

Safety in the I-5 Project Area

While traffic jams between Portland and Vancouver may have triggered the Columbia River Crossing project, safety may be the most compelling reason to improve this stretch of I-5.

More congestion = More collisions

It's common sense: More cars on the road mean more collisions.

- Currently, about 130,000 vehicles cross the I-5 bridge every day; in 2020 it will be 175,000.
- Accidents are more than twice as likely to occur between 6 to 9 a.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. when there are more cars on the road.
- With congestion growing each year, the number of accidents will continue to go up.

Outdated roadway design causes more accidents

Safety hazards are due, in large part, to outdated roadway design. Closely spaced interchanges, short on and off ramps, inadequate space for merging, limited sight distance, and narrow shoulders all create safety risks. Crash data show there is a strong correlation between these substandard features and the number and type of collisions in the project area.

- Weaving, merging, and diverging due to short acceleration lanes on I-5 south between SR 500 and Fourth Plain Boulevard and at the SR 14 interchange result in more accidents.
- Lack of room at the on and off ramps and short acceleration and deceleration lanes contribute to rear-end and side-swipe collisions at the Hayden Island and Lombard ramps and the Victory Boulevard interchange.
- Rear-end collisions account for about 65 percent of all accidents; side-swipes are about 14 percent of the total.
- About 34 percent of all crashes in the project area result in injuries.

Accidents are 3 to 4 times more likely when the lift span is up

During bridge lifts, motorists traveling southbound in Vancouver are four times more likely to be in an accident, and northbound motorists in Portland are three times more likely to have an accident, compared to when the lift span is not raised.

More truck accidents happen during midday

Because more trucks are on the road in the middle of the day, there are more truck-related accidents during that time.

Columbia River Crossing Project Area Safety Facts

From 2000 to 2004:

- There were 2,204 crashes, with 1,687 on the highway and 517 on ramps. That averages to more than one accident per day.
- In Oregon, the number of northbound crashes was about double that of southbound crashes.
- In Washington, the number of southbound crashes was about double that of northbound crashes. Because motorists are traveling at faster speeds on I-5 southbound toward the bridge, collisions there are more serious.

Sources: Washington State Department of Transportation Collision Data and Analysis Branch, Oregon Department of Transportation Crash Analysis and Reporting Unit

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