

Salem River Crossing Frequently Asked Questions

City of Salem Public Works Department

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What is the “Salem Alternative”?

The Salem City Council has heard from the community about the Salem River Crossing (also known as the Third Bridge) alternatives over the past several months and, based on the feedback, has developed the “Salem Alternative” to respond to community concerns and priorities. The Salem Alternative represents the vision of the Salem City Council to construct an urban scale bridge to connect west Salem to the rest of the City while, at the same time, minimizing displacements and traffic intrusions into existing neighborhoods. The main components of the Salem Alternative are:

- A four-lane bridge with few or no piers in the water connecting Wallace Road NW and Marine Drive NW to Commercial and Liberty Streets NE at Pine Street NE.
- Constructing Marine Drive NW in west Salem as a three-lane surface street paralleling Wallace Road NW between Glen Creek Road NW and Riverbend Road NW (this project is already included in the *Salem Transportation System Plan*).
- Building ramps to connect Marine Drive NW at Glen Creek Road NW to Highway 22, while minimizing property displacements on Edgewater Street NW.
- Relocating the Highway 22 interchange at Rosemont Avenue NW further west to Eola Drive NW to align with the City’s arterial street system and serve this portion of west Salem.

How much will the Salem Alternative cost?

A cost estimate for the Salem Alternative will be developed once all of the regional partners have reached agreement to advance this concept as the preferred alternative.

Who will pay for the Salem Alternative?

The Salem Alternative would be funded through a combination of federal, state, and local resources. The exact mix of funding is not known at this time, but will be explored as part of developing the financial plan. It is important to note that as a regional project, Salem residents will not be asked to fully fund this project. Early information on possible funding sources is available in the Salem River Crossing Funding Booklet (March 2008). http://www.salemrivercrossing.org/ProjectLibrary/FundingBooklet_03.2008.pdf

When will the Salem Alternative be open for traffic?

The Salem Alternative is likely to be constructed in multiple phases. Portions of Marine Drive NW are expected to be constructed within the next five years. The new bridge and the associated changes to Highway 22 will likely not be started until several years after the Final Environmental Impact Statement and other approval processes are completed. Among the tasks to be completed before construction can be started is to identify funding sources, obtain land use approvals, finalize designs, and acquire rights-of-way. Prior to each key phase, the assumptions about development and traffic growth will be reviewed to determine what should be constructed. Advancing the Salem Alternative as the preferred alternative in the Environmental Impact Statement process does not lock the region into building all elements if, in the future, it is determined an element is no longer be needed.

What are the main reasons that we need another bridge?

- **Improved Access**

The existing bridges are the only motor vehicle crossing of the Willamette River between Independence to the south and Newberg to the north. In the event that the existing bridges are not usable due to either a natural or man-made occurrence, the required detour is 25 miles to the south or 60 miles to the north. The Willamette River divides an existing and growing urban area that relies on access to both sides of the river as part of daily life. When the Union Street Pedestrian Bridge was reconstructed, it was designed to only allow emergency use by police and medical vehicles. This is an improvement in redundancy for emergency vehicles, but it does not address the greater need for people to cross the Willamette River to go to work, pick up their children, get to the doctor, take their medicine, and more. Note that because the existing bridges have multiple ramps, it is extremely difficult, even in an emergency, to allow two-way traffic flow on one of the bridges if the other is lost.

- **Street Connections and Alternative Modes**

The current single point crossing of the Willamette River in the Salem-Keizer area impacts traffic throughout the City. The requirement that all traffic must flow to a single point in order to cross the Willamette River creates the need for excessive out-of-direction travel and encourages the use of the automobile over other travel modes. Another crossing of the Willamette River will provide more travel choices, help to disperse traffic, and encourage pedestrian and bicycle travel.

- **Traffic Congestion**

The Center and Marion Street Bridges together carry more than 80,000 vehicles per day. This volume is comparable to the volumes that travel Interstate 5 each day through the Salem area. Existing and future traffic congestion adds to travel time and increases air pollution. The traffic on the bridges, however, has a much more significant peak in the morning and afternoon. As the capacity of the bridge and connecting streets is used up, the peak traffic will extend for longer periods of time. This is already evidenced by hourly traffic volumes in 2011, which show a peak period extending from one to two hours or more. Additionally, because the west Salem area has a significant supply of vacant land designated for future development, much of it with single and multi-family residences, it is expected that traffic volumes on the bridges will increase in the future even with the expected increase in the use of bikes, buses, and other transportation modes. This growth, combined with growth throughout Polk County, will lead to longer periods of traffic congestion in the future.

- **Quality of Life and Vibrancy in Downtown**

The peak traffic conditions have a negative impact on the attractiveness of downtown living as well as walking and shopping in the downtown core. This adverse impact will increase as the peak period of traffic continues to expand. Making downtown Salem a place where people want to live, work, and play has long been a City goal. Constructing another river crossing was one of the most important actions identified as part of the Vision 2020 process to make downtown Salem more livable.

- **Economic Development**

Traffic congestion impacts the cost of doing business in our area. Retaining and attracting economic development is limited by the ability to move goods to and through the region. For the region, another bridge crossing is particularly important for economic development in Polk County. For the City of Salem, a new bridge is important to alleviate traffic bottlenecks approaching and passing through the downtown core. A new bridge will also provide the opportunity for economic development in the vicinity of the bridgeheads. This could be particularly beneficial to the Highland Neighborhood.

