

SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE, October 11, 2001

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Prepared October 16, 2001

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

About 40 people attended this public event to discuss the SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study. The open house was announced in news articles in the *Hood River News* and *White Salmon Enterprise*, as well as in press releases to local newspapers in The Dalles and Skamania County. Attendees participated in the following activities:

- Indicated where they live, work, and how often they use the existing bridge on a large worksheet
- Reviewed location and alignment concepts for crossing alternatives
- Reviewed and commented on an evaluation of crossing alternatives
- Listened to a presentation about the background and status of the study; made comments and asked questions afterwards
- Completed a questionnaire, identifying crossing alternatives that should be evaluated in more detail
- Viewed pictures of different types of bridges and tunnels constructed in other locations

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

- Most participants live in Washington (over two-thirds); of those who completed the live/work/bridge use exercise, just over half work in Washington or in both states
- Most attendees use the bridge frequently; of those who completed the live/work/bridge use exercise, over 80% use it more than once a week
- The following eight options, in order of number of "votes," were the top choices recommended for further study:
 - Fixed span bridge for all modes at the Existing corridor
 - Fixed span bridge for all modes in the East A corridor
 - Fixed span bridge for all modes in the City Center corridor
 - Fixed span bridge for motor vehicles in the City Center corridor, with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge

- Tunnel for motor vehicles in the City Center corridor, with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge
- Tunnel for all modes in the existing corridor
- Fixed span bridge for motor vehicles in the existing corridor, with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge
- Retrofit of the existing bridge

OPEN HOUSE RESULTS

A summary of the results of each activity follows.

LIVE/WORK/BRIDGE USE MAP

Of those who participated in this exercise, twenty-three live in Washington and five in Oregon. Twelve people work in Washington, ten in Oregon, and three in both Washington and Oregon. Nine people said they use the bridge daily, thirteen 2-3 times per week, three once a week, and two once a month or so. Results are summarized in the following table.

Location	Live	Work
Washington	23	12
Oregon	5	10
Both Washington and Oregon	0	3

Bridge Use	
Daily	9
2-3 Times Per Week	13
Once a Week	3
Only on Weekends	0
Once a Month or So	2
Not at All	0

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATION

Participants viewed maps and diagrams of each alternative, as well as the results of a preliminary technical evaluation of them, including a summary of relative impacts related to a variety of criteria. Comments from participants follow.

East A Corridor (near SDS)

- East A Corridor would be coming into Bingen on Cedar Street. I am worried about the stone house (one outstanding house) on the east side of Cedar. There also are many other residents in this area.

- The Bingen marsh/lake would be impacted negatively, including increased noise and pollution, and Peregrine (Falcon) hunting patterns cross the road from power line to pond.
- Do SDS Lumber trucks from Oregon turn left on SR-14 then left again into SDS? (A crossing in this location) could cause a huge congestion problem. Also, trucks will be coming up hill at SR-14 from an underpass.

Existing Corridor (Oregon side)

- Please be explicit in regards to the plans for the I-84 interchange. Many of us feel it must be redesigned if the existing corridor bridge option is adopted.
- Look at reconstructing the interchange if the bridge is kept in the same location.

City Center Corridor (Washington side)

- How can a “T” intersection handle projected traffic?
- Concerned with traffic problems on Washington side, i.e., Highway 14 is narrow and flows very fast.

