

Washington and Oregon working together for
the economy, jobs, and quality communities

Update April 2002

Freeway... Transit... Bridge Improvements

Task Force Adopts Draft Recommendations

Here in the Portland/Vancouver region, the I-5 corridor is our transportation and economic lifeline. It's how we get to our jobs, shopping, families and friends. It's how we move our products and have goods and services delivered to us. And it passes through some of our region's most vibrant communities and ties us together.

Over the last year, thousands of people have taken the time to help determine what kind of future we want for the I-5 corridor connecting Portland and Vancouver. Now, the I-5 Partnership Task Force has developed draft recommendations to meet the transportation, economic and livability needs of the Portland/Vancouver area. Among the key improvements they recommend (discussed further inside) are:

- **Three through lanes on I-5 in each direction, including southbound through Delta Park**
- **A phased light rail loop in Clark County**
- **Up to two additional lanes in each direction across the Columbia River in the I-5 corridor**
- **Interchange improvements**

"Doing nothing is not an option. Regardless of which side of the river you call home, this is about our region's future... and the future of our children. We've been given the opportunity to come together. This is something we need to do – and we need to do it well."

John McKibbin
Task Force member

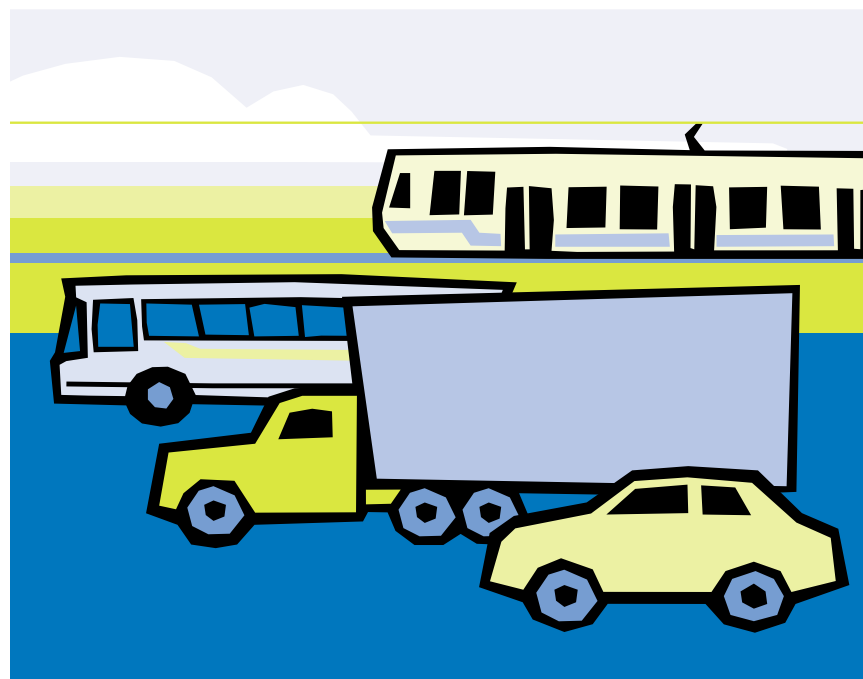
Key goals of the recommended improvements:

Improve transportation mobility: We will never get rid of peak period congestion, but we can keep it from getting worse and prevent it from creeping into the mid-day period. If we don't do anything by 2020, we will have an average of 32,000 hours of vehicle delay over a four-hour peak period – on a good day with no accidents. The recommended improvements cut that delay in half. They also reduce the length of the peak period. They do this by balancing the capacity of each freeway segment so that no one section creates major congestion upstream or down.

Increase transportation choice and reliability: Because congestion will always be a fact of life during the rush hour, one of the key goals has been to provide other transportation choices that are reliable and predictable. Based on public input, the Task Force recommended a light rail system in Clark County and expanded bus service on both sides of the river.

Minimize community impacts: The Task Force has heard from the community that a key goal should be to avoid displacing homes. The project team has worked with the community to refine potential designs for the bridge and its influence area (SR 500 in Vancouver to Columbia Blvd. in Portland). Through this work, we have greatly reduced the number of potential displacements, although it is difficult to completely avoid the need to purchase some homes and businesses, particularly on Hayden Island. The east/west segment of the light rail loop may also require displacements; the actual number will depend on the final alignment.

Support Growth Management: The recommendations support existing land use plans in Washington and Oregon by not encouraging growth in rural areas and by providing transportation access to the core areas. Further, the Task Force recommends ongoing and improved bi-state planning and communication, before new river crossing capacity is added in the I-5 corridor.



