across the Columbia River that'll have space for rapid-transit buses or light rail. Besides, C-Tran buses are running around with plenty of empty seats right now."

Some of the concerns have a measure of validity and ought to be kept in mind by the 15-member high-capacity transit task force. It will meet for the first time 6 p.m. Tuesday at the county elections office, 1408 Franklin St. The public is welcome.

The task force is charged with devising a high-capacity transit system to operate within the county 20 or 30 years out. Here, according to Dale Robins of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, is one example of how this new study might unfold: A population center such as the Salmon Creek/Felida area is identified. Then, popular destinations are identified, such as downtown Vancouver, the mall or a complex of high-tech companies near Camas.

Then, they'll design corridors between those points, perhaps the right of way along existing highways. And they'll recommend possible modes of transportation for each corridor, such as bus rapid transit (not to be confused with regular city buses that stop every couple of blocks), light rail, trolleys or heavy rail.

The goal is to provide "an alternative to backups on congested roads and highways by traveling in an exclusive transit right of way," the council's fact sheet says.

"We are looking at transit that will carry more people more efficiently," Robins said. "We are not building anything. We are developing a plan to say 'here is where a corridor makes sense.' "

As for the breakfast eater's concerns, it is good to know that regular commuters and C-Tran are represented in this study. We were pleased to hear Robins say he expects some corridors to be identified that can serve just fine for years with standard buses making limited stops over existing highways. What won't make any sense is for opponents AND supporters of light rail to Portland to stake out positions on this study before any studying even begins. For more information visit <http://rtc.wa.gov/hct>.