

## STUDY MOVES AHEAD

The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, in partnership with the Oregon and Washington State Departments of Transportation and local cities and counties, is evaluating alternatives for a new or improved Highway 35 Columbia River crossing. The outcome of the study will be an understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks of a new or improved crossing, short and long term recommendations for improvements, and an implementation and funding strategy. Activities conducted to date include:

### Project staff:

- Evaluated existing conditions of the current crossing and potential alternative corridors.
- Recommended a thorough inspection of the existing bridge.
- Identified criteria to evaluate initial crossing corridors and alternatives.
- Reviewed preliminary corridors and different types of facilities.

### Citizens:

- Responded to a community questionnaire (more than 300 returned).
- Attended a public open house to learn more about the project and prioritize key issues.
- Took part in interviews to discuss the study (25 community leaders participated).
  - Participated in two meetings each of a citizens advisory committee and steering committee of local elected officials to provide advice.

# SR-35 Columbia River Crossing



## Project Update

## HIGH PRIORITY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The public has identified these issues, common to all alternatives:

- **Safety.** The existing bridge is too narrow, particularly for trucks, and the facility may have exceeded its useful life.
- **Economic.** The effects on adjacent communities, including the port districts, should be considered in all evaluations. The benefits and costs should be weighed to decide whether a new crossing is in the best interests of the communities.
- **Transportation.** Impacts on adjacent facilities and systems should be evaluated.
- **Alternative modes.** A future crossing should accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists safely.
- **Tolls/Financing.** If tolls are used to pay for a new crossing, they should benefit citizens on both sides of the river equally; any tolls should be discontinued after the facility is paid for.
- **Current and future capacity.** A new or improved crossing should meet the needs of the community at least 50 years into the future.
- **Freight.** A future crossing should accommodate freight movement.
- **Historic and aesthetic values.** The historic value of the existing bridge and its visual impacts on the Gorge are important.
- **Location/social/local community.** The bridge ties together communities in Oregon and Washington for work, shopping, entertainment, and other activities. A new or improved crossing should serve citizens on both sides of the river.





Many of these issues are among the criteria that will be used to evaluate alternatives selected for further study. Issues specific to preliminary alternative crossing corridors include:

- Traffic and connections to adjacent roads such as SR-14 or I-84.
- Environmental impacts, such as noise, fish hatcheries and wetlands.
- Physical constraints such as the high bluffs on the north side of the river.
- Visual impacts, particularly of a high bridge alternative (several hundred feet).
- Koberg State Park, Stanley Rock, the adjacent Native American in-lieu fishing site and railroad crossings.
- Historic resources, including the Columbia Gorge Hotel and Historic Highway.

## INITIAL CORRIDORS EVALUATED

The consulting and agency management team have conducted a preliminary evaluation of initial crossing corridors (see facing page) based on the following criteria:

- **Purpose and need** for the project must be met. This includes addressing deficiencies of the existing bridge and meeting the transportation needs of people and businesses in local communities on both sides of the river.
- **Impacts on cultural and historic resources** on or eligible for the National Historic Register should be avoided.
- **Effects on Native American “in lieu” fishing sites** could result in some options being ruled out.
- **“Visual subordination”** must be achieved. The Columbia River Gorge Scenic Act requires structures located in the scenic area be “visually subordinate” to the natural landscape.
- **Minimum impact on “section 4(f) resources,”** including parks recreational areas, wildlife

refuges, and historic sites. For federal-aid transportation projects, the alternative that least impacts USDOT Section 4f resources must be selected unless it is not feasible or prudent.

- **At grade railroad crossing.**

Locations that require such crossings may not be feasible or safe.

- **Location outside an “urban exempt area.”** Urban areas within the Columbia River Gorge are exempt from many of the Scenic Act’s requirements. A crossing outside an urban area may not be practical.

Based on preliminary analysis, the West and High corridors (see facing page) do not meet several of these criteria and appear to have relatively low potential for further study. The East A & B corridors have moderate potential, while the Existing Low and City Center corridors have relatively high potential for detailed evaluation.

