

► **The Interstate Bridge over the Columbia River is outdated and dangerous, and nothing will be done**

► **"You send the signal that you're not serious about economic development"**

The rotting bridge that carries traffic on Interstate 5, the busiest West Coast trucking artery, across the Columbia River between Portland, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash., doesn't have a real name. Known as the Interstate Bridge, the 98-year-old span is one of the most dangerous in the country. On the older northbound side, designed for Model Ts and horse carts rolling at 15 miles an hour, cars and 18-wheelers share three narrow lanes. Its humped roadway blocks drivers from seeing trouble ahead, and one section frequently lifts to let boats pass below, halting traffic. There are no shoulders. Last May, Rosemary Krystofiak, a retiree from

Nevada visiting her son in Portland, stopped in a line of cars during a lift. Another driver slammed into her Jeep Grand Cherokee. The impact fractured Krystofiak's vertebrae. "I thought I was going to die," she says.

The day after her accident, the two-state agency that was supposed to shepherd a \$3.2 billion replacement project starting in 2014 shut down. After spending \$200 million in state and federal money on surveys and designs, lawmakers in Oregon and Washington scuttled the proposed Columbia River Crossing, a project backed by the governors of both states. Its failure was the work of Tea Party conservatives who

opposed the light-rail extension planners tacked on to the project and of left-wing environmentalists who hate the idea of investing in roads.

It also reflects the inability of the Obama administration to influence state legislators when it comes to replacing crucial national infrastructure. Shoddy infrastructure will cost U.S. businesses \$1.2 trillion by 2020, according to the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Republican lawmakers in Washington state spurned \$1.25 billion in federal funding and publicly rebuked Obama's transportation secretary, Illinois Republican Ray LaHood, when he flew there in April 2013 to court ►

◀ their support. "Obviously people without much vision," LaHood says of the state legislators who turned him down. Now, he says, it will be at least a decade before a replacement for the Interstate Bridge is built. "That's what it took to get to the point we were at with the current concept," says LaHood, who left the post in 2013 and is now an adviser at Meridiam, an asset management company that invests in infrastructure projects.

The northbound span, which opened in 1917, has one of the lowest sufficiency ratings of any U.S. highway bridge with daily traffic of more than 50,000 vehicles, according to the Federal Highway Administration's National Bridge Inventory. The rating, based on factors including structural condition, average traffic, and road width, was 28th-lowest among 18,984 such bridges in 2013. Including a southbound span built in 1958, the Interstate Bridge carries 130,000 vehicles a day.

In October, Oregon's chief bridge engineer, Bruce Johnson, sent a letter to Washington state transportation officials laying out the costs of maintaining the status quo: \$600 million to bring the bridge to current seismic standards, \$150 million to replace the 25-year-old road decks, \$75 million to paint it. At a minimum, the lift shafts, rollers, and rusted bearings need replacing, and cracks in the deck have to be patched. Those fixes alone could cost more than \$12 million, Johnson says.

Backers of the new bridge design say it would reduce accidents by 70 percent and add \$230 million to local wages. The double-deck structure has 10 lanes, rather than six, and wide shoulders. It includes lanes for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as tracks for extending Portland's light rail across the water. "You can have deer and bald eagles, that's all wonderful," says Scot Walstra, a development official in Washington's Cowlitz County who backs replacing the bridge. "If you can't move goods and you can't get to work in a timely fashion, you send the

signal that you're not serious about economic development."

Yet for Republican leaders in conservative Clark County, where Vancouver is located, teaming up with the Obama administration and Democrats in

"Light rail is not a transportation solution, but a political ideology designed to change people's behaviors...and expand the size of government"

Leaders ready to ride new bypass proposal

Hillsboro wants ODOT to study route from I-5 to Sunset Highway

By JIM REDDEN
Pamplin Media Group

Hillsboro's City Council is revisiting a controversial road project intended to relieve growing traffic congestion in Washington County.

The council wants Oregon's Department of Transportation to evaluate the need for new westside transportation corridor. It is essentially a longer version of the western bypass plan that

was abandoned in the 1990s.

The council voted on Nov. 20 to submit a bill to the 2013 Legislature requiring that ODOT study a new automobile and freight link from Interstate 5 near Wilsonville past Hillsboro to the Port of Portland. The study is to be completed in time for the 2015 legislative session.

