



Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study

General Corridor Evaluation

June 2002

Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS)

The Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS) is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) designated by the Governor to develop and implement a coordinated, comprehensive, and continuing planning process that addresses issues related to the transportation systems of regional significance in the urban area.

SKATS is governed by a policy committee made up of elected officials from the jurisdictions within our region (the cities of Salem and Keizer, and Marion and Polk counties) and representatives of agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Salem Area Transit District (SATD), which are responsible for building and operating our transportation infrastructure. The SKATS Policy Committee provides the region a valuable forum in which to consider the issues, develop coordinated strategies, and recommend prudent investments in our system to solve the transportation challenges we face in the region. Inasmuch as most of the significant improvements to our transportation system require a pooling of many types of federal, state, and local dollars, no single jurisdiction has either the authority or the financial resources to "go it alone." The SKATS Policy Committee provides the means for us to develop the "community of interest" that we must have to coordinate our transportation planning and investments to solve our current and expected problems, and to create a workable system for our future.

SKATS Policy Committee

Judy Smith	City of Keizer
Wes Bennett	City of Salem
Randy Franke	Marion County
Tom Ritchey	Polk County
Dave Bishop	Oregon Department of Transportation
Dennis Koho	Salem Area Mass Transit District
Toni Stewart	Salem-Keizer School District

The Policy Committee considers recommendations from two SKATS advisory committees as an integral part of its decision-making process: the SKATS Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of representatives from a broad range of constituencies in our community, and the SKATS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), made up of jurisdictional staff, agency representatives, and other interested parties. In addition, there is an extensive public involvement process associated with each of the major planning, programming, and project decisions made by the SKATS Policy Committee.

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Acknowledgments

This document was developed through the dedicated efforts of the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study Task Force members who contributed many hours to this study process.

Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study Task Force Members

City of Salem Citizens' Advisory Traffic Commission	Doris Heavner, Robert Diedrich
Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde	Vacant
Environmental Interest	Eb Engelmann
Hispanic Community	Sonny Ortiz
City of Keizer	Jerry Watson
Keizer Chamber of Commerce	Mark Cusick
Keizer Neighborhoods	Karen Trucke
Marion-Polk Building Industries Association	Mike Guyer
Marion County	Bob Royer
Oregon Department of Administrative Services	Vacant
Polk County Agriculture	Phil Walker
Polk County Business	Craig Hanneman, Chuck Lerwick
Polk County Citizen At Large	Gene Miller
Private Provider	Gary Anderson
Salem Area Mass Transit District, Senior & Disabled Services	Dennis Kilfoil, Randy Morgan
City of Salem	Phil Cogswell, Martin Gage
Salem Chamber of Commerce	Deane Funk
Salem Downtown Association	Robin Barney, Lynn Bailey, Abigail Lambert
Salem Downtown Development Advisory Board	Gerry Bartz, Terry Kelly
Salem Economic Development Corporation (SEDCOR)	Janet Taylor
SKATS Bicycle Advisory Committee (Bicycle Interest)	Ted Litchfield
SKATS Bicycle Advisory Committee (Pedestrian Interest)	Lucia Norris
SKATS Citizens' Advisory Committee (Citizen At Large)	Kevin Johnston
SKATS Goods Movement Advisory Committee	Scott Cantonwine
SKATS Goods Movement Advisory Committee (Agricultural Representative)	Greg Gilmer
SKATS Policy Committee	Tom Ritchey, Dennis Koho, Phil Walker, Ralph Blanchard
Salem-Keizer Schools Community Relations Advisory Committee	Gary Viedorfer
Salem Neighborhoods, Inc. (SNI)	Eleanor Miller
Salem Youth Commission	James Smith
West Salem Business Association	Garth Larson
West Salem Neighborhood Association	Linda Bierly
Yamhill County	Dave Haugeber

**Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study:
General Corridor Evaluation**

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Executive Summary

The summary presents the results of the General Corridor Evaluation for the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study and includes:

1. the project background;
2. the purpose and need statement;
3. the goals of the study;
4. the results and recommendations of the analysis;
5. the actions taken to date regarding the analysis recommendation; and
6. next steps in the Environmental Impact Study process related to river crossing capacity.

Background

The traffic volumes on the Center and Marion Street bridges in Salem have been increasing at a steady rate since 1985. The adopted Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS) Regional Transportation Systems Plan (RTSP) shows that the capacity of the bridges is now consistently being exceeded during the peak hours. Consequently, the RTSP identified the development of a remedy to congestion on the bridges as an “outstanding issue” requiring further analysis and consensus building. Recognizing the issues related to the need for additional transportation capacity across the river are both complex and controversial, the SKATS Policy committee established two citizen committees to initiate the overall planning process:

1. Bridgehead Engineering Study Citizens Advisory Committee, charged with examining relatively low-cost, capacity-increasing improvements to the existing bridges.
2. Willamette River Crossing Capacity Task Force (Task Force), charged with addressing the need for longer term solutions.

