

SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE, HOOD RIVER INN, OCTOBER 12, 2000

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Prepared October 19, 2000

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

About 37 people attended this first public event to discuss the SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study. The open house was announced in a newsletter distributed as a newspaper insert in the *Hood River News* and *White Salmon Enterprise*, as well as a news article in the *Enterprise*. The newsletter also was distributed at a variety of public places on both sides of the Columbia River. Attendees participated in the following activities:

- Indicated where they live and work on a large aerial photo display of the area
- Used “dots” to identify their three most important issues for the study
- Commented on crossing alternatives displayed on aerial photographs
- Listened to presentations about the project and participated in subsequent question and answer sessions.

A more detailed description of the presentation and discussion begins on page 8.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

- The majority of participants live in Washington while most work in Oregon.
- Top priority issues identified by participants include:
 - Location
 - Alternative transportation issues
 - Safety
 - Tolls
 - Current and future capacity
- Most frequently cited comments related to specific crossing alternatives include:
 - Traffic impacts
 - Tolls/ownership of bridge
 - Location
 - Safety
 - Environmental impacts such as noise, affects on the hatchery and wetlands
 - Proximity to adjacent communities
 - Physical constraints

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

A summary of the results of each activity follows.

LIVE/WORK MAP

Of those who participated in this exercise, three live in Hood River, four in Bingen, eight in White Salmon, two due west of White Salmon, and seven outside of the study area (three in Oregon and four in Washington). Eight people work in Hood River, one in White Salmon, one in Bingen, one about two miles west of White Salmon, and nine outside the study area (four in Washington and five in Oregon).. Results are summarized in the following table.

Location	Live	Work
Bingen	4	1
Hood River	3	8
White Salmon	8	1
West of White Salmon	2	1
Outside study area - Oregon	3	5
Outside study area - Washington	4	4

PRIORITIZATION OF ISSUES

Participants were provided with a list of issues previously identified for consideration in the study. They were asked to place dots next to the three issues they consider most important and to identify additional issues that should be addressed. Results follow. New issues are indicated in *italics*.

Issue	Number of Dots
Location	9
Alternative transportation opportunities (walking or bicycling)	8
Safety	8
Tolls	7
<i>Capacity - present and future</i>	7
Commercial needs - trucks	5
Visual impacts/aesthetics	5
Cost and financing	5

Issue	Number of Dots
Connections to adjacent highways (I-84 and SR-14)	4
Commercial needs – business access	3
Environmental impacts	3
<i>Bridge noise</i>	3
River traffic/navigation	1
Operation and maintenance	1
Life expectancy of current bridge	1
Economic impacts	0

CROSSING ALTERNATIVES

Participants reviewed aerial photographs of each crossing alternative currently under study, including an existing conditions/no action option. They placed stickee notes with their comments on each photograph. In some cases, comments are related to specific locations; in others, they are more general in nature.

Existing Conditions/No Action Alternative

Most comments are related to three main issues – safety, traffic and tolls. Other issues include the general need for improvement, alternative transportation modes, noise, growth limitations, aesthetics and railroad connections. Remarks follow:

Safety

- When will safety issues of I-84 exchange be addressed?
- Safety conditions on the I-84 intersection side of the bridge currently are unacceptable. Continued growth will only make things worse. We have been lucky no one has been killed at the on/off ramp that often is backed up onto the interstate.
- It is a terrifying experience crossing the bridge. Those guard rails won't hold.
- Upgrade safety to fit with current regulations.
- Does the bridge meet earthquake standards?

Traffic issues

- North side access if fine – or can be; south side interchange and four-way toll booth is a real [expletive].
- Both the I-84 ramp and the bridge/SR-14 interchange need better traffic control.
- This is way too congested at both ends and is getting worse!
- Is congestion of I-84/highway 35 due to stop sign? Toll booth? Marina access?

Tolls

- I am tired, tired of the toll – \$500 per year.
- I am tired of paying the Port of Hood River for a bridge that was paid for in the 50's.
- Paying toll for something I must use but have no input/voice on is not acceptable.