Maximize Economic Competitiveness: By improving traffic movement through the corridor, the recommendations improve our region's ability to move goods and services. And, the recommendations improve access to the ports, downtowns and other critical core industrial and business areas.

Coming Up

On May 7th and 8th, there will be open houses in Vancouver and Portland to review the refined concepts for the Bridge Influence Area, the funding options, rail, land use, and other additional technical work. See Inside for "What's Next."

If we do nothing...

By the year 2020, we will be facing significant congestion in this corridor throughout a good portion of the day – doubling the delays we experience today.

This would be a problem anywhere, but this segment of I-5, between I-84 in Portland and I-205 north of Vancouver, is especially important. It is the most economically important section in our region – and one of the most important sections on the West Coast (see inside).

The problems are growing because:

- Parts of our road system (interchanges, merging lanes, etc.) were built before current safety standards and are not designed to handle today's demand
- We lack reliable, efficient transportation options
- The land uses that have developed over the last century have resulted in the corridor becoming critical to many different types of trips, including the growth in commuters.

Early in the process, the Task Force adopted a Problem, Vision and Values Statement to guide their work. This was included in the last update and in essence says:

"The goal of the I-5 Partnership Task Force is to create a multi-faceted, integrated plan... that will protect our future with an improved and equitable balance of: livability, mobility, access, public health, environmental stewardship, economic vitality and environmental justice."

Open Houses May 7 and 8 (see back page)

The Draft Recommendations

The draft recommendations adopted by the Task Force were intended not simply to keep traffic moving in the corridor, but to address transportation needs in a

“The recommendations are a balanced set of solutions, and although there is still much work that has to occur, the Task Force’s hard work and dedication to the effort will give us a big picture look at where we want to go and how we want to get there.”

