

The Interstate Bridge: A Growing Problem for a Vital Community Connection



Columbia River CROSSING



Project Background

The Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River (I-5 bridge) is actually two bridges, side-by-side, built in 1917 and 1958. A second river crossing—the I-205 Glenn Jackson Bridge—opened in 1982. Now, growth is straining the capacity of both crossings. Concerned that a world-class economy cannot thrive without world-class infrastructure, federal, state, and regional agencies have joined together to address the problem.

In 1998, the Washington and Oregon Departments of Transportation formed a bi-state partnership to study transportation problems and possible solutions over a larger stretch of the I-5 corridor from the Portland metropolitan area through southern Clark County. They engaged business, neighborhood, and interest groups in planning for a series of improvements. The studies showed that the highest congestion and the most unmet demand occur where I-5 crosses the Columbia River. The studies also included a range of improvement and traffic management recommendations.

One key recommendation called for adding more travel space, or capacity, over the Columbia River with a replacement bridge or supplementing the existing I-5 bridge to ease bottlenecks on local travel and interstate commerce. Other recommendations were to consider high-capacity transit improvements and a range of financing options. They also stressed the importance of involving the public, including low-income and minority populations, in project planning.

Now, with the Columbia River Crossing project, state and local transportation agencies are taking the next step to address the most urgent need. This project will follow the National Environmental Policy Act process to engage the community and select an alternative. For process details included in our next newsletter, sign up to be on our mailing list.

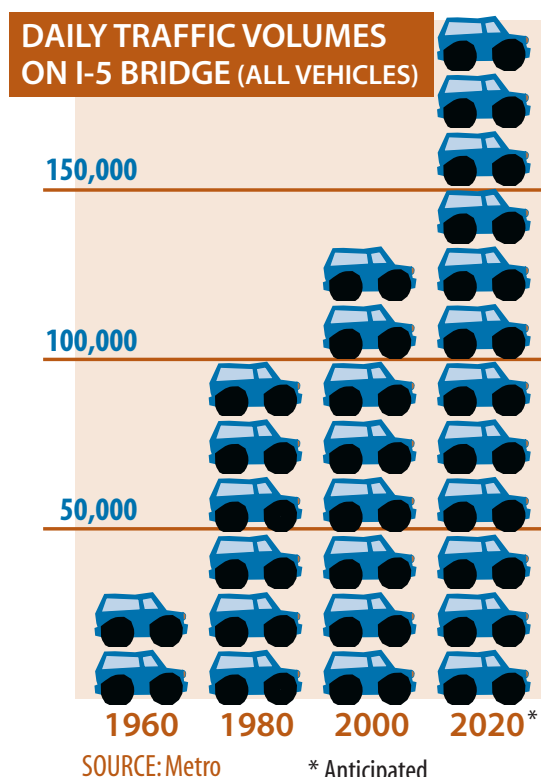
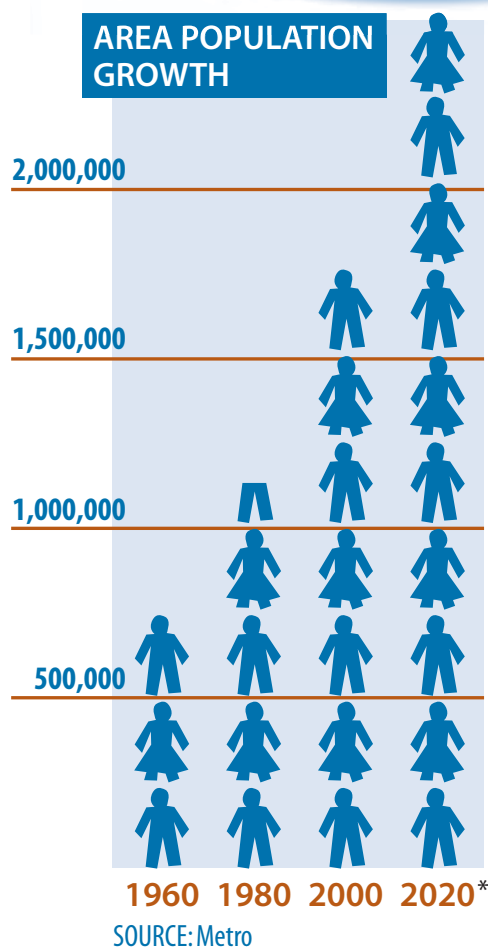
When the Interstate Bridge between Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington, first opened, 350,000 people lived in the region with fewer than 20,000 cars and trucks. Now, there are 2 million people and 2 million cars and trucks. Simply stated, there isn't enough room on the I-5 bridge to keep up with demand, and demand will continue to grow. We must find a way to creatively address the problem. If we don't, traffic congestion for residents, commuters, businesses, freight, and tourists will only get worse.

