

SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study



SR-35/COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING FEASIBILITY STUDY

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE
Thursday, February 28, 2002

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

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 a newsletter distributed directly to about 500 people who have expressed an interest in the project and/or attended previous events. It also 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. 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:

- Reviewed and commented on bridge design concepts for crossing alternatives under consideration
- Viewed an awards ceremony for participants in a youth bridge design contest. Young people between the ages of 5 and 18 received prizes donated by local businesses for winning entries in a contest sponsored by the *Hood River News*, *White Salmon Enterprise*, local cities and counties, and local businesses, including Da Kine, Discover Bicycles, Hood River Outfitters, the Hood River Department of Parks and Recreation, McDonalds, Pietro's Pizza and Walmart.
- Listened to a presentation 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

- Relatively few people made comments about specific elements of the alternative bridge designs. Most were concerned more with the location of the alternatives and related issues.

- Comments about crossing locations were related primarily to the East and City Center crossings. Several comments oppose the City Center location, while comments about the East corridor are mixed.
- The consultant team prepared a cable-stay bridge design concept to supplement those from the design workshop, for consideration. This alternative garnered the most comments which were split between highly favorable and strongly negative.
- Specific design features that received positive comments included the delta piers, haunched girders, open railings and arched span, with one person recommending a through-arch.

COMMENTS ON DESIGN CONCEPTS

Participants reviewed and commented on different bridge design concepts in each corridor. Design drawings showed the location and alignment of the alternative, shape and spacing of bridge piers, type of supporting structure (e.g., constant depth or haunched girders, arch or cable stay structures) and other design details. Open house attendees were asked to review the drawings and comment on aspects of the design they liked or disliked. In addition to commenting on design elements, a number of people made general comments about particular locations or other aspects of the alternatives. Comments are shown below by corridor and design alternative.

City Center Corridor - 1200' Arch With Girder Segmental Approach and Wedge Piers

- It looks like this arch could allow boats to pass side by side under the bridge.

City Center Corridor - Tunnel for Vehicles Only

- No comments.

City Center Corridor - Girder Segmental With Tapered Piers

- Forget about using this location – our waterfront is too precious. (*refers to location on Oregon side near Hood River event site*)

City Center Corridor - Haunched Girder Segmental With Tapered Piers

- I liked the haunched girders.
- Do not select an alternative at this location – ruins too much of our waterfront. (*refers to location on Oregon side near Hood River event site*)

City Center Corridor - Cable Stayed With Girder Segmental Approach and Delta Piers

- These design criteria are fine as far as they go, but we will need to see the costs to really decide.

- Ugly. Forget this.
- Most visually appealing design.
- Good to have some superstructure so that it feels like a bridge. (*refers to the cable stay tower*)
- The enormous 500' high tower on the Washington side might "disappear" into the hillside from Hood River, but it would not do so for drivers on the Washington side on State Route 14, nor for residents on the heights, or boat traffic. (*refers to cable stay tower*)

East Corridor –Girder Segmental With Wedge Piers

- No comments.

East Corridor –Arch With Girder Segmental and Wedge Piers

- Is noise an issue? Can it be reduced?
- This design does not intrude on the delineated wetland.
- I like the arch.
- This is a good alignment for the communities of Bingen and White Salmon. It alleviates Oregon side congestion. Good access for Port development. Does not impact wetland setback already delineated.
- I am opposed to this Corridor crossing the west end of Bingen Pond. It is a wildlife haven. (2 comments)
- I oppose the extra two miles this option would add to my daily commute.
- This is the best option (Bingen) because it is shorter distance, less pilings, reduces traffic on Oregon side without major intersection configuration, and has a better link to SR 14 and White Salmon. Could the Oregon interchange be moved slightly west, then ramp up and over Stanley Rock? This would provide plenty of height and further reduce distance and pilings.
- This location makes the most sense for the communities in Washington.

Existing Corridor –Retrofit of Existing Bridge

- The retrofit with elevated center section for boats makes the most sense. A three-mile tunnel makes the least sense.
- How can this option solve the traffic problem on the Oregon side?
- This option would cause severe traffic problems on the Oregon side – I-84 back-ups, toll bridge back-ups.
- Can the SR-14 junction be re-aligned to avoid the Heritage Tree there? (e.g., refers to location where bridge begins to meet with road on Washington side of the river)
- Please try to avoid taking out this great old oak (Heritage Tree). (near where the bridge intersects SR-14 on the Washington side of the river)

Existing Corridor –Girder Segmental With Wedge Piers

- No comments

Existing Corridor –Girder Segmental With Delta Piers

- I like the delta piers with a through arch, like the Alsea Bay Bridge.
- Hug the west side of the current bridge with the new bridge. (*where the bridge meets on Oregon side of the river*)
- Shift the new bridge alignment to west of current bridge. (*where the bridge lands on the Washington side of the river*)
- Keeping the view open by using steel bands on the edge (open railings/guard rails) is very good.