Specific tasks for the Task Force during the General Corridor Evaluation portion of this study were:

1. define “the problem”;
2. develop a universe of sketch-level alternative solutions;
3. screen “nonviable” alternatives; and
4. recommend alternatives for further analysis.

General Corridor Evaluation Recommendations

During their December 10, 1998 meeting, the SKATS Policy Committee reviewed and discussed the recommendations made by the River Crossing Capacity Task Force. The Policy Committee concurred with the Task Force recommendation to carry the Tryon/Pine and Kuebler bridge corridors forward for further detailed study in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.

In addition, as a consequence of the findings contained in the General Corridor Evaluation, the SKATS Policy Committee adopted the following four recommendations regarding the need for additional transportation capacity across the Willamette River in the Salem-Keizer urban area:

1. Aggressive improvements to non-construction alternatives should be pursued to increase transportation capacity.
2. Intermediate construction alternatives should be analyzed to increase the capacity of the existing Marion and Center Streets bridges and prolong their useful life.
3. At some point in the future, a new bridge will be needed to provide adequate transportation capacity across the Willamette River to maintain the area's mobility and accessibility goals.
4. The proposed Tryon/Pine and Kuebler corridors should be studied further as potential locations for a new bridge.

As a related issue, the Task Force discussed the nature and desirability of some day having a beltway around the Salem-Keizer urban area. The SKATS Policy Committee also identified the need to further consider the beltway concept and directed staff to include the Kuebler Bridge and its associated beltway concept in the future "vision" portion of the upcoming draft of the SKATS Regional Transportation Systems Plan to be released for public review and comment.

1 - Introduction

The Salem-Keizer urban area is located in Oregon's central Willamette Valley midway between the Portland metropolitan area to the north and the Eugene-Springfield area to the south. The Willamette River is the dominant geographic feature in the region and separates Marion County on the east side of the river from Polk County on the west side; the river also bisects the city of Salem. The urban area includes the cities of Salem and Keizer and portions of unincorporated Marion and Polk counties. The Salem-Keizer area is the third largest urban area in Oregon and SKATS is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the urbanized area.

The issue of providing additional transportation capacity across the Willamette River in or near the Salem-Keizer area has been ongoing for many years. Although the existing Marion and Center Street bridge structures represent a two-fold increase in transportation capacity over what existed prior to 1983, the Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS) Regional Transportation Systems Plan (RTSP) adopted in 1996 specifically identifies the need to develop additional transportation capacity across the Willamette River as an "outstanding issue" that requires further detailed analysis and consensus building in order to evaluate and select a preferred package of alternatives.

The Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study has been initiated to address these issues and to provide the analysis and process necessary to evaluate a wide range of potential solutions, including alternative new bridge corridors. This General Corridor Evaluation is the first step in that process, and documents the evaluation of alternative solutions that could offer some potential to solve the identified problems and recommends promising alternatives for further analysis. Subsequent efforts in the planning process will include developing a regional consensus on a preferred solution, the completion of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for any preferred construction alternative, and a decision on the preservation of required rights-of-way (if any).

Before any rights-of-way are preserved or any preferred alternative is constructed, the recommended transportation system alternatives must be included in the transportation and comprehensive plans (as appropriate) of the affected jurisdictions and agencies. For an alternative to be included in those plans, federal and state regulations require that detailed studies be undertaken to examine all possible modal "build" alternatives as well as a "no build" alternative and to evaluate their potential impacts across a broad spectrum of factors. Finally, federal financial constraint regulations require that some feasible funding strategy be included in the decision to construct a preferred alternative.

Background

Crossing the Willamette River has been a recurring issue in the history of transportation in the Salem-Keizer area. The location of the existing bridges was originally selected because it was the narrowest—and, consequently, the least costly—location, and the site merged well with the existing road system. Subsequent efforts to increase river crossing capacity have resulted in additional improvements at the existing location primarily because those improvements were deemed to be the most cost effective.

Attempting to locate a new river crossing corridor in the Salem-Keizer area has been the subject of various technical studies and related efforts since 1965 (see **Appendix A**, Chronology of the Salem Area Bridges). Prior to the current planning efforts documented in this report, five river crossing studies had been conducted:

1. the 1965 Salem Area Transportation Plan and 1970 DeLeuw-Cather study,
2. the 1973 Salem Bridge Location Report,
3. the 1975 Salem Bridge Study and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS),
4. the 1980 Center and Marion Street Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and
5. the SKATS 2005 Areawide Transportation Plan and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Bridge Study.

