

SR-35 Columbia River Crossing Feasibility Study



SR-35/COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING FEASIBILITY STUDY

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE

May 15, 2003

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Prepared June 4, 2003

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

About 25 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. Attendees participated in the following activities:

- Reviewed a preliminary evaluation of alternatives being evaluated as part of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).
- Reviewed a summary of the schedule and process for the DEIS.
- Listened to a presentation about the project, including a discussion of a proposed preliminary preferred alternative bridge crossing alignment, and participated in a subsequent question and answer session.
- Completed comment forms.

A more detailed description of the presentation and discussion begins on page 7.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

- Most verbal and written comments were supportive of the preliminary preferred alternative bridge alignment recommended by the project team and advisory committee.
- Several people voiced concerns about the potential cost and process for demolishing the existing bridge if a new bridge is built.
- Other comments and questions focused on the schedule for design and construction of a new bridge and advantages and disadvantages of specific alternatives.

- Comments also were received on the financial impacts of tolls on Washington's businesses and commuters.

PRESENTATION

Arnold Cogan introduced Dale Robins of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC), Chuck Green of Parsons Brinckerhoff, and Paul Korsmo of Entranco. They provided participants with a brief summary and status report for the project, DEIS process, and alternatives, as well as an opportunity to ask questions or make comments.

He noted that the project was initiated by the members of local community who worked with their congressional representatives to secure a federal appropriation for the study. They currently are in the process of seeking additional federal funds in 2004 to complete a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

During Tier 1, the project team also conducted the scoping process associated with the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) being prepared as part of Tier 3.

During Tier 2 of the study, the consulting team, based on technical analysis and guidance from local and resource advisory committees, further narrowed the number of alternatives under consideration based on technical analysis and guidance from advisory committees, the public and Oregon and Washington DOT administrators. Next the seven alternatives and three corridors were narrowed to the three alternative alignments in a single corridor proposed for study in the DEIS.

Chuck Green described the three alignment alternatives and associated transportation impacts. He noted that the existing bridge is inadequate or substandard in terms of lane widths, lack of bicycle/pedestrian facilities and weight limits for trucks. He also discussed the following issues:

- For the EC-1 alternative, there would be potentially significant impacts to Dock Grade Road, including an additional 150 peak hour vehicle trips. These impacts would require major improvements to the road to widen it and provide an adequate base. They likely would involve some cutting into the side of the hill or filling on the downhill side of the road. The cost of these improvements has not yet been factored into the cost of this alignment alternative.
- Improvements to the intersections of Highway 35 and I-84 on the Oregon side would be needed for all alternatives. A combination of roundabouts and/or a signal at one of the ramps intersections is recommended.
- Tolls would be collected in one direction only (southbound) to address potential congestion problems with northbound bridge traffic. Toll amounts are based on an

earlier study of optimum toll prices for the bridge, taking into account a survey of area residents and bridge users conducted last year.

- All alternatives would result in a better level of service than the no-build alternative.
- All alternatives would result in better connectivity and mobility for bikes and pedestrians than the no-build, as the existing bridge has no bicycle or pedestrian facilities.
- All alternatives would have lower operating and maintenance costs because there would be no lift span (draw bridge section) to maintain.
- All alternatives would improve mobility for freight in comparison to the no-build alternative, as the existing bridge has substandard widths for trucks.

Paul Korsmo discussed the schedule and process for completion of a DEIS and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), as follows:

- Technical reports have been prepared evaluating environmental and other effects of the three bridge alternatives.
- Results of the technical reports will be incorporated in a DEIS for internal (state and federal agency) review and then review by the public, expected this fall (2003).
- A DEIS public hearing and comment period will take place in October or November, 2003.
- Comments from the public will be incorporated in an FEIS and Record of Decision, if they are undertaken. No funding has been secured for these activities, though a request for federal money has been submitted. If undertaken, the FEIS would be completed in 2004 or early 2005.

Next Paul summarized other findings related to environmental impacts of the alternatives, including:

- For many resources (such as air quality, water quality, impacts on fish and other aquatic species), impacts are the same or very similar for all three alternatives.
- The EC-1 alternative has higher impacts related to vegetation because of the improvements needed for Dock Grade Road in this alternative. The EC-3 alternative also would have higher impacts because of the likely need to remove a large Oak Tree on the Washington side of the river, just east of the existing bridge.
- Visual impacts would be higher for EC-1 due to improvements to Dock Grade Road.
- EC-1 would have greater impacts on existing businesses than the other two alternatives.
- For EC-1, impacts on soils would be higher due to related Dock Grade Road improvements (cutting and filling on either side of the road to widen it).

- There is no substantial difference in social, “environmental justice”, or recreation impacts among the three alternatives.
- EC-2 may affect existing archeological resources more than the other two alternatives.
- EC-2 also may have higher impacts on the existing Native American Treaty Fishing site, west of the existing bridge, than the other alternatives.
- EC-1 would be the most costly of the three alternatives (about 10% higher).