Additional General Comments

Several participants filled out general comment forms. Comments included:

- Use widely spaced piers with minimal lighting – no lift but some superstructure for the bridge; like the feel of the existing corridor best.
- The Hood River area is a large recreation area. It would be wonderful to have the Bridge be a destination and functional with bike and fishing access.
- In order to fit with the local outdoor lifestyle, a pedestrian path really must be incorporated into the design.
- Access for cyclists both recreational and commuter must be included. Local cycling and alternative transportation organizations should be contacted and enlisted to aid in design and funding issues. If the tunnel design is chosen, how long will the old bridge be fit for use? Will the cost of upkeep close this option in time? We must have a long term solution. Movement of the bridge to a different alignment could be detrimental to the income of businesses on the current Hood River Beachhead.
- I'm not sure if this has been addressed but the noise should be mitigated somehow.
- The East (Bingen) corridor must make the most sense when all is considered. It has a shorter distance, fewer pilings, relieves traffic congestion on the Oregon side, on the Washington side hooks up better with SR-14 and White Salmon access. Check with Warm Springs Casino proposal. It would make sense to access the new casino from the Interchange – they may even help pay for it. Could bridge come off the top of the Koberg (Stanley) Rock? This would mean even more height, less distance and fewer pilings.
- Prefer the bridge option with support cables on the Washington side – aesthetically pleasing. Keep decorative lighting and all other forms of light pollution to a minimum.

PRESENTATION

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.

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. Progress to date on this study includes:

- Identified five preliminary crossing corridors and a broad range of facility types.
- Narrowed the list of crossing corridors to three and the types of facilities to bridges or tunnels.
- Identified 17 preliminary facility alternatives.
- Studied and narrowed the 17 alternatives to seven (7), including a “no-action” alternative.
- Conducted a public opinion survey about the perceived need for a new bridge and other issues (described below).
- Conducted a design workshop to identified bridge and tunnel design concepts.

Dale noted that a recent public opinion survey conducted for the project indicated strong public support for a new/improved bridge. About 65% of respondents say there is a great need for a new or improved bridge; another 15% say there is some need. The survey also indicated that most trips across the existing bridge are for non-work purposes. Most survey respondents are willing to pay a toll of at least \$1; slightly over half say they would pay \$1.50; slightly under half would pay \$2 per trip.

Dale also described a design workshop recently conducted with members of the Local Advisory and Steering Committees for the project. Participants worked in three small groups to identify possible bridge designs for alternatives in each crossing corridor. Results of the groups were very similar, with a consistent desire for a design that fits well within the scenic landscape of the Gorge, but is somewhat decorative.

Dale also briefly described the remaining facility options which include the following:

City Center Corridor. *2nd Street interchange in Hood River to SR-14 in Washington.*
Alternatives:

- New bridge for cars, trucks, bicyclists and pedestrians

- Tunnel for cars and trucks here; existing bridge rebuilt for bicyclists and pedestrians

Existing Corridor. *Approximately same alignment as current bridge. Alternatives:*

- New bridge for cars, trucks, bicyclists and pedestrians
- Retrofit existing bridge for cars, trucks, bicyclists and pedestrians

East Corridor. *Connects from I-84 east of Koberg State Park in Oregon to Bingen Point in Washington. Alternatives:*

- New bridge for cars, trucks, bicyclists and pedestrians
- New bridge for cars and trucks; existing bridge rebuilt for bicyclists and pedestrians

No action. No new bridge or significant improvements other than currently planned by the Port of Hood River

Next, Chuck Green discussed the next steps in the project, which include the following:

- Evaluate remaining alternatives in more detail.
- Complete an economic/financial feasibility study (based partly on survey results) to help identify how much revenues could be expected from tolls and how much state or federal money would be required for the project.
- Refine cost estimates.
- Narrow the list of alternatives from seven to two or three build alternatives and a no-build option in April and May.
- Review results of technical analysis and project team recommendations with advisory committees in May.
- Discuss results and recommendations with Oregon and Washington Department of Transportation (DOT) Regional Administrators in late May. The Regional Administrators will determine whether to proceed with Tier III/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Tier III would be scheduled to begin in the Summer of 2002 and be completed in the Spring of 2003.

Chuck noted that without the likelihood of significant local funding for a new or improved crossing through tolls or other means, the study may not go forward. At best, local funding sources are likely to pay for only a portion of the cost of a new crossing, with the remainder financed by state and federal funds. Given the heavy competition for funding for transportation projects in both Oregon and Washington, as well as at the national level, a significant local contribution is probably essential for ultimate completion of the project. If the Oregon and Washington DOT Regional Administrators do not believe this is possible, they may not approve the final (third) tier of this study.

Questions and comments followed the presentation (answers are shown in italics)

Question: What is the schedule for the next public meeting?

Answer: It depends on the outcome of the decision by the Regional Administrators. If the study moves forward, the next public meeting likely will be in late spring or early summer. At this point, we do not have another public meeting scheduled for this tier of the study.

Question: If you decide not to build a new bridge, are there other options to improving the existing bridge. What is its useful life?

Answer: There may be some limited, short-term improvements possible such as the addition of traffic signals at either end of the bridge. The Port also is planning some improvement projects, such as replacing the decking.