Other Comments

- Can the bridge be widened at all with a new surface?
- [The bridge] must be replaced. The bridge noise carries up and down the Gorge. It is like living next to a freeway in Seattle day and night. No walking path or bike path is available.
- Bike/pedestrian lane.
- Current bridge noise is a big problem.
- I love this bridge (aesthetics only). It is a national treasure (looking at it) in the rain, at sunset and sunrise.
- How will sites south of BNSF Railroad be accessed? BNSF will not want an at grade crossing.
- It feels like the current bridge is limiting development/growth of Klickitat County. Many people look at the bridge (toll, narrow lanes, etc.) and decide not to live in Klickitat County.

Current Crossing Location

Most comments are related to three issues – traffic, access to pedestrians and bicyclists, and ownership. Other issues include noise, aesthetics, safety, tolls and the bluff-to-bluff crossing. Remarks follow:

Traffic Issues

- South side congestion is really bad – must fix.
- A short-term addressing of safety issues along the I-84 off-ramp to the bridge eastbound is much needed; long term use of this corridor must include this issue.
- Consider rehabilitation to existing bridge to update width, surface, bike and pedestrian use, and spend the rest of the money working with ODOT to rehabilitate the intersection/interchange on the Oregon side.
- Low crossing can't avoid current congestion; high crossing would route log trucks and all traffic through White Salmon.
- Congestion on the south side also is a big problem. (2 comments)

Ownership

- Take the bridge out of the hands of the Port of Hood River. They have been unwilling to address safety issues from the I-84 exchange. (2 comments)

- No more Port of Hood River ownership or toll.
- No Port ownership. Deal with major traffic issues and noise; widen for bikes/walking.
- Any new bridge near the old one would ruin its aesthetic and historic value.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access

- Consider rehabilitation to existing bridge to update width, surface, bike and pedestrian use, and spend the rest of the money working with ODOT to rehabilitate the intersection/interchange on the Oregon side. (*comment also listed above*)
- Prefer one bridge with bike/walking access. No noise. This area is a good alternative.
- Bikes – widen to allow use by bikes; widen existing bridge safely.

Other Comments

- Bluff-to-bluff corridor creates access problems to both Highway 14 and I-84.
- Don't waste much money looking at bluff-to-bluff – [get a] quick cost estimate and eliminate.
- The Washington side should start near the Visitor's Center and go [to the] current terminus on the Oregon side.
- This plan could destroy an older established community.

East Corridor

Most comments are related to location, wetlands and generally positive comments about this option. Remarks follow:

Location

- A site even farther east of this proposal seems both more economically feasible and reduces traffic congestion problems of more westerly proposals.
- Suggest the bridge be moved east of Bingen wetland/SDS. SR-14 is above the railroad at this point and could land without damage to Bingen CBD [central business district] and could provide access to commercial area.
- Outside urban boundary. Will bridge land on the south or north side of I-84?
- Why not farther east by the gravel pit instead of wiping out east Bingen and impacting wetland?
- Going through the Port of Bingen is the best plan after replacing existing bridge at existing site.

Positive Comments

- Shortest distance of all alternatives.

- This also looks like a good alternative location.
- Probably best for Bingen, if done right.
- An eastside crossing with a railroad underpass on the north side would benefit north side businesses.
- This is a good option if bike/pedestrian lane is included – easily accessible by White Salmon/Bingen residents.

Wetlands

- Wetland – very important for migrating birds.
- Wetlands would be affected/destroyed.
- Wetlands are important.

Other Comments

- Don't want a bridge going through the neighborhood. Not a good option.
- I don't think this east side would be too harmful to downtown Hood River. Urban boundary problem.
- Washington state DNR and private timber sales – log haul to Portland mills.
- Ambulance/emergency access Hood River/White Salmon/Bingen to Portland.
- On the north side: BNSF will not allow at grade crossing. To go over railroad at this point will wipe out most of Bingen CBD [central business district].