The vote follows the release of a new white paper commissioned by the council that predicts motor vehicle congestion will spread beyond the rush hours in Washington County — and beyond — without such a project. The paper, "Transportation Infrastructure and the Westside Economy," was prepared during the past three months by the ECONorthwest economic consult-

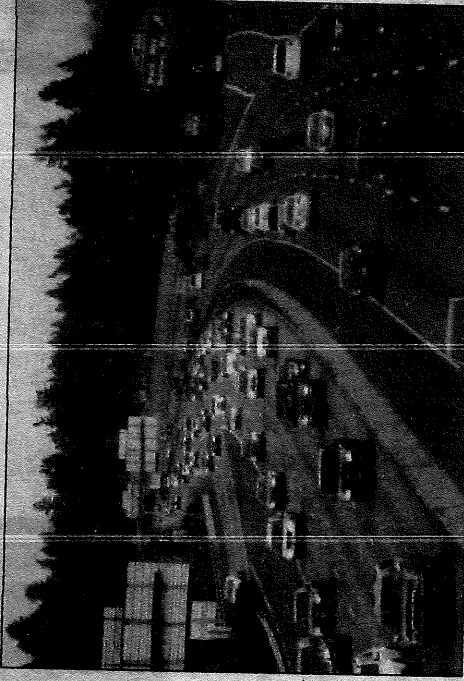
ing firm and the Transpo Group, a Kirkland, Wash., transportation consulting firm.

"Many of the suburban and rural highways that link Hillsboro, Cornelius and Forest Grove with Beaverton, Tualatin, Tigard and Wilsonville, will experience heavy congestion. These routes were not designed and built to withstand the growth in urban commuter and freight mobility demand expected in the future. Traffic safety will be a key concern on these routes," according to the consultants' report.

Although the council is requesting a study, Mayor Jerry Willey already

See BYPASS / Page A7

Rush hour traffic is already congested in both directions on Highway 26 near Highway 217. A new white paper predicts it will get much worse in coming years but could be relieved by a new Westside Transportation Corridor.
TIMES PHOTO: CHASE ALLGOOD



Bypass: Project still has support

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The council believes the extent of the congestion makes the issue a matter of state concern. Oregon and Washington officials began planning for the westside bypass in the 1980s. In 1987, Metro formally amended its regional transportation plan to include the bypass. At that time, it was planned to be a four-lane freeway from I-5 near Wilsonville to the Sunset Highway near the 185th Avenue interchange. Construction was expected to begin after Interstate 205 was completed.

Some Washington County residents opposed the project, however, because portions of it would cut through farm and forest lands. They formed Sensible Transportation Options for Peo-

ple — or STOP — modeled after the Mt. Hood Freeway in Portland in the 1970s. Aided by the land-use watchdog organization 1000 Friends of Oregon, STOP sued Metro, charging that the project violated the state's land-use and urban growth boundary rules. 1000 Friends instituted its own suit against Washington County for its role in the project. Oregon's Land Use Board of Appeals ruled the county needed to consider alternatives to the westside bypass. As a result, ODOT agreed to study a range of options. In addition to the proposed project, they included: a no-build alternative that included completion of Westside MAX, expanded feeder TriMet bus service and already funded roadway improvements; a transportation system management/planned projects alternative that added unfunded roadways improvements and transportation demand management features, such as parking charges and "dial-a-ride" transit service; and an arterial expansion/high occupancy vehicle express alternative that added the construction of new express arterials and preferred access for HOVs.

At the invitation of ODOT, 1000 Friends of Oregon helped prepare another alternative. Called the land-use/transportation/fair quality alternative, it added an emphasis on dense transit-oriented developments, counties in Washington, Clatsop and Tillamook in Oregon, Clackamas, Yamhill, Multnomah, Clackamas, Marion, Clatsop and Skamania. According to the paper, affected communities should rigorously assess the long-term need for a Westside freight and mobility corridor alternative to I-5."

In his letter, Willey also correctly predicts there will be strong opposition to the proposal because of its potential cost and impact on agricultural and natural resource lands.

Multi-modal approach

Washington County's economic engine has been growing faster than the rest of the region for many years. Between 1967 and 1987, retail sales in the county increased nearly 12 percent compared to less than 2 percent in Portland, which dominates Multnomah County. Since then, companies like Intel have fueled a high tech boom in and around Hillsboro. The most recent U.S. Census figures show Washington County grew 1.2 percent in 2012, faster than either Multnomah County at 0.09 percent or Clackamas County at 0.08 percent. The white paper says the growth is fueling congestion that cannot be adequately reduced by transit and other alternative forms of transportation. It contends congestion is spreading throughout an interstate region that stretches from the coast through the Willamette Valley and up into the state of Washington.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Hillsboro shifts focus of TV Highway to north-south

BY ANDREW THEEN
and KATHERINE DRIESSEN
THE OREGONIAN

It's no secret that Tualatin Valley Highway, the vital state roadway connecting Hillsboro and Beaverton, needs major upgrades to address safety, transit and congestion concerns.