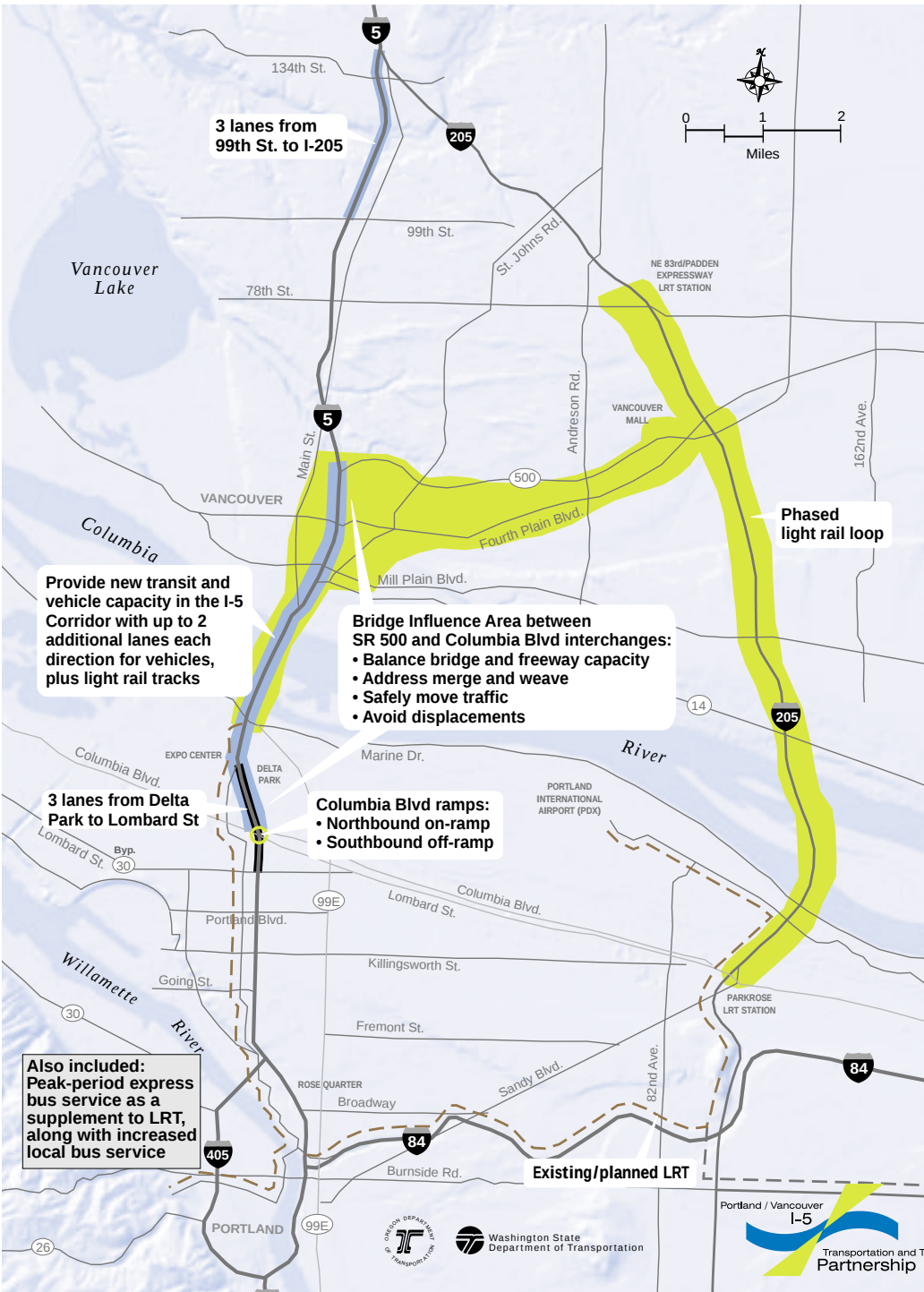
Henry Hewitt
Task Force Co-Chair

way that is fair and that balances economic vitality, community livability, public health, and the environment.

Following are some of the key elements of the recommendations.

Key Recommendations

- Widen I-5 to **3 lanes** where it is currently 2 lanes between: a) Delta Park and Lombard and b) 99th St. to I-205 in Vancouver.
- Establish a **phased, light rail loop** system in the vicinity of the I-5, SR 500/4th Plain and I-205 to serve travel needs within Clark County and between the two states.
- Provide **peak-hour, premium express bus** service to supplement light rail.
- Provide **more I-5 capacity across the Columbia River** for vehicles, light rail and buses (2 new lanes in each direction for vehicles and buses and 2 light rail tracks).
- Consider **interchange improvements between SR500 in WA and Columbia Blvd.** in OR, where necessary for the Interstate to function smoothly and safely.
- Make the **Columbia Blvd. interchange a full interchange** to facilitate freight movement.
- Washington and Oregon need **to agree now on a plan for managing land development** around interchanges to protect and support the region’s transportation investments.
- Before construction of any additional cross-river transportation capacity, Oregon and Washington will develop and agree to a workable accord for an **integrated regional transportation and land use system**.



Other Recommendations

- **Do not widen I-5 to four through lanes** in each direction between the Fremont Bridge in Oregon and the I-205 Interchange in Washington.
- Further study of a **new west arterial road** should be pursued and identified as a potential transportation solution for **consideration in the future**. Impacts in Vancouver will need to be mitigated.
- The transportation issues near the **Rose Quarter** must be addressed and solved as part of an evaluation of the entire I-5/I-405 freeway loop.

There’s More Work to Be Done!

Before Any Recommendations are Adopted...

The Task Force has been clear that the viability of these draft recommendations depends on the outcomes of the remaining work. Between now and June, the I-5 Partnership will be developing answers to the following:

- How can the bridge and its influence area, SR 500 to Columbia Blvd, be designed to **make every effort to avoid displacements and encroachments** to neighborhoods and the environment, address merging and safety problems, and safely move traffic on and off the freeway?
- How can Oregon and Washington work together to protect the transportation system from the **effects of growth**?
- What **TDM/TSM** (transportation demand management and system management) actions should be implemented before new cross river transportation capacity is added?
- What are the needs of the **freight and passenger rail** system?
- What is the viability of **commuter rail** in the corridor?
- What is needed to ensure that the communities along the corridor don’t carry an **unfair share of the impacts** without also sharing in the benefits?
- What are the options for **funding** potential improvements?

What’s Next?

By this June (2002), the Task Force is scheduled to adopt final recommendations in the form of a strategic plan for the corridor. Between now and then, the I-5 Partnership will gather more public input and complete additional technical information, including the identification of promising funding options.

Once adopted by the Task Force, the strategic plan will be forwarded to the states of Oregon and Washington and to the metropolitan planning organizations in Portland and Vancouver for review and potential adoption into their transportation plans. Then the full environmental review and project development work may begin.

May 2002

Public review of additional analysis and finance options
In Vancouver
Tuesday, May 7, 2002
In Portland
Wednesday, May 8, 2002
(see back page for times and locations)
Task Force adopts refinements to draft recommendations

June 2002

Public review of final draft plan
In Vancouver
Monday, June 10, 2002
In Portland
Wednesday, June 12, 2002
Task Force adopts final recommendations and strategic plan, and then forwards plan to state and local transportation authorities

Post 2002

Environmental Impact Statement of recommendations and alternatives

Some frequent questions

“Why is this corridor so important to our economy?”

