

October 12, 2016

City of Salem and City Council  
Polk County Commission  
City of Keizer and City Council  
Marion County Commission

Re: Salem Preferred Alternative Bridge

Honorable Assembled Officials:

Below are two comments we wish to enter into the voluminous record of the bridge project currently known as the Salem Preferred Alternative:

**OVERVIEW:** What tends to get lost in the overwhelming detail that has accumulated in this decade-long process is the sheer epic scope of the project and what it means to the character and identity of West Salem.

The Salem River Crossing in its current form would constitute a thorough makeover of West Salem, turning it into a giant intersection, allowing people to speed through to Portland or the coast (without leaving much economic benefit here). Our identity will be subsumed into a series of ramps and bridges. The proposed bridge and its related tendrils will come to dominate and define West Salem.

It takes imagination over and above the maps and graphics and descriptions to envision the changes. Wallace Marine Park will be severely and negatively impacted with a major road skirting its boundary, one or more ramps slicing around or into the Union St. Bridge path, and a flyover of massive proportions somewhere in the vicinity. We realize that earlier options, now rejected, would have been worse. But the current configuration (including the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> St. extension) is bad enough to warrant dismissal.

Meanwhile, the Edgewater Commercial District, another defining element of West Salem, will be eviscerated, with scores of businesses replaced by a high speed road and ramp. The closing of the Rosemont exit off Rt. 22 will only add congestion to Wallace Rd. (countering one supposed goal of this project).

In addition a significant number of residences, some of recent vintage, will be eliminated north of Wallace Marine Park to make way for the new bridge and its connections.

To what end, all these changes? Allegedly, to improve “traffic flow.” A goal about which one can reasonably express skepticism. Is congestion-free commuting really going to be in our future if we build this bridge? Or will congestion just move to different locations? On this score, we don't think anyone is making any guarantees but there's a lot of wishful thinking that the proposed bridge is a traffic panacea which, realistically, we must understand it is not.

The proposed bridge is the type of project popular with cities in the 1950's and 60's which many of them came to regret (while still paying the tab).

**TOLLS.** Funding is the elephant in the room for this project. Funding is the huge missing piece, discussed only in general and speculative terms. But here is one nugget.

The Draft EIS states in the funding section: “Tolling is being explored as a way to pay for the project but it DOES NOT WORK IF ONLY ONE BRIDGE IS TOLLED. IF ONLY THE NEW BRIDGE IS TOLLED, MANY PEOPLE WOULD CHOOSE TO USE THE EXISTING (NON-TOLLED) BRIDGES INSTEAD OF THE NEW ONE. This would result in little improvement to congestion on the existing bridges. Since so many fewer people would use the new tolled bridge, not enough money would be generated to pay for it.” (Emphasis added.)

This statement implies that behavior can be modified through tolling. A toll on the two existing bridges, sooner rather than later and certainly before new construction, could have many positive results. It might make people think about their car trips, it might alter habits, ease congestion, and the revenue could be applied to bridge maintenance and/or public transit.

That concludes our comments, the least we can do as long-time residents of West Salem, in the face of a half-billion dollar project that we believe ought to be tabled indefinitely.

Sincerely,

Bob Coe & Merrily McCabe