PRESENTATIONS

During the meeting, Dale Robins, project manager for the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, and Chuck Green, consulting team project manager from Parsons Brinckerhoff, summarized the background and status of the project. They indicated that since our last public open house in March, 2001, the consulting and management teams for the project have conducted the following activities:

- **Further evaluated the crossing corridors** presented at the open house last March and recommended two corridors be eliminated from further study (the West and East B corridors). The Local Advisory and Steering Committees for the project agreed with those recommendations.
- **Developed and started evaluating specific alternative facilities** for further study and recommended some of those be eliminated or retained for more detailed evaluation. These alternatives have been evaluated against a wide range of criteria that correspond to the purpose, need and objectives for this study (e.g., moving people and goods across the bridge, minimizing impacts on the environment and addressing economic conditions and impacts). Of the initial 17 options, have recommended that nine be eliminated from further consideration and the remaining eight be studied in more detail. A “no action” alternative also must be studied per federal regulatory requirements.
- **Reviewed the results of the evaluation with the project’s Local Advisory and Steering committees.** They also have recommended which alternatives should be

eliminated or carried further. Most committee recommendations are consistent with those from staff and consultants but some differ.

- **Worked with regulatory agencies to develop a purpose and need statement** for the project, as required by environmental regulations; currently coordinating with those agencies to refine the purpose and need statement and review and refine criteria and alternatives for the study.
- **Began preparing to conduct a random sample survey** of local residents and others who use the existing bridge to help find out how much need people feel there is for a new or improved crossing and how much they might be willing to pay locally to build and operate it. The results of that survey will be used to help evaluate the financial feasibility of a proposed new or improved facility.

The next steps will be to further analyze and narrow the list of potential alternatives. Then, if warranted, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared to evaluate the final set of alternatives, and finally, a preferred alternative will be recommended, as well as short and long term financing strategies.

Comments and questions followed the presentations and are paraphrased below. Answers from staff and consultants are show in *italics*.

Question: How often is the bridge raised?

Answer: The bridge is raised about once a month to allow ships to pass or test the lift mechanism.

Question: Will you have models of possible bridges to review at the public open house tentatively scheduled for February, 2002?

Answer: We probably will have sketches or photos that are more representative of actual options. We may construct a model later in the study or bring a model from a similar project elsewhere.

Question: Is the Gorge Commission going to be involved in this project, including reviewing possible bridge designs?

Answer: We presented information about the project to members of the Commission earlier in the week. We expect them to participate in the design workshop with members of the Local Advisory and Steering committees.

Question: Will you have cost estimates in February?

Answer: We hope to have more refined cost estimates by then. At this point, our estimates are very rough because we have not designed the crossing in detail. Consequently, we are just using relative ratings to describe the costs. Costs for alternatives with high cost ratings are typically 2-3 times higher than those alternatives with low cost ratings. Also, we only have developed construction costs at this time. We do not have enough information to determine land acquisition or mitigation costs. Tunnels are the highest cost options.

- Question: Will you know who will pay for a new or improved bridge and how much in February?
- Answer: *We will not know how much all agencies might contribute but we will know something about the potential amount of local match funds. That information will help us determine how much state and federal matching funds would be needed. We probably will not know all this until late 2002.*
- Question: Is the tunnel option at all practical or are we wasting our time in suggesting that it be studied further?
- Answer: *The tunnel may be a promising option. It is likely to cost significantly more money to construct but it is a good alternative to study in terms of lower impacts on things such as fish, noise, visual impacts, and windsurfing. We are not wasting time by considering it further.*
- Comment: I would typically recommend a more cost-effective option but maybe a tunnel is the best alternative. Some people may think it is ridiculous.
- Question: How large would the tunnel be?
- Answer: *Probably two lanes. We are developing new 20-year traffic estimates but at this time we only see a need for two lanes.*
- Question: Would bikes and pedestrians use the tunnel?
- Answer: *We assume they would not. This alternative assumes that the existing bridge would be used for bikes/pedestrians. There are security issues with bikes/pedestrians in the tunnel. We also will look at ownership issues in the next tier of the study. A tunnel could cost anywhere from \$250 to 350 million. A new or improved bridge may cost \$100 – 200 million in construction costs only.*
- Question: A Highway 101 bypass in Gray's Harbor has been discussed for 20 years without anything being built. What is the timeframe here?
- Answer: *Nothing will be built particularly soon. It is difficult to say. The environmental process would take two years (2003). Completing that would allow the final design to start. No federal funding for construction of a new facility has been earmarked yet. Federal money likely would need to account for the bulk of the cost for a new or improved facility. The federal transportation authorization cycle is every six years. We also do not know how much money state or local governments would or could contribute. It probably will be six to 20 years before anything is built. If a new river crossing is to become a reality, the local community will need to help pay for the facility and get funding support from federal and state agencies and officials.*
- Question: What is the traffic volume/year on the bridge?
- Answer: *There are an average of about 7,500 cars per day translating to 2 - 2.3million vehicles per year.*
- Comment: It seems like revenues from tolls or other fees, given that level of use, would make a good local match.