From these previous efforts three predominant and recurring themes have emerged, and these issues will continue to have a significant influence on the region's ability to successfully implement a preferred solution of providing additional transportation capacity across the river.

The first theme is the lack of consensus in identifying another preferred bridge location in the Salem-Keizer area. Although various crossing alternatives have been proposed over the years, with several proceeding to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) phase, no new crossing alternative was ultimately considered totally satisfactory, and no consensus was ever reached on a preferred crossing location. As a result, past efforts to locate a third river crossing were eventually shelved. Constructing a third river crossing would undoubtedly have varying degrees of impact on affected segments of the community. Developing a regional consensus on the nature and location of a preferred solution will continue to be an ongoing challenge in the planning process.

A second theme is the inability to secure a firm funding commitment to construct a new bridge, and this has also been a factor in the lack of success of previous planning efforts. Preliminary costs in 1972 dollars for the proposed Pine Street bridge were estimated at \$34 million and the Mission Street bridge at \$28 million. More recent Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) estimates indicate that approximately \$180 million would be needed for construction alone. Since the actual cost of constructing a preferred solution will be substantial, the costs and benefits must be clearly defined and appropriately allocated among the various user groups if consensus on a funding commitment is to be achieved.

The third theme is the existence of a preconceived notion of another bridge as the "obvious solution" for solving existing and future river crossing transportation capacity problems. Previous studies gave little attention to alternative modes of transportation or other potential non-automobile related capacity solutions for increasing mobility across the Willamette River. Although the 1973 Salem Bridge Location Report addressed increased transit service as a potential alternative to constructing a third river crossing, the analysis was limited and did not evaluate transit's full potential in providing additional crossing capacity or increasing overall mobility. Other potential alternatives to constructing a third river crossing, such as increased bicycle and pedestrian use, transportation demand management efforts and system management techniques were never fully evaluated. The previous studies were also conducted prior to the enactment of more stringent federal and state environmental and planning regulations such as the Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA), the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and the Transportation Planning Rule (TPR). Each of these require a more rigorous analysis of the role of other potential transportation alternatives in solving identified problems.

Study Design and Process

The Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study was initiated as part of the planning process required by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991, and in accordance with 23 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Sections 450.104 and 450.318. The basic premise behind this planning process is that before a community makes a major investment in its transportation facilities, it must first consider other reasonable alternatives for solving identified transportation problems. Before the decision to proceed with the construction of a new bridge can be made, a thorough analysis must be undertaken of alternatives that include:

1. making the existing bridges and connecting transportation system work as effectively as possible, and
2. evaluating non-bridge construction approaches to solving the river crossing capacity problem.

The General Corridor Evaluation attempts to provide the first step in an integrated planning process to examine all the feasible transportation alternatives and to identify those that represent the most viable solutions to the identified problems and should be carried forward for more detailed analysis in an EIS process. Significant planning, political education, and consensus-building efforts will be necessary to overcome the hurdles encountered by the previous studies.

The General Corridor Evaluation portion of the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

1. analyze the travel demand across the river;
2. identify and document the components and problems associated with river crossing travel demand;
3. identify a wide range of potential "build" and "non-construction" alternatives;

4. evaluate the feasibility of the alternatives to meet existing and projected long-term travel demand;
5. evaluate the impacts of the alternatives on the natural and manmade environment;
6. present the analysis to the affected public and political entities and elicit comments and concerns;
7. identify those alternatives that demonstrate "fatal flaws" or offer no indication that they would be the most feasible or viable solutions to the identified problems; and
8. recommend those remaining alternatives for further consideration in a more detailed corridor alignment EIS, which is the next step in the overall planning process.

This General Corridor Evaluation also serves as a valuable pre-NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) level effort that:

1. provides adequate documentation of the analysis and process used in the consideration of alternatives removed from further study. (This removal reduces the number of alternatives that are addressed in the formal EIS process, thereby effectively making the EIS a shorter and less costly process.)
2. reduces the time, costs, complexity, and public and political learning curve associated with the EIS process by:
 - a. developing the base inventory information and impact data and constructing the geographic information system (GIS) and related databases to be used in the subsequent, required NEPA level EIS evaluations;
 - b. performing some of the preliminary evaluations and analyses that are required in the EIS process;
 - c. reducing the number of potential alternatives and focusing on the viable alternatives that will need to be considered in the EIS; and
 - d. raising public and political awareness about the issues, impacts, costs, and trade-offs involved in the process.
3. builds political, institutional, and citizen support for the remaining alternatives and develops consensus on the overall transportation-related strategies for providing additional river crossing capacity.