City Center Corridor

Most comments are related to possible topography issues on the Washington side of the river, i.e., connection over the steep bluffs there. Other topics cited more than once are distance from White Salmon/Bingen and positive responses related to the location on the Oregon side of the river. Remarks follow:

Topography on Washington Side

- North side connection along Highway 14 is unrealistic. Sheer rock face walls will not allow the area needed for traffic intersections.
- Washington end doesn't seem to connect to anything. Would need a plan for the north end to be considered.
- Connecting off City center interchange looks good. Still, how to connect to SR-14? (*comment also listed below*)
- Looks good on south side for fitting in but not into the south side – big bluff cut out or even higher – not into White Salmon. (*comment also listed below*)

Hood River Comments

- Looks good on south side for fitting in but not into the south side—big bluff cut out or even higher— not into White Salmon.
- Looks good on Hood River side, but most likely not practical on Washington side because of steep cliffs.
- This looks like a good location.
- Connecting off City center interchange looks good. Still, how to connect to SR-14?
- Great access to Hood River—avoids “short weaving distance”. Would need a ramp connecting to Highway 35.

Distance to White Salmon/Bingen

- Seems too far from White Salmon/Bingen—especially if bridge is accessible by bikes/pedestrians.
- Too far from White Salmon/Bingen.

Other Comments

- This option and west crossing would allow use of ex-SR-14 Park & Ride.
- Would SR-14 be widened from site to Dock Grade Road as a part of this option?

West Corridor

Most the comments are related to connections to SR-14 and Highway 35, potential impacts on the hatchery and windsurfing area, and the distance to White Salmon and Bingen. Remarks follow:

Connections to Highways

- Would eliminate potential recreational site on the north side—makes all SR-35 traffic use I-84.
- How will SR-35 connect to I-84? Interchange?
- Too far to detour traffic from SR-14 to SR-35.
- Too far from Highway 35; Highway 14 unsafe for biking/walking to White Salmon/Bingen.
- Would SR-14 be improved from Alt SR-141 to Bridgemart as a part of this option?

Impacts on Hatchery and Windsurfing

- Hatchery: Lewis & Clark Bicentennial site (probable) and any new commemorative construction would be affected.
- Bridge ending at hatchery would be devastating to tourism—eliminate one of the best local windsurfing spots—would need to provide access elsewhere. Tunnels to west.

- Ruin premier windsurfing site; would adversely affect hatchery.
- A site west of hatchery would destroy wind flow for windsurfing at one of the best sailing sites (and most popular) in the world.

Distance to White Salmon/Bingen

- Seems too far from White Salmon/Bingen—especially if bike/pedestrian access is built into bridge.
- To far away from town. Doesn't make a walk/bike path as useful compared to being close in to town.

Other comments

- Basically, I don't like to see bridge moved here and subsequent getting to downtown Hood River business (go west).
- Interference with Columbia Gorge Hotel? Height of bluff very intrusive.
- How about our view?

PRESENTATIONS

At two points during the open house, Dale Robins of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) and Chuck Green of Parsons Brinckerhoff provided participants with a brief summary of the project and an opportunity to ask questions or make comments. The Hood River Bridge was built in 1924. While improvements were made to the lift span and other components in 1938, the basic structure has changed little since the bridge was constructed. During the past 75 years, the type and number of vehicles crossing the bridge has changed significantly. Consequently, the bridge is deficient in its ability to meet current and future needs.

In 1997, in response to the desires of local residents, the Washington State Legislature designated the SR-35 corridor as a future route across the Columbia River. The corridor is not limited to the existing bridge or a specific type of structure. Due in part to efforts of local residents and elected officials, a grant to study the feasibility of the corridor was authorized as part of the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) . In 1999, RTC and the State Departments of Transportation for Oregon and Washington formed a Management Team and conducted the first (scoping) phase of the feasibility study. In doing so, they asked residents basic questions: 1) Is there a need for a feasibility study? and 2) What should be considered in the study?