Comment: We also need to consider maintenance costs. Toll revenues will have to cover those costs for the existing bridge until a new bridge is built.

OPEN HOUSE QUESTIONNAIRE

As noted above, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, identifying eight alternatives that should be studied further. Nineteen (19) people completed the questionnaire. Results are summarized in the following table, with the top choices shaded and shown in bold. Specific comments about alternatives follow the table.

City Center Corridor		Existing Corridor		East A Corridor			
<i>Facility</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Facility</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Facility</i>	<i>Votes</i>		
Floating Movable Bridge for all Modes	1	Fixed Span Bridge for All Modes	17	Fixed Span Bridge for All Modes	11		
		Fixed Span Bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	5				
Movable Bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	0	Movable Bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	2				
		Tunnel with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	3				
Movable Bridge for all modes	1	Tunnel for all modes	5			Movable bridge for all modes	1
		Movable Bridge for all modes	1				
Fixed Span Bridge, with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	6	Reversible traffic operations (one lane) with bike and pedestrian pathway	0				
Fixed Span Bridge for All Modes	8	Retrofit of Existing Bridge	4	Movable bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge	2		
Tunnel, with bikes and pedestrians on the existing bridge.	6	No Action	2				

General or Corridor Related Comments

- I think the existing location is best.
 - The City Center idea disrupts park and recreation areas south, and comes into a very narrow corridor north.
 - The Bingen idea disrupts homeowners, parks and wetlands.
 - Both of these ideas create new development where quieter areas exist now. This is an undesirable consequence.
- If the new bridge can look attractive, concrete may be the cheapest alternative. Maybe decorate it with natural rocks? Steel looks good. A tunnel might be okay, but expensive.
- We should not have to pay a higher toll than we do now. The old bridge was paid for long ago. We should have a low maintenance one built next time.
- Bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge is a nice idea, but economically I do not feel that this is feasible.
- A tunnel is not a good option because of the geography and geology of the area. It is too expensive.
- Most desirable is a fixed-span bridge for all modes, either the Existing or East Corridor. City Center is less desirable. The existing bridge is unable to handle present or future motor traffic or bicycle/pedestrian traffic, and it will not be economically feasible to maintain it for bicycle/pedestrian traffic only. This suggests one bridge to replace it which handles all traffic. Tunnel is not economically justifiable.
- I do not like the East A Corridor. It moves people away from Hood River and opens up undeveloped areas. It could be used to access casino.

Comments About Specific Alternatives

- **City Center Corridor:** Fixed Span Bridge, with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge
 - Separates vehicles from bikes and pedestrians and keeps historic bridge.
- **City Center Corridor:** Tunnel, with bikes and pedestrians on the existing bridge
 - Would be fun but too expensive.
- **Existing Corridor:** Fixed Span Bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge
 - Keeps historic bridge and separates vehicles from bikes/pedestrians.
- **Existing Corridor:** Movable Bridge with bikes and pedestrians using the existing bridge
 - Possible, but now you have to maintain two lift sections.
- **Existing Corridor:** Retrofit of Existing Bridge

- Makes the most sense.
- **Existing Corridor: No Action**
 - Not feasible. Need to have pedestrian /bike traffic abilities and existing bridge is in disrepair.

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