As a result, the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study embodies a careful effort to ensure a logical, efficient, and systematic process leading to the preparation of a draft EIS on a preferred solution to the river crossing capacity problems. The General Corridor Evaluation represents a "screening" process that involves the identification of both existing and anticipated transportation capacity problems and the evaluation of a broad range of transportation alternatives for solving those problems. Where the documentation indicates strongly that an alternative has no reasonable potential for effectively addressing identified transportation needs in relation to other available options, it is recommended to be dropped from consideration for further analysis. The remaining viable alternatives are recommended for continued study in the EIS process to examine these alternatives in more significant detail.

Public Involvement

Scoping Meetings

An initial step for a general corridor EIS planning process is to hold a scoping meeting to allow the affected agencies and local jurisdictions to review and comment on the proposed scope of work. The Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS), the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and project sponsor, conducted two scoping meetings on July 30, 1996 and on September 16, 1997 to:

1. identify the major issues that need to be addressed,
2. establish an appropriate review committee structure, and
3. determine a process for effective citizen and agency involvement throughout the study process.

Advisory Committees

Because the SKATS Policy Committee recognized that any plan addressing the river crossing issues would need widespread community support, it established two separate citizen advisory committees to review work products and provide a forum for developing broad-based consensus on potential river crossing alternatives and solutions. These committees were: the Bridgehead Engineering Study (BHES) Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study Task Force.

The BHES Citizens Advisory Committee was formed to examine relatively low cost, short- to intermediate-term capacity improvements to the existing bridges. Solutions identified by the BHES were adopted by the SKATS Policy Committee for inclusion in the SKATS RTSP and the appropriate jurisdictional plans.

The Willamette River Crossing Capacity Task Force was established in December 1997 to address longer term river crossing solutions in the Salem-Keizer area. The Task Force was composed of over 30 area citizens who represented a broad range of perspectives and interests. The SKATS Policy Committee asked the Task Force to oversee the study and planning to provide recommendations for subsequent efforts.

The adopted Task Force Bylaws are included in **Appendix B**.

Community Involvement

During October 1998, SKATS conducted three public open houses for the purpose of presenting information regarding the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study and receiving public comment. The open houses in Keizer, West Salem, and South Salem were held in a casual setting where the public could feel comfortable, take their time to review display materials, and talk to staff members. The local newspapers and radio stations were notified of the public open houses. The local newspapers published feature articles which, according to the open house questionnaires, were responsible for much of the attendance. A Portland television station also

discussed the study and provided open house information during their evening and morning news broadcasts. In addition, an e-mail advertisement was sent to Oregon Public Electronic Network members, inviting people to attend the open houses or e-mail their comments to staff. The local community television station ran a notice on their community events billboard advertising the open houses for one week.

Approximately 200 people attended the three events. Each attendee was asked to complete a questionnaire and if desired, provide written and verbal comments. This public input was tabulated and used to form recommendations to the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Task Force and the Policy Committee regarding the selection of corridors and options for further study. A summary of comments is included in **Appendix C**.

In addition, SKATS staff provided a speakers bureau, which responded to more than a dozen requests from the community for informational presentations. An informational brochure was also produced for the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study. In addition to being available at the open houses, the brochure was widely distributed to neighborhood associations, planning commissions, city councils, boards of county commissioners, and service organizations.

Interagency Review Meeting

On January 20, 2000, SKATS held a day-long meeting to solicit comments and suggestions from state and local agencies regarding the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study process. Copies of the draft Phase I document, as well as summary information, were mailed along with the invitations to the meeting. Specifically, state and local agency representative were asked to identify topics or issues that needed more detailed evaluation in the draft document or that were not covered at all. The comments were used to help guide the process for completing the final version of the Phase I document. A summary of the comments received from agencies is included in the **Appendix C**.

Next Steps

The General Corridor Evaluation of the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study analyzed the travel demand across the river and identified the components and problems associated with river crossing travel and system capacity in the Salem-Keizer area. It also identified a wide range of potential river crossing transportation capacity alternatives and evaluated their feasibility for meeting existing and projected travel demand, as well as their potential impacts on the natural and manmade environment. Two alternative corridors have been recommended for further study: Tryon/Pine and Kuebler. The Tryon/Pine corridor has been recommended to proceed into additional refinement analyses first. This will involve the preparation of a draft EIS in order to reach a decision on the protection of right-of-way and the eventual construction of a new bridge across the Willamette River in the Salem-Keizer area. The Kuebler corridor will be included in the draft SKATS Regional Transportation Systems Plan update for public review and comment.