As a whole, I-5 is the major connection between the Pacific states – and between western Canada and Mexico. But this specific section of the corridor connecting our two states is critical, because:

A unique nexus of trade routes: In this one section we have a meeting of all the major north/south and east/west modes of trade – the major east/west and north/south rail lines, the east/west and north/south interstate freeways, inland and ocean-going shipping, and, of course, the international airport. There is no other connection like it on the west coast.

Access to the region’s industry: Plus, I-5 provides direct access to some of the region’s most critical industrial areas on each side of the Columbia River – the Port of Portland, Rivergate, Swan Island, the Columbia Corridor, and the Eastside Industrial District in Portland; and the Port of Vancouver, Columbia Business Park, and the industrial areas in north Clark County, including Salmon Creek and Ridgefield Junction. Because of this, the majority of the truck traffic isn’t just passing through the corridor; this is where it is starting or stopping.

Access to the core business districts: And, of course, we have the core business areas – Downtown Vancouver, Lloyd Center and Downtown Portland. The communities on each side of the river have adopted plans that focus development in the core areas in order to protect farm and forest land. The success of our regions’ plans depends in part on our ability to get customers and workers in and out of these areas.

“Family wage jobs are the number one priority in Clark County. We aren’t going to attract – or keep – the businesses if we don’t have a transportation system to support them and we can’t deal with moving goods without dealing with moving commuters.”

Craig Pridemore, Clark County
Commissioner & Task Force member

“What would the draft proposals do for freight and the economy?”

By 2020, if we make no improvements in both our freeway and transit systems, we can expect more congestion, more delay, and less reliability. This would have an economic cost to our community, doubling the cost of delay to business, and providing poor access to our economic centers.

Specifically, the draft recommendations would:

- Reduce bottlenecks on the freeway and balance traffic flow
- Improve key freight interchanges including Columbia Blvd., Marine Drive, and Mill Plain Blvd.
- Improve bi-state and overall transit service

In 2020, this would mean:

- Better access to and from key industrial destinations
- Better access to and from key employment centers
- Better travel times and less congestion on I-5
- More reliability and predictability on I-5
- More reliability and predictability in transit service

Each of these benefits helps to create a positive business climate and helps make the region an attractive place to locate and expand business.

“What about the West Arterial Road?”

The Task Force believes this option looks promising, but not as a replacement for improvements on I-5. Its strength is that it would remove many trucks from the St. Johns neighborhood and provide another link between the industrial areas in North Portland and Vancouver. However, of all the options studied, this one provided the fewest benefits to the I-5 corridor. And it is not clear that there is a way to provide the link without impacting Vancouver neighborhoods. So, the Task Force recommends that this be pursued as a potential transportation solution for consideration in the future, but not as part of the I-5 corridor strategic plan.

“Light rail — what’s different from past proposals?”

The light rail loop proposal got a lot of support in all the I-5 Partnership surveys and public outreach, from the people of Clark County and Portland; yet, recognizing that Clark County has voted it down in the past, many ask what’s different this time. One of the

“What’s different now? For one thing, this is coming from us, the Clark County community. I think a lot of us have looked at the congestion and the options and decided that light rail really does make sense for the future.”

Ed Barnes
Task Force Co-chair

key differences from earlier proposals is that this approach can serve more of the county. The phased loop will someday serve both the east and west sides of the county – both the I-5 and I-205 corridors and points between. It is as much about connecting places within Clark County as it is about connecting Clark County with downtown Portland and the airport.

“Why not 4 lanes?”

Four lanes presents several challenges. Cost and impacts are among those. Adding a fourth lane would double the price and increase the community impacts for a much smaller, incremental improvement in congestion.

The three lanes and other recommended improvements provide a balance that will get the traffic moving more smoothly and reduce the amount of time the road will be congested.

Another concern about increasing capacity to four through lanes in each direction has been the ability of the rest of the system to handle that traffic. There are other sections of the freeway and road system that the agencies have not been able to determine how physically or financially to improve, even to meet the traffic needs today. Significant increases in traffic could contribute to a breakdown of these pieces of our system. The current recommendation to address the “pinch points” provides for smoother traffic flow without taxing other portions of the system.

“What about community impacts?”