Solving this problem will have one of the greatest economic impacts of any transportation project over the next decade. Moving commuters, freight, and transit across the river is essential for a strong economy.

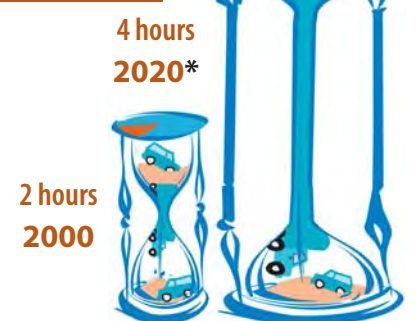
Mark Dodson
CEO and President of
Northwest Natural Gas

It's all about trade and jobs.

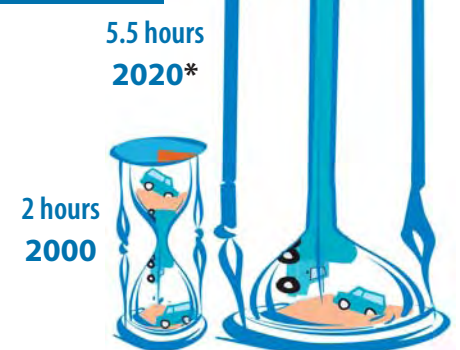
Royce Pollard
Mayor of Vancouver



MORNING RUSH HOUR CONGESTION



EVENING RUSH HOUR CONGESTION



SOURCE: I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership

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to Receive the Next Newsletter
(see back panel for details)

I-5 Crossing Congestion: A Closer Look at the Problem

The core or “bridge influence area” of the I-5 corridor is a 5-mile stretch between State Route 500 in Washington and approximately Columbia Boulevard in Oregon. More than 70 percent of the peak period traffic crossing the bridge gets on or off I-5 (or both) within this stretch, creating intense congestion-related problems. The bridge, built in 1917 and expanded in 1958, and the highway also fall short of current national design and safety standards. In looking for solutions, it is critical to clearly understand the problems. The map below shows the lay of the land and highlights key issues in the bridge influence area.