Hillsboro, Metro, Washington County and the Oregon Department of Transportation are wrapping up a nearly three-year study of specific projects to pursue over the next 15 years to improve the long-neglected corridor.

But while the critical 8.5-mile stretch of road between Hillsboro and Beaverton runs east-west, for Hillsboro, at least, the compass is skewed. The city quickly realized that north-south travel was going to be the issue, according to Hillsboro Mayor Jerry Willey.

The state's fifth-largest city plans to break ground on its long-discussed South Hillsboro community next year. The 1,400-acre planned community could be home to 25,000 new residents — a city within a city. Those residents presumably will need to travel north to job hubs along U.S. 26, and Hillsboro

is worried.

"We can make TV Highway as smooth as we want to until we dump Cornelius Pass or 185th or Brookwood into it," Willey said. "Then the thing grinds to a stop."

The intersection of Southwest Cornelius Pass Road and Southeast TV Highway became the epicenter of the conflict at the final Policy Group meeting for the TV Highway Corridor Plan last week.

Cornelius Pass Road is the front door to South Hillsboro, and once the city and county are able to navigate the bureaucracy involved in crossing the railroad tracks just south of the highway, Willey predicted, "there's going to be traffic issues almost immediately."

At the lengthy and occasionally tense meeting on Feb. 4, Willey and transportation planning engineer Don Odermott advocated for keeping all options on the table. The city wanted assurances that it could pursue the option of an overpass crossing the railroad tracks and the highway at that intersection.

Much of the debate turned on semantics, specifically whether current language

precluded that planning.

Odermott showed a computer projection of southbound traffic backing up more than 1.3 miles to Baseline Road on Cornelius Pass. Odermott said the city wanted to be sure it could "build the war chest" needed to construct an overpass or other transit option if and when that was necessary without opposition from Metro, ODOT or the county.

Willey said the city simply wants more tools in the toolbox. Prudent planning requires the city to come up with a funding mechanism to ensure the 11,000 new houses offset the traffic they generate, he said.

Metro Councilor Kathryn Harrington and ODOT officials expressed strong resistance because they thought the city was advocating for a specific solution to pursue before the plan's 15 years were up.

"We were concerned if we didn't hold the line, we wouldn't have the ability to do that," Willey said the day after the meeting.

Washington County, a regional partner in the planning, has been generally supportive of Hillsboro's effort

to keep options on the table. In a letter drafted last month, the county board wrote that although it was not "offering specific solutions," the majority of the commissioners support crafting more flexible language "to explore alternative intersection design solutions."

The county also has a significant stake in how the plan will affect unincorporated Aloha, where a three-year, \$2 million federally funded study on revitalizing the area is nearly complete.

Washington County's director of Land Use and Transportation, Andrew Singelakis, said it's important to create a dynamic document that can accommodate the anticipated growth in South Hillsboro and elsewhere.

Jeff Bachrach, legal counsel and project manager for Reed's Crossing, the 463-acre Newland Communities project in South Hillsboro, said all parties are in agreement that Cornelius Pass Road will be extended without an overpass.

"It's a bit of a distraction to spend too much time discussing what might or might not be needed in 15 or 20 years, when we have so many is-

Pass.

"It's in the way, and it's going to be impacted," he said.

Van Beveren, a one-time TriMet board president and community fixture, said he knows all the players in the saga, but it's still a lonely position.

"When people are tossing around your property rights freely, it's sometimes hard to listen to," he said.

Van Beveren said he'd rather be taken out by eminent domain now, rather in 15 years when he'd be 71 years old.

The list of projects and priorities to improve livability and safety along the road has to be adopted into the county and cities' transportation system plans.

Metro's Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation then sends a recommendation to the Metro Council, which will consider adopting it into its regional transportation plan in the fall.

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"When people are tossing around your property rights freely, it's sometimes hard to listen to."

Rick Van Beveren
of the Reedville Cafe

issues just to get built now," Bachrach said.

Intersection design is one of two issues the Washington County Commissioners have asked be reconciled before endorsing the plan. The second is a call for more specific guidelines about reserving right-of-way for high-capacity transit.

Any treatment on TV Highway affects Rick Van Beveren. For more than 70 years, the Van Beveren family has owned and operated the Reedville Cafe. The uncertainty is the hardest thing to stomach, he said.

"There's millions of dollars in development," Van Beveren said of his catering and business holdings on the corner of TV Highway and Cornelius