This corridor goes through a number of our region’s oldest and most vibrant neighborhoods. Addressing the travel needs has to be done in a way that recognizes and preserves the surrounding communities. Also, because a higher-than-average number of the people who live in these communities are low-income and/or people of color, it is especially important (and is, in fact a law) that we make sure they do not carry an unfair burden of impacts without sharing in the benefits. Some of the impacts people have asked about most frequently include:

Air quality: Because of adopted regulations affecting fuels and car design, and because there will be fewer old inefficient cars on the road, regional models show that air quality should be far better in the future than it is today. That said, there may be local air quality impacts of recommended highway and transit projects for the I-5 corridor, and further detailed analysis will need to be conducted in an environmental impact statement (EIS) to determine the magnitude of those impacts.

Potential property impacts: The bridge area and interchange improvements would require some property impacts, including displacing some businesses and homes on Hayden Island. The actual impacts will depend on the design. For the Vancouver core area, the current design concepts have been refined based on previous public input and now could displace two or less properties. The light rail alignment through Vancouver potentially would require no displacements in the I-5 section; the east/west section could affect and/or displace homes along the route, depending on the alignment chosen.

Noise and Visual: There has been no detailed evaluation of these impacts yet, but when you increase traffic and speeds through an area the assumption is that you will have additional noise (this will be addressed with sound walls, where possible). And when you add pavement, ramps, and walls the visual impacts will need to be considered.

At the upcoming open house we will ask for your ideas on things that could be done in this area to benefit the community.

Nearly 1700 People Take Time to Comment

From December 2001, when a Working Draft version of the recommendations were released for public review, until the Task Force meeting on January 29, the I-5 Partnership:

- Mailed letters to approximately 45,000 people
- Held a fifth round of open house public meetings in Vancouver and Portland
- Visited with neighborhood, business and other groups
- Posted information on the I-5 Partnership's website (over 4,000 computers have accessed the site over 330,000 times)
- Met with the I-5 Partnership's Community Forum (with

"I think the involvement of the public throughout the process is an important goal. When the planning is over, the neighbors and users of this corridor will have to live with our recommendations. We must insure that every opinion has been heard."

Serena Cruz, Multnomah County
Commissioner & Task Force member

representatives invited from each of the many neighborhood, business and other key civic and advocacy groups in the corridor)

- Advertised on a billboard and in regional and neighborhood newspapers and issued press releases
- Distributed information to libraries, coffee shops, etc., in the corridor.

A common questionnaire about the Working Draft recommendations was issued along with the letters, at the meetings, and on the website. In response, 1500 people filled out the questionnaire and another hundred sent emails or letters, phoned or commented at the Task Force meetings.

What you said...

A solid majority (67 percent) of those who responded to the questionnaire supported the overall set of recommendations.

On specific elements, a clear majority supported the three-lane, light rail, express bus, bridge, interchange improvement and land use cooperation elements of the recommendations. This majority support was found on both sides of the river for all of these elements.

The public response was divided on the working draft recommendations to *not* widen the freeway to four lanes and to not advance the west arterial road as part of this study.

You can find these results at www.I-5partnership.com, or by calling 1-866-STUDY I-5.

What is the Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership?

This is a bi-state planning project sponsored by both the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation (ODOT and WSDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

The project is led by a 28-member bi-state Task Force appointed by the governors of the two states. Task Force members include elected, business, neighborhood and community representatives.

The purpose of the project is to develop a strategic plan for the I-5 corridor between Portland and Vancouver.

Background

This study is built on previous work that has been done in the corridor. Several key findings from that work include:

- This section of I-5 is the most economically important corridor in the state.
- Doing nothing threatens the economic promise and livability of the region.
- There is no silver bullet – the answer needs to be multi-modal.
- Funding will have to include innovative finance.

How You Can Be Involved

It's not too late to get involved—attend upcoming meetings, schedule a briefing for your community organization, or contact us with concerns or questions.

How to Contact Us:

Mail: I-5 Partnership, PO Box 14631
Portland, OR 97293-0631

I-5 Partnership, PO Box 1709
Vancouver, WA 98668-1709

Website: www.I-5partnership.com

Email: info@I-5partnership.com

Call toll free: 1-866-STUDY I-5 (1-866-788-3945)

TDD: 1-800-735-2900



Washington State
Department of Transportation



P. O. Box 14631, Portland OR 97293-0631

P. O. Box 1709, Vancouver WA 98668-1709

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You're Invited

Come review information on:

- Revised concepts for the I-5 bridge influence area
- Finance options • Rail • etc.

IN VANCOUVER

Tuesday, May 7, 2002

4:30-8:00 p.m.

Jim Parsley Center (formerly Bagley Center)
2901 Falk Road, Vancouver

IN PORTLAND

Wednesday, May 8, 2002

4:30-8:00 p.m.

Kaiser Town Hall
3704 N. Interstate Avenue, Portland

Refreshments provided • Children welcome