

SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE, HOOD RIVER INN, March 8, 2001

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Prepared April 3, 2001

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

About 60 people attended this second public event to discuss the SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study. This event also was the official public scoping meeting for the environmental evaluation process being undertaken during the course of the study. The open house was announced in a newsletter distributed directly to about 350 people who have expressed an interest in the project and/or attended previous events. It also was announced in news articles and advertisements in the *Hood River News* and *White Salmon Enterprise*, as well as in press releases to local newspapers in the Dalles and Skamania County. Notice of the meeting also was posted at the tollbooths on the existing bridge over the Columbia River between Hood River and Washington. Attendees participated in the following activities:

- Indicated where they live and work on a large aerial photo display of the area
- Used “dots” and “stickee”/post-it notes to comment on the following:
 - Preliminary screening/evaluation criteria
 - Initial screening/evaluation of corridor crossings
 - Preliminary assessment of different types of facilities
 - Summary of public comments and responses
- 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 7.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

- The majority of participants live in Washington (about 80%), while about 60% work in that state.
- Most participants agreed with comments expressed during previous public outreach activities, with the following exceptions:
 - Most disagreed with the statement that “the historic value of the existing bridge and impacts on nearby resources such as the Columbia Gorge Hotel and Historic Highway are important;” comments seem to indicate that some or most of the disagreement was with the historic value of the existing bridge, rather than adjacent historic resources.

- Over half disagreed with this statement: “potential visual impacts, particularly of a possible high bridge alternative are important.”
 - Almost all participants agreed with initial assessments of different types of facilities, with one exception. About 40% of those who comments, did not agree on the priority (high) for further evaluation of “short term improvements to the bridge.”
 - There was a wide range of comments about preliminary evaluation of corridors.
 - Just over half of the participants (who noted an opinion) agreed with the “low” rating for the West Corridor (7 agree, 6 disagree).
 - A slight majority agreed with the “high” rating for the City Center corridor (10 agree, 7 disagree)
 - Most agreed that the Existing Low corridor deserves a high rating (20 agree, 3 disagree)
 - Over half disagree with the low rating for the Existing High corridor (5 agree, 8 disagree)
 - A majority disagree with the “moderate” rating for the East A corridor (5 agree, 10 disagree)
 - All disagree with the moderate rating for the East B corridor.
- It is unclear whether those who disagree with the moderate ratings for the two East corridors would prefer a low or high rating.

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

A summary of the results of each activity follows.

LIVE/WORK MAP

Of those who participated in this exercise, five live in Hood River, three in Bingen, six in White Salmon and 15 outside of these cities (all in Washington). Six people work in Hood River, five in White Salmon, six in Bingen, four in other parts of Washington and six in other parts of Oregon. Results are summarized in the following table.

Location	Live	Work
Hood River	5	6
Oregon (outside Hood River)	0	4
Bingen	3	6
White Salmon	6	5
Washington (outside cities)	15	3

CORRIDOR EVALUATION

Participants were provided with a summary of results of a preliminary assessment of the potential for further study of crossing corridors. They were asked to use dots to

indicate whether they agreed (green dots) or disagreed (red dots) with the initial assessments. They also were invited to add specific comments about the ratings. There was a wide range of agreement/disagreement and comments. Results follow.

Corridor	Potential for Further Study	Agree	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> West Corridor: connecting I-84 in Oregon to SR-14 in Washington	Low	7	6
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bridges at West Corridor would have major effect on recreation windsurf/kiting at the #1 spot for recreation in the main corridor. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> City Center Corridor: connecting from the Hood River City Center interchange to SR-14 in Washington.	High	10	7
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good to have in industrial area. Bridge at City Center Corridor would have negative impact on recreation at the event site, windsurfing and kiting at the Sand Bar. – This option seems to fit with the Oregon population base and Underwood community. – City Center would be okay, but there is not any reasonable way to connect to the narrow Highway 14. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> Existing Low Corridor: approximately the same alignment as the current bridge.	High	20	3
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – City Center Corridor lines up with White Salmon dock grade, has low impact on Hood River event site. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> Existing High Corridor: approximately the same alignment as the current bridge but at a much higher elevation; connecting from Button Junction to Jewett Boulevard (SR-141)	Low	5	8
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – We would be channeling all traffic through this one corridor. – As our population base grows, we will need more than one bridge. – High Corridor is not a convenient location. Existing site location is easiest for both sides of travel. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> East Corridor A: connecting Koberg State Park to Bingen Point	Moderate	5	10
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A bridge here ruins by noise the only Washington public access to river. – This option may have a positive impact on Bingen, White Salmon and Mosier. – East A will ruin wetland and wipe out the east end of Bingen if underpass on railroad. How would trucks from Oregon get to SDS? 			

<input type="checkbox"/> East Corridor B: located east of the East A corridor, near the Reese's Mill site in Washington	Moderate	0	11
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FACILITY EVALUATION

Participants were provided with a summary of the results of a preliminary assessment of the potential for further study of different types of facilities. They were asked to use dots to indicate whether they agreed (green dots) or disagreed (red dots) with the initial assessments. They also were invited to add specific comments about the ratings. Participants generally agreed with the preliminary assessments with some exceptions. Results follow.