The project team also identified and evaluated specific types of facilities against the same criteria. The following types of crossings have low potential for further study because they do not appear to meet the purpose and need for the project:

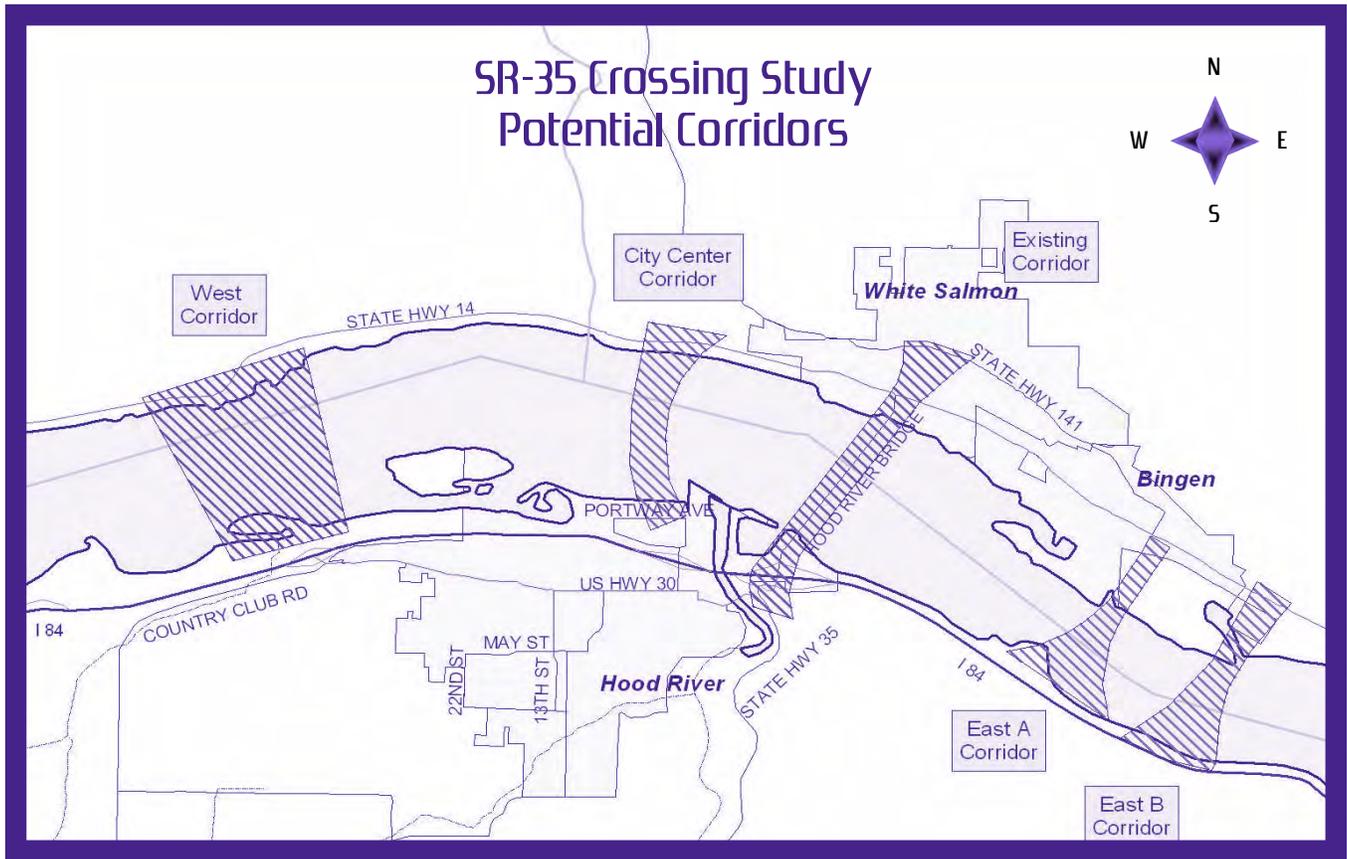
- Aviation transport
- Tramway
- Ferry system
- Transit only facility
- Bicycle/pedestrian only facility

Types of facilities with high potential for further study are shown on the next page.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Opportunities to learn more about the project and comment include:

- Attend the next community open house/public scoping meeting scheduled for March 8th, 5 – 8 p.m. at Fidel’s at the Gorge Restaurant in Bingen.
- Request a presentation to your neighborhood, business or civic group.
- Visit our Web site at [www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/sr35](http://www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/sr35).
- View displays to be posted in community buildings in Bingen, Hood River and White Salmon.