Question: Would it be possible to get a monthly bridge pass or have an automated toll entry for people who use the bridge frequently?

Answer: The Port sells discount ticket books now, which save people about 15% of the regular ticket price. The Port has looked into automated toll collection equipment but there are no local companies with the expertise to repair those types of machines because most of them are used on the east coast or in California. The Port also is considering changes in the design of the toll plaza but has not made any decisions about that yet.

Question: What is the likelihood that you will conduct an EIS? Is there a real chance that you won't?

Answer: Yes. It will depend in large part on the results of the economic/financial feasibility study we are conducting and the relative portion of the cost of a new bridge that could be borne by the local communities. Once that study is completed, we will know more.

Question: I am concerned about bicycle access for both commuting and recreation. What does the finding about potential bicycle use from the survey mean?

Answer: In the survey, we asked people how likely they would have been to make their last trip across the bridge by walking or bicycling if such facilities were available. About 11 to 14% of respondents said they would have been "very likely" to do so; 9 to 13% said they would have been "somewhat likely" to do so.

Question: What is the likelihood that a new bridge would include a pedestrian/bicycle path.

Answer: All of the options we are studying include a bicycle/pedestrian facility. Federal and state regulations would require such a facility.

Question: Have you looked at federal grant programs for bicycle and pedestrian facilities as possible options for financing?

Answer: We have considered them generally and will consider them in more detail as part of the EIS process, if it is conducted.

Comment: Cycling is very popular in this area, particularly for recreation. It is limited significantly now by the inability for bicyclists to cross the river. Creating a pedestrian/bicycle facility would have a huge local benefit. I am sure you could get strong support from the bicycling community for a new or improved crossing.

Next Mike Traffalis of Parsons Brinckerhoff briefly reviewed the results of a recent bridge inspection study and report prepared for the Port of Hood River. For the most part, the report, which described a “fracture critical” study and an underwater inspection, indicates that the bridge is in fair to good condition. It identified one set of structural members (supporting stringers underneath the bridge deck) that are in need of immediate repair. The Port plans to replace these stringers as part of its deck replacement project scheduled for later this year.

Questions and comments followed the presentation (answers are shown in italics)

Question: Does the inspection report indicate the bridge’s current tonnage (weight) rating?

Answer: No. The study did not include stress tests which would be required to identify a tonnage rating. However, the Port conducted such test about five years ago and that information may be available as of that date.

Question: How secure is the overhead gas line attached to the bridge?

Answer: We believe it is very secure. The Port recently replaced all utilities, including that gas line. The utilities were designed to withstand conditions in the Gorge, including flexing by the bridge. As far as we know, the gas line and other utilities are in good working order.

Question: Is the bridge economically viable for the Port?

Answer: Yes. At this time, the cost of operation and repair does not exceed the revenues from tolls. However, as the bridge gets older, maintenance and repair may cost more than the tolls collected. There are no plans to raise tolls in the near future. The Port is preparing to complete some fairly costly repairs and maintenance work, including spending approximately \$7 million to replace the bridge deck and supporting stringers mentioned earlier. The Port assumes the bridge has at least a 20-year life span and its maintenance and improvement plans are based on “rolling” 20-year estimates.

Question: Is it possible to add a pedestrian/bicycle lane to one of the sides of the bridge?

Answer: Not without major reconstruction of the supporting structure. It would be necessary to add such a cantilevered bike/walking lane to both sides to keep the bridge balanced. The supporting piers of the bridge are not strong enough to support this added weight without reducing the amount of vehicle weight that could cross the bridge. Therefore, adding a bike/pedestrian lane would require

building new supporting piers, which essentially would require rebuilding most of the bridge.

DESIGN CONTEST RESULTS

Arnold Cogan of Cogan Owens Cogan presented awards to winners of a bridge design contest sponsored by the *Hood River News, White Salmon Enterprise*, local cities and counties, and local businesses, including Da Kine, Discover Bicycles, Hood River Outfitters, the Hood River Department of Parks and Recreation, McDonalds, Pietro's Pizza and Walmart. Winners included:

Age category 13-18

- **First Prize: Barry Claman**, Hood River Middle School - Gift certificate from Hood River Outfitters and gift from DaKine

Age Category 9-12

- **First Prize: Breanna Moreau**, White Salmon - Gift certificate from WalMart
- **Second Prize: Roberto Nunez**, Westside Elementary School in Hood River - Large pizza, salad bar and pitcher of soda from Pietro's Pizza

Age Category 5-8

- **First Prize: Parker Young**, Hood River - Gift certificate from Discover Bicycles
- **Second Prize: Logan Carlstrom**, Hood River - Large pizza, salad bar and pitcher of soda from Pietro's Pizza
- **Third Prize: Kevin Harris**, Hood River - Gift certificate from WalMart

Special Awards:

- **"Most Exciting and Thrilling Crossing:" Chase Young**, Hood River - Swim pass for the Hood River Aquatics Center
- **"Strongest Bridge/Most Likely to Become an Engineer." Grant Young** - Hood River - Swim pass for the Hood River Aquatics Center

All participants also received a certificate good for a free hamburger at McDonalds in Bingen or Hood River