Facility	Potential for Further Study	Agree	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> Aviation transport	Low	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle/pedestrian only facility	Low	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/> Ferry system	Low	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/> Short-term improvements to the existing bridge and adjacent roads (e.g., one-way toll, reversible lanes, traffic lights)	High	9	6
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Port of Hood River has been using tolls for purposes other than the bridge. - Evaluate earthquake hazard. - As a reserve back-up to new bridge only. - One-way traffic on bridge will make I-84 interchange a mess, especially with traffic trying to exit I-84 and go to White Salmon. - Present bridge – replaced and enlarged to encourage pedestrian traffic. Free bridge. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> Single, multi-modal draw, floating or fixed span bridge or tunnel that accommodates automobiles, trucks, bicycles and pedestrians	High	19	1
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't make it fancy, make it efficient. - We need to take some pride. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> Tramway	Low	0	0
<input type="checkbox"/> Transit only facility	Low	5	0
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need bike and foot travel. 			

Facility	Potential for Further Study	Agree	Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/> Truck/bicycle/pedestrian bridge or tunnel, in conjunction with existing bridge for passenger vehicles	High	7	2
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a pedestrian/bicycle bridge or tunnel makes sense, but adding in trucks to the crossing? No for both safety and aesthetic concerns. 			
<input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle-only bridge or tunnel, in conjunction with the existing bridge set aside for bicycles and pedestrians	High	12	3
Comments:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If this present bridge is not replaced it will collapse in 10-15 years. - Two bridges would mean twice as much in maintenance cost. 			

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Participants were provided with a summary of comments made during previous public outreach activities. They were asked to use dots to indicate whether they agreed (green dots) or disagreed (red dots) with the comments. They also were invited to add additional comments. Participants generally agreed with the earlier comments, with some exceptions. Results follow.

Comments/issues raised during initial meetings and interviews	Agree	Disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing bridge feels unsafe - too narrow, particularly for trucks, and the facility may have exceeded its useful life. 	21	0
New Comments:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are only two options. Rebuild the existing or build at the Koberg site. - Might make a great pedestrian and bicycle bridge. - Or make a one-way high traffic time release in future. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic effects on adjacent communities, including the port district, should be considered in evaluating future crossing alternatives. 	12	3
New Comments:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider both ports equally. - The economy of the port should not be the only money factor. They need to diversify. 		

Comments/ issues raised during initial meetings and interviews	Agree	Disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts on adjacent transportation facilities and systems should be evaluated. 	11	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new or improved bridge should accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists safely. 	16	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If used, tolls should benefit citizens on both sides of the river equally and be discontinued when the facility is paid for. 	22	1
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can enough tolls be collected to even come close to the cost of a new bridge? Trust account. No tolls. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity of a new or improved crossing to meet the needs of the community at least 50 years into the future. 	15	0
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Especially if Indians build a casino and impact on I-84 interchange. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrow travel lanes make freight movement difficult, as do tolls. 	15	0
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The historic value of the existing bridge and impacts on nearby resources such as the Columbia Gorge Hotel and Historic Highway are important. 	1	9
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bridge itself has little or no historic value to me when compared to the hotel/highway. Existing bridge may be needed in future as population or tourism base expands. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new or improved crossing should conveniently serve citizens on both sides of the river as communities in both states are tied together for work, shopping, entertainment, and other social activities. 	12	0

Comments/ issues raised during initial meetings and interviews	Agree	Disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental impacts such as noise, effects on the hatchery, wetlands and other natural areas such as Bingen Lake are important. 	14	1
<hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not put bridge over the west end of Bingen Pond. The grated bridge is a good idea because of snow and ice. Snow plows on bridges do not usually work too well. The hum of the bridge is annoying. It is an environmental pollutant to my ears. I like to walk the marina path in Hood River at lunch and the sound is trash. People I know who have stayed at Hood River Inn were bummed at the constant drone of the bridge. East Corridor concern for the beautiful stone house on Cedar Street concern for Bingen wetland sand pond. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical constraints such as the high bluffs on the north side of the river may impact alternatives. 	6	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential visual impacts, particularly of a possible high bridge alternative are important. 	3	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vertical and horizontal clearance and location within the river channel will affect navigation. 	2	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible impacts on Koberg State Park, Stanley Rock and the adjacent in-lieu fishing site and railroad crossings should be examined. 	5	1

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 and status report for the project, as well as 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 is being identified and reviewed 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 practical or desirable. Because federal funds are being used to pay for the project, it must comply with regulations specified in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement or other environmental assessment document likely will be produced. This meeting is part of the formal information gathering or “scoping” phase associated with the NEPA process. The study also must address requirements of the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Act, as well as other federal, state and local laws and regulations.

To date, the consulting and management team have completed the following activities:

- Met twice with members of a Steering Committee of local elected and appointed officials and a Local Advisory Committee of citizens and interest group members.
- Held an initial public meeting.
- Conducted stakeholder interviews with 25 community leaders and interested parties.
- Distributed a community survey, receiving over 360 responses from local residents and employees.
- Completed a baseline conditions report.
- Developed initial screening criteria, using them to assess preliminary corridor and facility options.
- Drafted an interagency agreement for use in the Merger/ Accord process.

- Updated a draft Purpose and Need statement, which has been reviewed by the Steering and Local Advisory Committees.

Chuck Green of Parsons-Brinckerhoff then discussed a preliminary evaluation of corridors and facilities. Five corridors were identified for study in the initial phase of the project. Two additional corridors subsequently were added - one by the consulting team and another in response to public comment. A full range of facility types also was identified. A Purpose and Need statement, drafted during the initial phase of the project, has been revised (but not finalized) in response to comments from project advisory committees. The consulting and Management Team used this draft statement, in combination with several other preliminary screening criteria to assess these options, resulting in an assessment of each corridor and facility type's potential for further study (low, moderate or high). Summaries of the assessments were distributed and available for comment at the meeting.

There were no questions asked after the presentations. One participant commented that people and their use of a new or improved crossing should have priority over environmental and historical considerations when alternatives are assessed.

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