Are there other things we can do to make the existing bridges work better?

Significant improvements have been made over the past 20 years to reduce congestion at bottleneck areas. The Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments prepared a graphic and list of projects that have been completed since 1994 or are currently funded, including changes that were identified in the *Bridgehead Engineering Study* (1998). This information is available on the City's web page. While there remain a few minor improvements that could be made, these would only result in marginal improvements. We are reaching the limit of what can be done to squeeze more capacity from the roadways. Already, traffic congestion is happening for longer periods in the afternoon and evening.

Would we still need a bridge if more people took the bus, walked, bicycled, or shifted their work hours?

The *Salem River Crossing Alternate Modes Study* (Study) was undertaken in 2009 and 2010 to identify strategies to decrease the demand on the existing bridges in the peak morning and afternoon periods. The Study recommended a series of strategies that could be undertaken by various organizations, including the City, the State, the Transit District, business organizations, and others. Together, these actions could help achieve a reduction in demand over the existing bridges. Based on this analysis, the Salem River Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) assumed a larger reduction in demand during the peak period than would be forecast based on current conditions and programs. Even using this reduced demand, our analysis indicates that a new bridge is still needed across the Willamette River in this region. In addition to pursuing construction of another bridge, it is important to continue efforts in the region to reduce demand during the peak travel periods.

Does the Salem Alternative displace houses or businesses? If so, what help do you offer them to move?

The Salem Alternative has been designed to minimize the number of houses or businesses that would need to be displaced. The estimate of displacements will be finalized in the Final EIS. Both the City and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) follow the requirements of the federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Properties Acquisition Policies Act. This act ensures the fair and equitable relocation and reestablishment of persons, businesses, farms, and nonprofit organizations displaced as a direct result of a project. Refer to the following brochures, available on the ODOT website at:

<http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/ROW/Pages/publications.aspx>.

- *Moving Because of the Highway or Public Projects* (ODOT, Form 734-3772)
- *Acquiring Land for Highways & Public Projects* (ODOT, Form 734-3773)

Why is the new bridge structure so long?

During much of the year, the main channel of the Willamette River at the new bridge location is approximately 1,200 feet wide. The width of the floodway at this location, however, is approximately 3,200 feet. By comparison, the entire floodway width by the Center and Marion Street bridges is approximately 1,200 feet. This additional width requires more structure to ensure that the bridge can function during periods of high flow.

Will the new bridge lead to more flooding downstream?

No, constructing a new bridge will *not* increase the risk of downstream flooding. The Salem Alternative minimizes the number of piers in the water as a way to reduce downstream impacts. Furthermore, any fill used to construct the bridge must be mitigated by removing a like amount of material in the vicinity of the project. In this way, there will be no rise in flood levels as a result of the project.

What is the condition of the Center and Marion Street bridges?

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the Center and Marion Street Bridges. According to the *2012 Bridge Condition Report*, the Center Street Bridge had a rating that is considered good while the Marion Street Bridge was rated poor. The Marion Street Bridge rating, however, did not take into consideration \$3.2 million of maintenance repairs that were completed by ODOT last year (Statesman Journal, *Process Protects State's Bridges*, June 1, 2013). Both bridges are scheduled to be inspected again in September 2013. The rating for the Marion Street Bridge is expected to improve as a result of the work done over the past several years. It should be noted that neither bridge was designed to withstand a large earthquake.

Will a new bridge hurt the retail core in downtown Salem?

The Salem Alternative is not expected to have any direct impacts on the retail core in downtown Salem. However, indirect impacts may result from changes in traffic patterns and reduced congestion. Some reduction in traffic congestion could enhance the vibrancy of downtown Salem by making the area more attractive to people shopping, walking, and living downtown. It is also possible that some shoppers might chose to use the new bridge to access shopping opportunities in east or west Salem instead of coming downtown. On balance, it is the opinion of staff that the Salem Alternative will have an overall positive impact on Salem retail shopping areas.

How much did it cost to prepare the Draft EIS? How much will it cost to finish the Environmental Planning Process?

The total cost of the Salem River Crossing project from its inception in 2006 through the publication of the Draft EIS in April 2012 was approximately \$5.2 million. ODOT currently has a contract in the amount of approximately \$2.4 million to complete the environmental process, which is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). To date, the City of Salem has contributed approximately \$500,000 toward this project. The remaining funds have been federal transportation planning funds.

Does the project really cost \$100,000 each month?

No. At the peak of the analysis period leading to the Draft EIS, the work product of the professional engineering consultant team, under contract with ODOT, averaged approximately \$100,000 per month or less, depending on the scope of work and the number of people engaged in that phase of the project. The costs for the consultant team are minimal while City Council has sought additional input from the community.

How can I get more information?

The City of Salem has posted a lot of information about the City Council process on their website at: www.cityofsalem.net/salemrivercrossing. The Draft EIS and associated background documents are available on the main project website at: www.salemrivercrossing.org.

Questions about the Salem Alternative should be addressed to Julie Warncke, City of Salem Public Works Department, 503-588-6211 or jwarncke@cityofsalem.net.