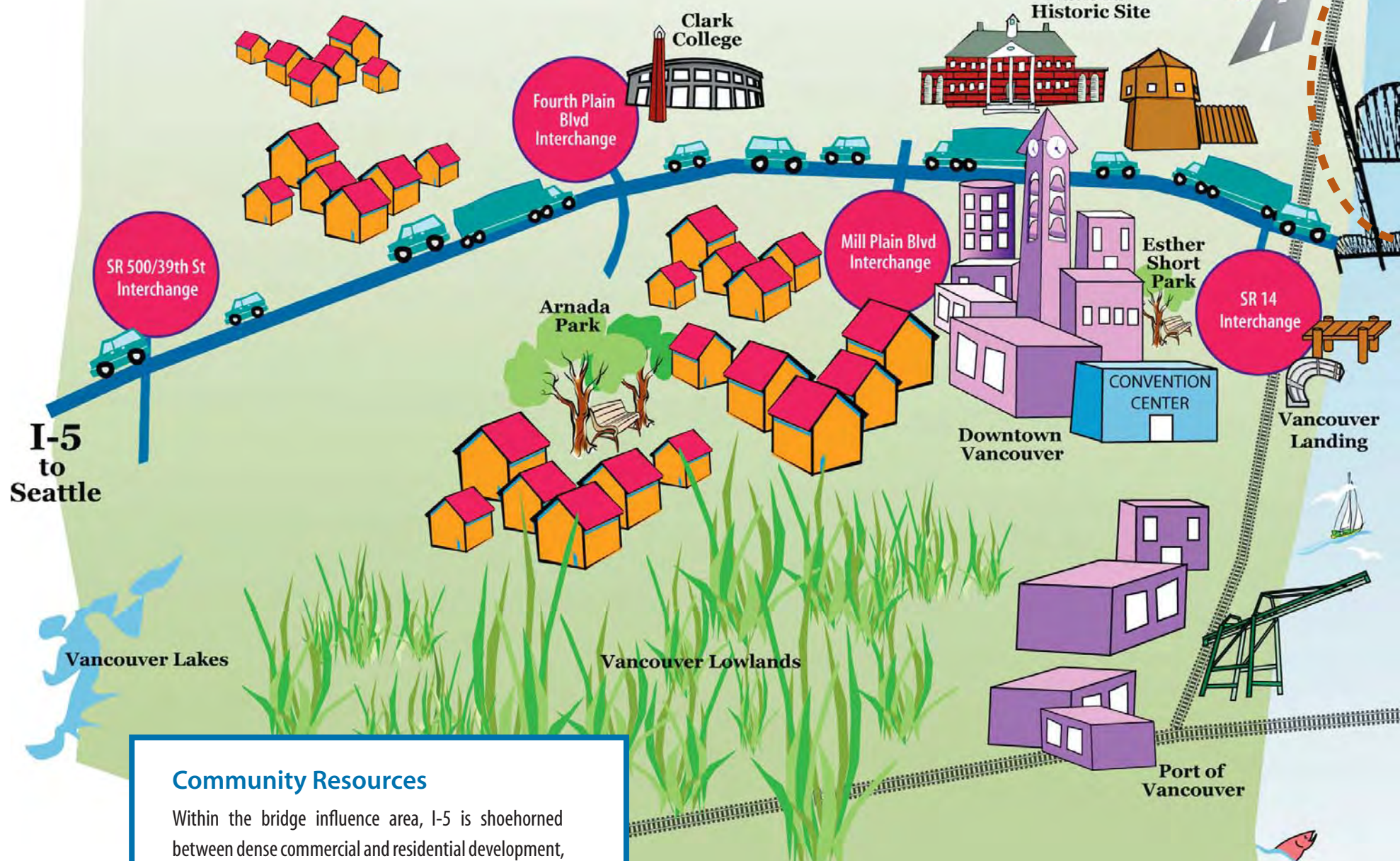


Closely Spaced Interchanges

The interchanges on either side of the bridge are only about ½ mile apart from each other. To allow for safe movement of vehicles on and off the freeway, interchanges work best if they are at least 1 mile apart. On-ramps must be long enough to allow drivers to pick up speed and safely merge with traffic, and exit lanes must be long enough to prevent backups onto the highway. There must also be enough room for drivers to “weave” across lanes to reach exits.

Safety

Even minor crashes that block the lanes in the bridge influence area can cause regionwide gridlock and slow traffic flow. This is a common occurrence (due in large part to narrow or nonexistent shoulders) that will increase with growth in traffic.



Community Resources

Within the bridge influence area, I-5 is shoehorned between dense commercial and residential development, parks, wetlands, historic sites, and commercial uses—key communities and resources that must be considered in any physical changes to the highway or its interchanges.

