

# UNION STREET RAILROAD BRIDGE

## RETURNING SALEM TO THE RIVER...ONE STEP AT A TIME.



### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the City's plan for connecting Salem's river front parks?

The two downtown waterfront bridge projects, the Union Street Railroad Bridge and the Minto Island Bridge, hold the promise of connecting Salem's major urban parks and trails, and providing needed multi-modal access for families, commuters, visitors, and recreationists who live, work, and play in Salem. With a 1,036-acre portfolio of popular downtown parklands and over 20 miles of trails, Salem has an exceptional collection of urban recreational resource in close proximity to the downtown. These facilities are poised to serve as vital community linkages; helping to transform, revitalize, and improve the livability of our community.

Is there lead in the paint on the bridge? Has it been treated?

Yes, the underlying paint on the bridge contains some lead. The recommended treatment was to "encapsulate" the lead-based paint, this was completed in April 2010. The encapsulation process included carefully removing and disposing of all loose paint and then painting over the structure with a durable lead-free coating.

How can I get up-to-date information about the bridge?

For information on the bridge, its history, photographs, construction updates, and event updates, please visit [www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge](http://www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge)

When and why was the bridge originally built?

The nationally registered historic Union Street Railroad Bridge, and the timber trestle that joins it to West Salem, were built in 1912-1913. They were constructed by the Salem, Falls City & Western Railroad in cooperation with the Southern Pacific Railroad, to connect Salem by train with the western part of the Willamette Valley. The bridge includes a lift section because, at the time it was built, the Willamette River was still heavily used for shipping. The design of the bridge, patented by Waddell & Harrington Engineers, represented the cutting edge of technology at the time.

Soon after the crossing was completed in 1913, the Southern Pacific Railroad bought out the Salem, Falls City & Western Railroad, incorporating the operation into its own system. The Southern Pacific used the line to Dallas and Falls City until it was taken over by the Union Pacific Railroad in 1996. The City of Salem acquired the bridge, the trestle, and the right-of way out to Wallace Road, for one dollar in 2003. The structure was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in January 2006.

Are there copies of the original plans?

Yes, there are partial copies of the original construction plans online at [www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge](http://www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge).

Can the lift span on the bridge still be opened and closed?

No. With the permission of the U.S. Coast Guard, which manages navigable waterways, the bridge has been permanently closed since 1980.

How will future maintenance of the bridge be handled?

When the City obtained the structure and the right-of-way property, it also negotiated a phased gift from the Union Pacific Railroad of \$550,000 to seed a long-term maintenance fund. This donation was complete in 2008. The idea is to build up the fund before tapping into it. Now that the initial bridge rehabilitation is completed, major maintenance work should not be required for about fifteen years, allowing the fund to grow significantly. In the interim, day-to-day cleaning and small scale maintenance will be the responsibility of the City of Salem Parks and the Transportation Division of Public Works.

Why not just leave bicycle and pedestrian traffic on the Marion and Center Street Bridges?

The sidewalks on the vehicular bridges do not meet safety or accessibility standards for shared pedestrian/bicycle facilities, and they do not connect well with parks or the City's general bicycle and pedestrian networks. In addition, the environment on the road bridges is fume-choked, dirty, and noisy. The converted Union Street Railroad Bridge meets all standards, provides a more pleasant experience, and also ties together a large traffic-separated network of trails and paths in Riverfront and Wallace Marine Parks. When a footbridge is built across the slough at the south end of Riverfront Park, Minto Brown Island Park will also be linked into this system.

Are the bridge and trestle strong enough for bicycle/pedestrian use?

Yes. The bridge and trestle were engineered to safely carry fully loaded freight trains, a weight far greater than that of bicycle and pedestrian users. Both structures have been shown through recent structural analysis to be in sound condition.

Is the converted bridge usable by emergency vehicles in the event of an accident or if the highway bridges were closed?

Yes, the new deck for the bridge was designed with the capacity to carry all the emergency vehicles in the City's fleet except the very largest fire engines.

The trestle support timbers are charred. What happened? Is the trestle really safe to use?

Several times, during the 1970s, the trestle was set afire by vandals, most notably in 1975 when almost the entire structure was involved. The railroad assessed the strength of the structure at that time, made repairs, and put the bridge back into use for another twenty years. In 2006, the City's engineering consultant also analyzed the strength of every piece of the trestle and found that the surface charring had actually served to preserve most of the timbers. About five percent of the pilings were showing signs of rot, and were repaired or replaced. An analysis is available at [www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge](http://www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge)

Those big concrete counterweights look kind of scary. Are they safe?

The counterweights have been thoroughly examined by a team of engineers and are in sound condition. Weathering has caused some small pieces of the concrete to crack and fall off in the past. This problem was addressed by repairs, and by the installation of a tray under each weight to catch any debris that works its way loose in the future. In terms of the counterweights falling, even in a strong earthquake, the engineering report indicates the likelihood is extremely small. The report on the condition of the counterweights is available at [www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge](http://www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge)

Could the pedestrian/bicycle use share the bridge with a trolley?

The option of sharing the bridge with a fixed track trolley was investigated and rejected for reasons of safety and practicality. The trolley use would take up most of the width on the bridge, introducing conflicts and forcing all other users into a narrow and unsafe lane. A trolley would also have to cross the active rail line at the east end of the bridge, a requirement that the railroad would certainly veto. A bridge or tunnel to cross the tracks would be prohibitively expensive.

Would it be possible to cantilever platforms or a lane for a trolley off the bridge?

Although technically possible, cantilevering substantial structures off the bridge would be difficult and very expensive. Four small overlook platforms were constructed where the western three truss sections of the bridge come together. As noted above, a trolley would also still face the hurdle of crossing an active railroad line near the east end of the bridge.

Has the Union Street Railroad Bridge won any awards?

Since the Union Street Railroad Bridge's restoration project began and the bridge became a bike and pedestrian way, it has received three awards, for engineering, heritage, and planning. On April 18, 2009, the bridge was awarded the Engineering Excellence Grand Award for Transportation from the American Council of Engineering Companies in Oregon. Almost a year to the date of the opening of the bridge, the Oregon Heritage Society honored the bridge with a 2010 Oregon Heritage Excellence award. Most recently, the Union Street Railroad Bridge received the 2010 Transportation Planning Excellence Award. This award was sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, and the American Planning Association. And the Victorian Society in America awarded the Society's highest honor in recognition of the restoration and adaptive re-use of the important historic Union Street Railroad Bridge May 2011. For more information on each of these awards, please see our web page at [www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge](http://www.cityofsalem.net/unionbridge).