

October 19, 2016

TO: Salem Area Local Officials

FROM: Robert Cortright, West Salem

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO PRO-BRIDGE TESTIMONY (Land Use Application Case No. CA16-04)

At the October 12 public hearing, bridge supporters offered a series of arguments in favor of a UGB amendment to allow a new bridge that upon close examination are either wrong or misleading.

Assertion: A third bridge will reduce traffic congestion in Salem

Reality: The EIS says congestion will triple

With or without the new bridge traffic congestion in Salem will more than triple over what we experience today. The reason: Building more roads allows and encourages more traffic. Any congestion relief is short-term, because once a new bridge is built people make different decisions about where to live, work and shop. (Many bridge boosters said as much in their testimony.) Even the EIS says the bridge will make only a minor difference in future congestion levels. Without a new bridge, regional traffic congestion (measured in vehicle hours of delay) is expected to more than triple, increasing by 362% over current levels. With a new bridge it will grow slightly less: by 342%.

Assertion: A third bridge will help reduce idling and pollution

Reality: A new bridge will result in more traffic and more idling, not less

Yes, it's true that idling cars cause pollution, but national and international studies conclude that expanding roadway capacity does little, if anything, to reduce idling. The reason: over time, new roads encourage more traffic and longer trips which result in more emissions, more congestion and more idling than when we started. The EIS says a new bridge will result in 20% more emissions. Besides, pollution from idling is a declining problem that experts say is likely to disappear completely as vehicle technology continues to improve and cars automatically turn off rather than idle.

Assertion: A new bridge will improve mobility in emergencies and bridge closures

Reality: There are cheaper and better ways to deal with emergencies

A new bridge is an incredibly expensive and inefficient way to deal with emergencies like a bridge closure. Since it's unlikely to be built for 20 years or more a new bridge will do nothing to help with emergencies or closures emergencies between now and then. Fortunately, there are a number of low-cost and cost-effective ways we can improve our ability to get emergency vehicles across the river and minimize the impact of bridge closures. These include developing an updated emergency response plan that provides for two-way operation of the Marion and Center Street bridges, providing for emergency vehicle use of the Union Street rail bridge, and expanding emergency medical and other services in West Salem.

Assertion: A new bridge will improve our ability to recover from a Cascadia earthquake

Reality: We're much better off fixing the existing bridges

The latest science says there is a 20% chance of a magnitude 8+ earthquake in the next 50 years. ODOT says the existing bridges are likely to collapse, but that they can be retrofitted to survive a massive quake. Statewide, ODOT estimates we need \$5 billion to retrofit our existing bridges and roads. When the quake happens we'll be better off (and adequately served) if the existing bridges are intact.

Assertion: The Rosemont exit won't be closed.

Reality: The decision being made now is to close it

Salem's proposed transportation plan amendment is a final land use decision to close the Rosemont off-ramps. While the city says it *wants* to replace or move the Rosemont exit (to Eola or further west) that decision is put off to some future, undefined time and process. The city says only that it “won't support” closing Rosemont until there's a replacement. However, since closure is clearly allowed by the plan and since it's ODOT's highway, the fact that the city “won't support” it is essentially a meaningless protest.

Assertion: We're just amending the UGB, we'll make a decision about the bridge later

Reality: The UGB change is specifically for a big new bridge, only design details are remain

The land use decision is not just a decision to expand the UGB and it doesn't delay a decision about building a bridge (or what kind of bridge to build to a later date or process. The current proposal amends both the UGB and the city's transportation plan for the specific purpose of allowing construction of a four-lane regional bridge. The only decisions that would be made later are design details based on engineering studies. In fact, a decision to build a different or smaller bridge would require the local governments to adopt a new UGB and new plan amendments.

Assertion: We need to expand the UGB in order to build Marine Drive

Reality: Marine Drive can go forward without a UGB amendment

Marine Drive is already a “planned improvement” in Salem's adopted transportation plan. While a small part of Marine Drive is would be outside the UGB, state rules allow its construction without a UGB amendment. As the West Salem Neighborhood Association has suggested, Marine Drive is an agreed upon, immediate priority that should – and can -be treated separately from a UGB amendment for a proposed new bridge.

Assertion: Federal and state governments will pay for all or most of the new bridge.

Reality: Extremely unlikely

Federal and state funds are extremely limited and a new bridge in Salem is likely to be a low-priority for both state and federal funding. Congress ended the practice of “earmarks” for big highway projects more than five years ago. ODOT reports that the state highway fund has no money for road expansion. And even if ODOT had more money, this stretch of Highway 22 is a low “third priority” - out of four – for new state funds. The official funding strategy for the bridge says most of the cost will come from three local sources: an increase in gas tax and vehicle registration fees and a \$1.50 toll on all bridge crossings. Yes, the state spent big bucks for the Woodburn interchange and the Newberg-Dundee bypass, but I-5 and Highway 99W are major state highways. A new bridge in Salem is more like the new Sellwood Bridge in Portland which was funded with 70% local funds.

Assertion: The bridge will cost just \$425 million

Reality: Cost estimates are almost certainly too low.

There is no reason to believe that a third bridge will cost this little.

The cost estimates that have been prepared based on very sketchy preliminary information. The detailed cost breakdown is provided on one-page! The consultant reports are unclear about whether the cost estimates reflect earthquake risks and design standards and the need to cross a gravel pit that is now 50-foot deep, half-mile wide lake. In addition, ODOT has a history of huge cost overruns on big projects. Between the time it was planned and built, the cost of the Woodburn interchange doubled from \$40 to \$80 million.