Based on these findings, the Management Team and project Advisory Committee have made the following recommendations related to a preferred alternative.

- The No Action alternative is not preferred as it does not meet the purpose and need for the project.
- EC-1 would not be preferred as it has the highest overall impacts.
- Although EC-2 and EC-3 have relatively minor differences, EC-2 is recommended as the preliminary preferred alternative because it would have relatively lower impacts on vegetation, existing businesses, and archeological resources.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Question: Have you held public meetings in Oregon also?

Answer: *Yes. We have alternated the locations of public meetings between Oregon and Washington. All of our advisory committee meetings have been held in Hood River.*

Question: What do H, M, L stand for on your alternatives evaluation summary?

Answer: **H = High; M = Medium, L = Low.**

Question: Which agencies are participating in this project and reviewing your technical resource reports?

Answer: *Federal and State environmental and other agencies such as the Oregon, Washington and US Departments of Fish & Wildlife, the US Army Corps of Engineers, The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Washington State Department of Ecology, and others.*

Question: Is the project being driven by the Department of Transportation (DOT)?

Answer: *It is jointly managed by the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, in cooperation with the Oregon and Washington DOTs. However, it began in response to local efforts including cities, counties and your Washington State Congressional Representatives.*

Question: Have any agreements about tearing down the existing bridge been reached between the Port of Hood River and any other agencies?

Answer: No.

Question: Will Port of Hood River expect payment for the existing bridge?

Answer: That is not known. Port expects the existing bridge to continue to operate for the foreseeable future. At some point, it may become more expensive to operate and maintain the bridge than can be covered by toll revenues. If this is the case, the bridge may not be particularly valuable to the Port. The Port has made no decisions about funding a new bridge. As part of this study, we are considering increasing the toll by \$0.25 prior to construction to help pay for demolition of the existing bridge or new bridge. Our cost estimates include demolition of the existing bridge.

Question: Will the study answer these questions?

Answer: It will identify how to pay for a new bridge.

Question: Would the new bridge be two lanes or larger?

Answer: Our 20-year traffic forecast indicates that two-lanes will be sufficient to accommodate projected traffic over that period. However, our 75-year traffic forecast shows that three-lanes will be needed ultimately. Therefore, our design includes the ability to expand the bridge from two to three lanes. The design also includes a pedestrian/bicycle path and shoulders.

Comment: The EC-1 alternatives appears to create a potential bottleneck as you go from a highway to a local road (Dock Grade Road).

Answer: Dock Grade Road would be improved to be a standard two-lane road throughout its length.

Comment: Dock Grade currently is closed in winter.

Answer: Yes. This alternative would entail increased operation and maintenance costs related to Dock Grade Road to keep it open during the winter.

Comment: EC-3 is closer to the trailer park on the Washington side and result in more impacts there. EC-3 also would have more impacts on the Hood River Inn from noise and construction.

Question: What is the timeline for the Record of Decision (ROD) related to the EIS?

Answer: We are unsure. It will depend on funding of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). If funding approved, a FEIS could be completed within 1 ½ years along with 30% of design completed as part of the FEIS. Final design could be completed concurrently with construction (known as “Design/Build”) or take 1-2 years prior to construction. That will be dependent on funding for design and construction of a new bridge.

Question: What is the timeframe for construction of a new bridge?

Answer: That is very dependent on local support and the potential for federal funding. Without federal funding, it is very unlikely that this bridge will be built.

Question: Who will pay for, build and operate a new bridge?

Answer: It is assumed that a new bridge would be jointly owned and operated by the two states (Oregon and Washington State Departments of Transportation). The toll

would sunset after construction costs were paid off. Typically, one state maintains an interstate bridge and the other state pays them half the maintenance and operation costs.

Question: In which direction would the toll be collected if it became one-way?

Answer: *In the south bound direction. There might be some automated toll collection.*

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- Concerned that there was not more consideration as the aesthetics of a new bridge. A plain bridge is not necessarily the least visually intrusive. Bridge should have character and be nice to look at. Take example of all pictures/paintings of Hood River; the bridge tends to be the focal point. The only one of the proposal that have anything pleasing is the tiered arch. Should have had more choices as to visual effects. Tiered arch should be included in design.
- EC-2 should be where the bridge goes.
- EC-2 seems most reasonable in all ways.
- My family has owned the property in this area for over 75 years. When I was a child, seasonally the Indians would come and stay in the vicinity and fish and dry their fish. They would bury their artifacts each year and dig them up again when they came back. It is highly likely that some of them are still there - under the water. Also, the ferry used to run from this area the house currently on our property was a hotel.
- The Alternative #3 that would be built east of the existing Hood River bridge would harm the business that I own (Bridge RV Park and Campground). I am concerned about the noise and visual impact on the RV Park. Business customers complain about the existing noise from the bridge now and I would be afraid it would be worse with the bridge built closer.
- Agree with recommendation of EC-2 as preliminary preferred alternative (4 responses).
- EC-3 would have negative impacts on the RV/Camping facility located east of the existing bridge.