Transit Across the River

Congestion on I-5 in the bridge influence area delays travel on public transportation along with cars and trucks, decreasing transit travel speed and service reliability. Travel times for buses crossing the river are expected to increase substantially by 2020.

Bridge Lifts

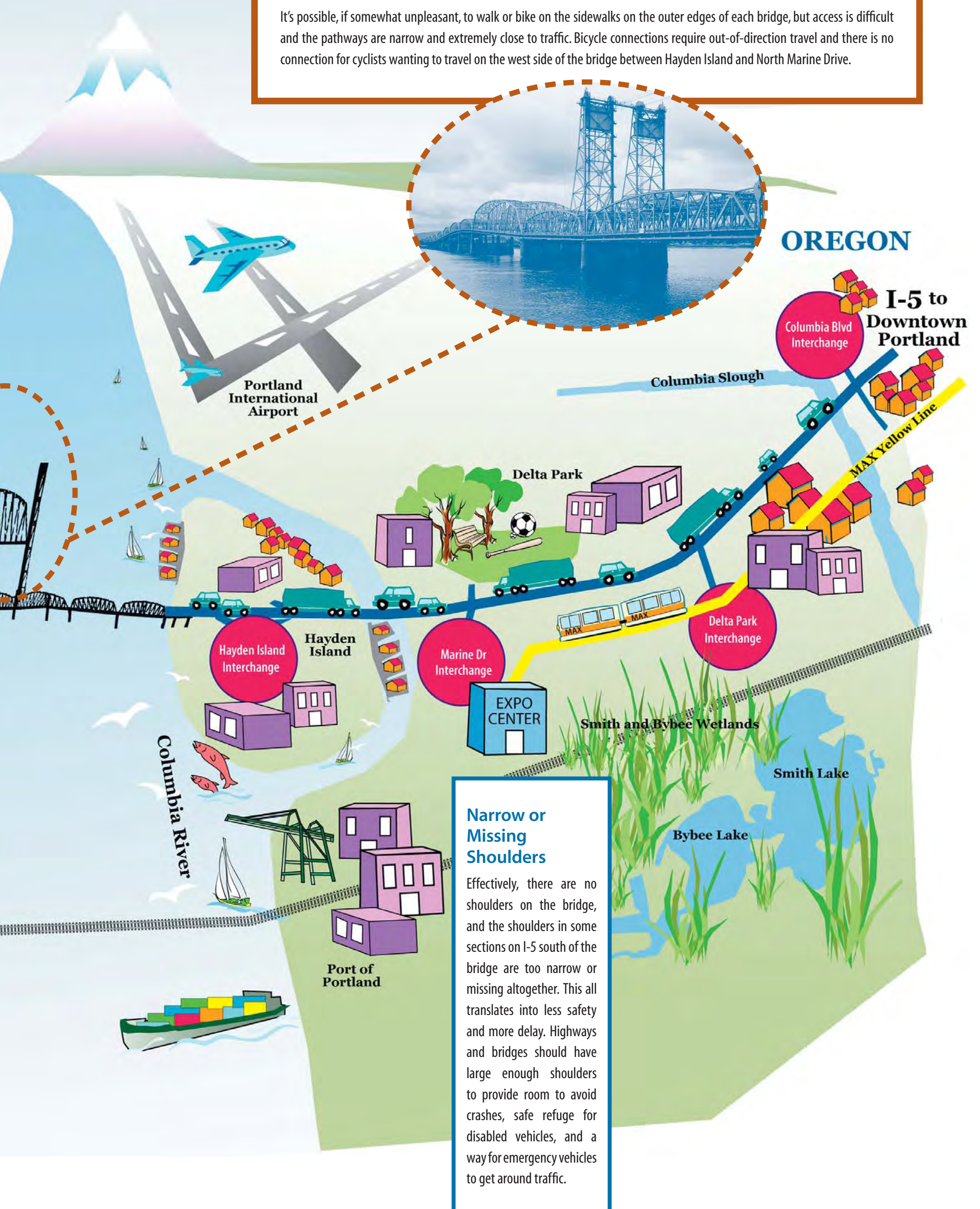
Currently, the bridge is not high enough to allow many types of boats to pass underneath. The “lift span” portion of the bridge must be raised up to 30 times a month. While a complete lift takes only 10 minutes, it can affect traffic for up to an hour afterwards, stopping vehicles leading to the bridge for several miles. By 2020, these backups will take longer to clear.