### Locations

**East A & B Corridors:** connects Koberg State Park to Bingen Point – expanded to include area east of Stanley Rock near Reeses Mill

**Existing Low:** approximately the same alignment as the current bridge

**Existing High:** approximately the same alignment as the current bridge with higher elevation; connects Button Junction to Jewett Boulevard (SR-141)

**West:** connects I-84 in Oregon to SR-14 in Washington

**City Center:** connects the Hood River City Center interchange to SR-14 in Washington

### Facilities with High Potential for Further Study

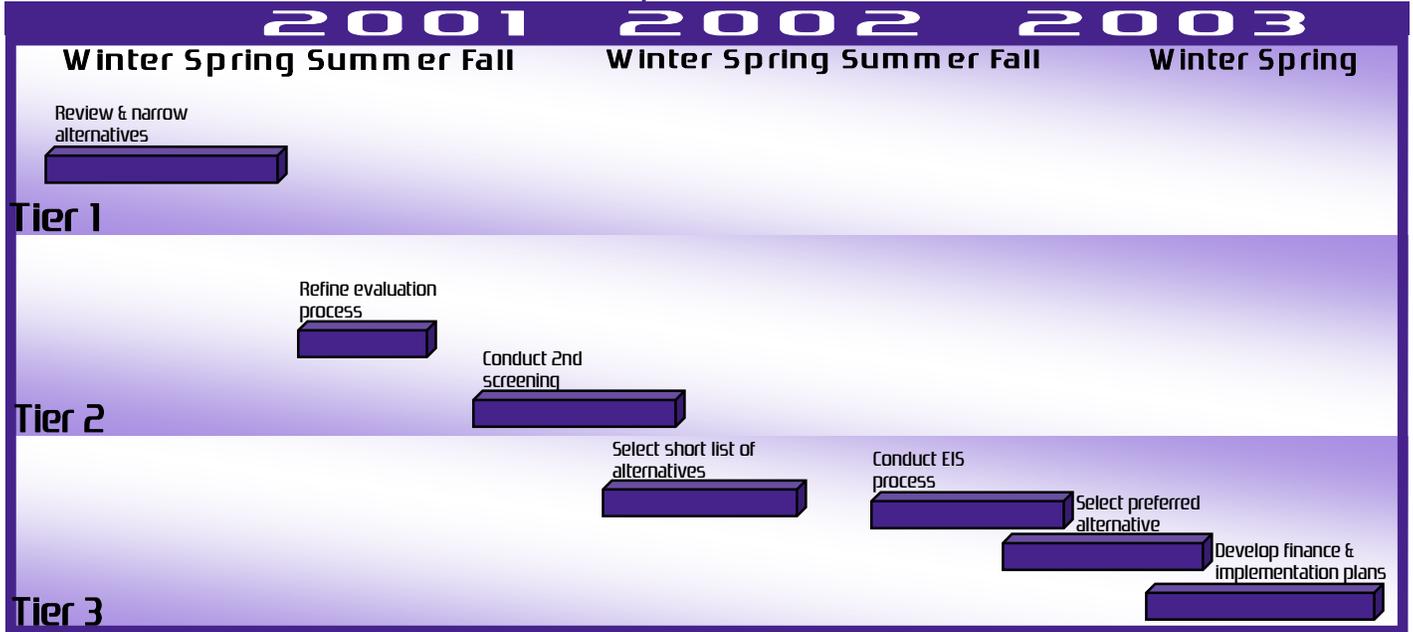
Single, multi-modal draw, floating or fixed span bridge or tunnel that accommodates automobiles, trucks, bicycles and pedestrians

Vehicle-only bridge or tunnel, with the existing bridge set aside for bicycles and pedestrians

Truck/bicycle/pedestrian bridge or tunnel, in conjunction with existing bridge for passenger vehicles

Short-term improvements to the existing bridge and adjacent roads and intersections (e.g., one-way toll, reversible lanes, traffic lights)

# Study Schedule



## Open House/Public Scoping Meeting Scheduled!

- ⇒ Learn more about the study
- ⇒ Review results of preliminary analyses and alternatives recommended for further study
- ⇒ Ask questions and make comments
- ⇒ Tell us how you would like to be involved

The second in a series of public events to discuss issues and possible impacts of this project will be held:

**Thursday, March 8th, 5 to 8 p.m. at Fidel's at the Gorge (restaurant), Bingen, Washington on SR-14 at 120 East Steuben**

This also will kick off the public scoping process required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

## For More Information

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