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Study will look at new ways to move people in Clark County

Mass transit - A federal grant will pay for the research to identify the roads and the modes

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VANCOUVER -- A \$1.88 million countywide study is being launched to select high-capacity transit corridors and then to pick a mode -- light rail, streetcar or bus rapid transit, or something else.

The study is expected to take 18 months, according to Dean Lookingbill, director of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, which heads the research.

The group, a clearinghouse that processes state and federal transportation funding, also handles some transportation planning and research for the various governments in Clark and Skamania counties.

In a briefing Thursday, Lookingbill said the study is separate from the long-term planning process that is considering light rail or bus rapid transit on a proposed replacement bridge for Interstate 5.

"We will look at all options," Lookingbill said, "including bus rapid transit, commuter rail, monorail, streetcar, light rail and other types of transit that move large numbers of people quickly and efficiently."

He added that the Federal Transit Administration grant of \$1.488 million -- plus a local match of \$400,000 -- requires the group to study systems that use a fixed guide way. Directors of the C-Tran bus system have shown interest in bus rapid transit, in which a special lane is set aside for rubber-tired vehicles that can be as long as 175 feet, in as many as three segments, carrying as many passengers as a light-rail train.

Lookingbill said the new study will use the latest county land-use plan and its projections for 30 years of growth. He said it should not be confused with the Columbia River Crossing's planning, a "vision" exercise that is looking at freeway needs and additional Columbia River bridges 50 years in the future.

"The CRC is looking at getting across the river, while we will look at moving people inside the county," Lookingbill said.

Dale G. Robins, a senior planner with the regional council heading the corridor study, said he does not expect quick results.

"In a typical process, you won't see work on a new system for six to 12 years after we complete the study," Robins said Thursday. "There are a lot of decisions, and then you wait for funding."

Lookingbill said the final decision on corridors and transit mode will be made by the regional council, acting on advice from a steering committee which in turn will be guided by a task force of up to 15 citizens. The steering committee will include two legislators, two members of the Vancouver City Council, the Battle Ground City Council, Port of Vancouver and Clark County. Several steering committee members also serve on the Board of Directors of the C-Tran bus system.

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