Seismic Reliability

The I-5 bridge cannot be upgraded to meet current seismic standards. If the I-5 lifeline were to be broken, our quality of life and economic vitality as a region would be severely impacted. It is a lot easier—and more cost-effective—to prevent a crisis than to recover from it.

Pedestrian and Bike Access

It's possible, if somewhat unpleasant, to walk or bike on the sidewalks on the outer edges of each bridge, but access is difficult and the pathways are narrow and extremely close to traffic. Bicycle connections require out-of-direction travel and there is no connection for cyclists wanting to travel on the west side of the bridge between Hayden Island and North Marine Drive.



Narrow or Missing Shoulders

Effectively, there are no shoulders on the bridge, and the shoulders in some sections on I-5 south of the bridge are too narrow or missing altogether. This all translates into less safety and more delay. Highways and bridges should have large enough shoulders to provide room to avoid crashes, safe refuge for disabled vehicles, and a way for emergency vehicles to get around traffic.

The Interstate Bridge: At a Crossroads

We're interested in your thoughts!

It's time to take action to relieve congestion on the Interstate Bridge over the Columbia River. This bridge is a major lifeline for our community, linking Vancouver and Portland and carrying the freight, commuters, and traffic that support the economy and vitality of the region and the entire West Coast. And while it has served us well over 88 years, the bridge has been stretched far beyond capacity—the hours of stop-and-go traffic grow every year. Expected growth will only make congestion worse, causing longer and longer delays.

Transportation agencies in the bi-state region have joined together to lead development of an improved crossing. Over the next year, we will evaluate possible solutions that consider highway, high capacity transit, bicycle, and pedestrian uses. This won't be an easy task—and we need your help. Read on to better understand the problem, discuss your concerns at an open house, check out the Columbia River Crossing project Web site, and take our online survey (see back panel for details). Help shape the future of this vital community connection!



700 WASHINGTON STREET
VANCOUVER, WA 98660



What Do You Think?



Sponsored by the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Washington State Department of Transportation in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration

Tell Us What You Think

There are many ways to participate in the Columbia River Crossing project:

- Come to an open house to learn about the project and tell us your views on the problems and issues*
- Voice your opinion by taking an online survey*
- Add your name to our mailing list. Use the project Web site or send your address to the project office, "Attention: Mailing List"
- Request a speaker for your community or business group meeting to discuss the project (send a request through our Web site or call the numbers to the right)



*These activities support the National Environmental Policy Act process

Contact Us

Phone: 360-737-2726 or 503-256-2726

Web Site: www.columbiarivercrossing.org

Includes information on the project's partner transportation agencies

Online Survey

www.columbiarivercrossing.org

Open Houses

Saturday, October 22

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Jantzen Beach SuperCenter on
Hayden Island (central mall area)

Tuesday, October 25

4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Clark College, Gaiser Hall Room
PSU 258 C, Vancouver

Thursday, October 27

4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs
4134 N. Vancouver Avenue, Portland

The open house locations are accessible to people with disabilities. Individuals requiring reasonable accommodations may request written materials in alternate formats, sign language interpreters, physical accessibility accommodations, or other reasonable accommodation by contacting the project office at 360-737-2726 or 503-256-2726. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may call the Washington State Telecommunications Relay Service or Tele-Braille at 7-1-1, Voice 1-800-833-6384, and ask to be connected to the event sponsor's phone number.