

Submitter: Micki Varney
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB2781

My name is Micki Varney and I live in West Salem which means I reside in Polk County. I am also the Salem City Councilor representing West Salem.

I am here in support of House Bill 2781 which would authorize the formation of bridge district in the Capital City Region, consisting of Benton, Marion, Polk and Yamhill Counties.

I, like many other residents of West Salem and the surrounding area, live on the west side of the Willamette River but work on the east side of the river. One of the top complaints I hear from neighbors, folks in local stores and restaurants, and citizens I chat with at community gatherings is the traffic congestion in Salem—especially the congestion on the two bridges and the bottleneck those bridges create.

The need for additional Willamette River crossings is not a new concept. Folks in this region have been talking about it for decades. Forty years ago there were plans and a vision for a beltline-design which would route regional traffic around Salem; it had connections running east and west over the river which connected to existing north south transportation routes. Then that idea was scrapped and someone decided the more circuitous path we are forced to use now was better for Salem. Ever since then, Salemites have invested millions in studies and spent countless hours discussing and promoting the “best” locations and designs for another River crossing. But each attempt has ended up in a morass of contentious opinions about where the crossing should go and who would pay for it. It’s been a political football. We’ve been running up and down the field but never scoring a goal and the traffic congestion just continues to get worse. Our population keeps increasing, the local wine economy has flourished drawing tourists to our area, and more and more Portland metro commuters are choosing to live either in or around Salem.

Some folks say “we’ve tried to move forward on a bridge for years, and it hasn’t worked, why should we try this again?” Well, previously, we didn’t have HB 2781 in our tool box. There are certain projects which are virtually impossible to complete without a Phillips screwdriver--like removing and replacing the door handle on my sliding glass door last weekend. What I like about HB 2781 is that it provides the shape and structure of the screwdriver, but it’s the people of the Capital City Region who will determine the scope and the size of that screwdriver. That’s why this time is different. This bill provides a playbook to help us finally kick that goal.

I urge you to support House Bill 2781 so that we have the tool we need to make a regional Willamette River crossing possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Micki Varney
Salem City Councilor-Ward 8