This first phase resulted in the scope of work for the feasibility study currently underway, including the tiered approach and a preliminary list of issues and alternatives to be considered. The objective of the study is to identify short and long-term solutions for the corridor and a financing plan to implement them. Issues of particular concern that have been identified include safety concerns, tolls, access to

bicycles and pedestrians, navigation impacts, environmental issues, economic impacts, and the location of a potential new or improved crossing.

A consulting team is assisting the Management Team in identifying and evaluating technical issues. At the outset, a wide range of possible alternatives will be identified in Tier 1 of the study. In Tier 2, these options will be narrowed to a short list of more promising alternatives and evaluated in greater detail. In Tier 3, a single preferred long-term alternative, as well as short-term strategies to address identified issues and a financing plan will be developed. At the conclusion of each Tier, the Management Team will decide whether to continue with the study or determine that a new or improved crossing is not feasible. Because federal funds are being used to pay for the project, it must comply with regulations specified in the National Environmental Policy Act and an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement will be produced. The study also must address requirements of the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Act, as well as other federal, state and local laws and regulations.

The public will have a variety of opportunities to obtain information and comment on the study, including public meetings and other events, participation on advisory committees, newsletters, news releases, a web site and youth programs.

A summary of discussion during and after the presentations follows.

Question How long will each tier last?

Answer Tier 1 will be finished in early spring, 2001 with a reality check of the preliminary options identified. Tier 2 will take the longest time, stretching into spring, 2002 for analysis of the alternatives, ending with a short list of long term options and possible short term solutions. Tier 3 will be done by the end of 2002, resulting in preferred long term and short alternatives, as well as a plan for financing and implementation.

Question What is the life expectancy of the bridge?

Answer We are investigating that as part of Tier 1 and hope to have an answer within the next several months.

Comment You should really push the Web site address for this project. I heard about this through the White Salmon newspaper. I suggest a link with the Gorge.net web site.

Comment I suggest you hand out flyers to people crossing the bridge.

Answer We have discussed that with the Port and will continue to investigate it.

Question Are there any safety guidelines that the bridge currently is not meeting?

Answer The lanes are narrower than suggested widths, though they may not be in violation of a specific requirement. There are no bike or pedestrian lanes. Bridge inspection is being conducted this week and should provide more

information. The bridge does have deficiencies due to the time of construction (1924). However there is a low reported rate of accidents on the bridge.

Question Have you identified future or current capacity requirements?

Answer We are working on that analysis. Most traffic turning operations at adjacent or connecting intersections are at acceptable levels. The I-84 interchange may not be operating at an acceptable level. We still need to assess the long term situation.

Question Have you identified any state or federal violations for the existing bridge?

Answer Not at this time. It is considered to be a privately owned facility and is not held to some state and federal requirements. We will assess this as part of our study.

Comment There are significant traffic back-ups on the Oregon side. Would state or federal agencies get involved to address this.

Comment There could be liability issues for the Port of Hood River. There are many back-ups at the interchange. It is fortunate there have been no serious accidents. It is a serious safety issue. Safety issues associated with the backup on the interstate near the interchange for the bridge could be addressed with a police warning a mile or two before the exit.

Answer It is important to identify short term remedies and lobby for their implementation.

Question Will you evaluate financing options early in the project?

Answer We will identify potential funding sources and their general practicality early. We also will look at restrictions on specific funding sources. Later Evaluating in the process, we will evaluate costs and funding strategies in more detail.

Question What agency makes the final decision about a preferred alternative? Who drafts the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)?

Answer Ultimately we must decide which state will take the lead, then it is likely to be that state's department of transportation or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Question I am concerned about the location of the potential touch-down point of the high crossing alternative. The location appears to be right next to or on top of my house. Will you be addressing impacts of alternatives on existing neighborhoods?

Answer We will identify and assess those types of impacts to determine if they are acceptable to the community. It is too early to say at this point how that assessment will affect the general evaluation or selection of a preferred alternative.

Comment The touch down point near Jewett Boulevard would be near the top of the hill.

Question Does the Corps of Engineers have navigation requirements that must be met?

Answer The Corps may have jurisdiction on wetlands. The US Coast Guard has the lead jurisdiction for navigation issues and requirements.

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