

Economic Effects of Replacing the Hood River Bridge

For More Information

Additional information about this study can be found on the Project Website
<http://www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/sr35/>
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SR - 35 Columbia River Crossing Study



SR 35 Hood River Bridge Background

The Hood River bridge is one of the three highway bridges crossing the Columbia River in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The bridge connects the communities of White Salmon/Bingen, Washington with Hood River, Oregon.

The Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge was built in 1924 and rebuilt in 1938 when the Bonneville Dam was built. Residents, businesses, and the bridge users on both sides of the Columbia River are concerned about the safety and service life of the bridge.



Purpose of the Type, Size and Location (TS&L) Study

The primary purpose of this project is to improve the movement of goods and people across the Columbia River between the Bingen/White Salmon, Washington and Hood River, Oregon communities.

Previous studies from transportation agencies in Washington and Oregon evaluated the need to reconstruct or replace the bridge. Two studies completed in 2004 (SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study and Draft Environmental Impact Statement) identified a preferred alternative: building a replacement bridge to the west of the existing Hood River bridge.



Many issues have to be evaluated and discussed to get from the present bridge to a replacement: design, engineering, cost, environmental impacts, and more. One of those issues is the economic effects of a replacement bridge—was the topic of the study summarized in this folio.

The TS&L study will answer these economic questions:

- What is the role of the existing bridge in the regional economy?
- How do current conditions affect the use of the bridge?
- What are the potential benefits of a replacement bridge?

Current Economic Conditions

The current conditions on the bridge primarily affect how the bridge is used because (1) the narrowness causes occasional vehicle damage, slow speeds, and stress for drivers, (2) weight limits make some freight more expensive to deliver, and (3) bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited. The economic study identified the following concerns:

- The narrowness of the bridge frightens people crossing the bridge: local resident and visitors alike.
- The narrowness of the bridge causes problems for schools and transit agencies: minor damage to vehicles (such as scrapes or broken side-view mirrors) and worries about passenger safety.
- Motorcycles have a hard time riding on the grating of the bridge.
- Pedestrians and bicycles cannot cross the bridge.
- The weight limit for vehicles crossing the bridge is 80,000 pounds. This weight limit and the narrowness of the bridge impedes efficient freight movement.
- The Hood River bridge is one of the most challenging bridge on the Columbia River system for river traffic.

Roles of the Hood River Bridge

The fundamental role of the bridge is to connect the communities of White Salmon/Bingen with Hood River, allowing the communities to share a common workforce, retail services, and public services. It is not one of several transportation links making that connection: it is the only link making that connection for 20 miles in either direction. The bridge:

- **Provides residents and businesses with cross-river commuting access to Washington and Oregon.** Businesses are dependent on access to workers on both sides of the bridge. About 10% to 15% of daily trips on the bridge are for commuting to work.
- **Supports the regional economy.** Hood River is the economic center of the region. Residents of Washington depend on the bridge to be able to shop and conduct business in Hood River. Businesses in Hood River depend on residents of Washington for customers.
- **Supports the movement of goods and services between Washington and Oregon.** The bridge allows relatively easy freight movement across the river, which thus allows manufacturers and producers some choice in where to have materials processed. Most freight goods that cross the bridge are wood products and fruit: for processing, use within the region, or for export outside of the region.
- **Provides access to recreational attractions and improves tourism within this region.** Visitors to the region use the bridge to access attractions or recreational opportunities on both sides of the river, as well as the retail and accommodations services available primarily in Hood River.
- **Provides access for emergency services between Washington and Oregon.** The bridge also allows

Conclusions: Benefits of a Replacement Bridge

The research and community outreach in this project suggest a replacement Hood River bridge would provide or improve:

- **Access between Hood River, OR and White Salmon/Bingen, WA beyond the existing bridge's estimated remaining useful life of 25 years.** A new bridge would have a design lifetime in excess of 75 years.
- **Travel time within the region.** Increases in the speed of bridge crossings would reduce the time it takes to cross the bridge, resulting in annual savings of about \$350,000. Relieving congestion would result in reduced fuel consumption, saving about \$90,000 per year.
- **Freight mobility within the region.** A new bridge with an increase in the maximum freight load allowed could attract more freight users to the region and provide a savings of around \$125,000 per year.
- **Safety for bridge users.** Improving safety on the bridge would help people in the region feel more comfortable when crossing the bridge. Replacement would provide an annual savings, from fewer broken mirrors, between \$40,000 and \$80,000 and \$100,000 to \$300,000 annually from fewer major incidents.
- **Multimodal transportation options to cross the bridge.** A replacement bridge would accommodate more transit buses, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, resulting in a decrease in driving.
- **Tourism.** A replacement bridge would benefit bicycle and other tourism, making it easier for visitors to cross the river.
- **Environmental quality.** The replacement bridge would reduce or eliminate storm water runoff.
- **Safety for river traffic.** This bridge is one of the most challenging on the Columbia River system for barge operators. Although there have been few barge strikes on the bridge, there is potential for a serious barge incident that could involve loss of life, negative environmental impacts (depending on the goods on the barge), and could significantly damage the bridge.

