



SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

January 18, 2001

Key Issues

In September and October of 2000, interviews were held with about 70 stakeholders and opinion leaders (see list attached) for what was at that point titled the “Portland/Vancouver I-5 Trade Corridor.” Interviewees included representatives of a broad range of interests including neighborhoods, local business, trade and shipping, community and civic groups, and advocacy groups for the environment, transportation and workforce development.

Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about: the role and importance of the corridor; the nature of the corridor problems; how those problems may be addressed; key issues to consider; and funding.

Following is a discussion of the key messages that emerged from the interviews.

What is the Role of the Corridor?

1. **“The corridor plays a critical role in supporting mobility for trade and for people.”**

The vast majority of the interviewees – community, neighborhood and business alike – believed this section of the I-5 corridor is very important. It was commonly referred to as the “life line” or “lifeblood” of the region.

2. **“It is an indispensable route for local commerce as well as regional and international trade.”**

Industries depend on the corridor. Interviewees noted that all forms of shipping meet in the corridor; it is a conduit for goods transported by rail, ship, freight, and air. In most cases, people believed that a primary function of the corridor is to

provide clear trucking routes through the region, especially to and between the Portland and Vancouver ports.

3. “People rely on I-5 and its major arterials seven days a week to conduct the business of their lives.”

Many neighborhood representatives, as well as business and other community members pointed out that they and their neighborhoods rely on the corridor as commuters during the workweek and to reach services, recreational areas, shopping and event facilities throughout the week. Hayden Island in particular emphasized that they have no other way on and off the island than I-5.

Is There a Transportation Problem in the Corridor?

1. “Congestion and the unpredictable nature of the corridor pose a serious problem for the region.”

With few exceptions, interview participants felt that the use of the corridor exceeds its current capacity, and that this is a serious problem. Many believed that capacity problems are primarily a result of the growth in commuters, and others are more concerned about the growth in truck use. The issue of Clark County residents’ commutes to Portland emerged as a theme across the interviews, with different opinions about whether the growth in commuters could or should be addressed. However, people generally agreed that both regions contribute to and are responsible for addressing the problem.

2. “Trucks and commuters need more direct and timely routes to their destinations.”

The interviews reflect a need for more direct routes to local ports and industrial centers. Business and neighborhood representatives believed better road design, maintenance, and transit systems would decrease traffic problems. Employment development specialists and many of the large employers discussed the need and the difficulty in getting transit service with routes and hours that work for the employees.

3. “Many capacity concerns are linked to specific problem spots.”

The Delta Park “bottleneck,” where the number of freeway lanes decreases from three to two lanes, was often cited as a source of frustration, as was the Interstate Bridge with the interchanges on each side that seem to cause backups. The other most common problem areas cited were at the Rose Quarter (I-5/I-84) and near the Marine Drive and Delta Park interchanges.

4. “Environmental and livability issues will be of great concern to the community.”

Neighborhood, civic organizations, and business representatives voiced livability concerns. The most common neighborhood-related problem was the presence of freeway-related freight and commuter traffic on residential streets and local arterials. The overflow of trucks in communities was viewed as a safety hazard. People who lived near I-5 were concerned about noise and air pollution resulting from heavy traffic and the placement of on ramps in residential areas. Many

Clark County residents believed that capacity problems at the 4th Plain and Mill Plain exits increase the number of trucks in their neighborhoods.

5. “If the transportation infrastructure is not put in place, the region can not achieve its land use plans on either side of the river.”

The region has planned for the downtown areas and Lloyd Center to carry a significant burden of future commercial area growth, but a number of interviewees stressed that it will be impossible to achieve without substantial improvements. Likewise, many emphasized that the industrial areas in Vancouver and Portland cannot be developed without better access.

6. “It is ‘the’ or ‘one of the’ most important transportation problems in the region.”

Most of the interviewees felt that finding solutions for the problems in this corridor should rank at or near the top of the region’s priorities. There were a few individuals who believed that the problem was not comparatively significant. These individuals either thought traffic in the Portland/Vancouver area was “not bad compared to traffic in Seattle,” or stated that another regional issue, such as education, was significantly more important. But nearly everyone felt that, of the region’s transportation issues, this section of I-5 is critical.

How Should We Address the Problem

1. Opinions about how to address the problem were diverse; however, most people agreed that long-term strategies must be multifaceted and include a combination of transit and road improvements.

In response to a list of potential strategies, most people felt bottlenecks should be a priority. There was also considerable support for expanding or replacing the existing bridge. Other solutions that had less consistent support were building a new bridge in a different corridor, adding a fourth lane, and demand management. Congestion pricing received the least support, but those who did support it felt strongly about it.

Transit improvements were supported by most of the interviewees; the most common transit solutions cited were light rail, commuter rail, and increased bus service.

2. Some believed that alternative transportation systems have been promoted at the expense of necessary road improvements.

A number of business and trucking representatives, and a few neighborhood representatives, commented that they felt the region has put its resources toward alternative solutions – transit, bike, pedestrian – that does not support the needs of trade. Many of these interviewees expressed support for transit, but said it is time to address freight mobility.

3. Interviewees presented a range of additional options for addressing congestion in the corridor.

In many cases, interviewees suggested a range of additional strategies that they believed could increase mobility in the corridor. These options include: reversible traffic lanes, truck-only lanes, and shifting jobs to Vancouver. The creation of a new bridge just west of the Interstate Bridge and building a bridge for freight, were also common suggestions. Several people suggested that the first phase of the strategy should focus on projects that require little capital investment. Their reason for this suggestion was to develop options that help the region make better use of its current transit systems.

4. There were mixed reactions to the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes.

While some people supported HOV lanes, some interviewees believed that HOV lanes are ineffective in that they are not enforced, are underutilized, and are only present in small segments of the corridor.

What Issues Will Affect the Shape of the Overall Process?

1. “Community involvement and education will be critical to the success of the process.”

Community involvement and the need for an inclusive decision-making process was a consistent theme. People felt that involvement and education during the study’s development would increase the likelihood that strategies would be implemented. Moreover, people believed that developing the public’s sense of ownership and responsibility for addressing the problem would create incentives for people to accept and/or use the alternative measures, such as transit and demand management.

2. “The public needs to understand the connection between trucks on the road and the availability of goods in their communities.”

It was not only the business representatives, but also many of the neighborhood and community members that emphasized that there is a direct connection between the ability to move goods and the trucks on the road, and that the project needs to educate people. One interviewee stated a common perception of business interests, “Neighborhoods vote, trade does not,” in explaining that decision-makers listen to their neighborhood constituents, not to the trucking community, so the neighborhoods need to understand how this affects them.

3. Neighborhoods in Vancouver and North/Northeast Portland expressed concern about the potential for displacement of homes and businesses.

Several Vancouver and Portland residents discussed the history of how I-5 was originally constructed. They thought that options that include significant displacements of houses along I-5 in order to expand the freeway are likely to be met by community opposition. In Portland, interviewees pointed out that because of a series of large-scale neighborhood displacements in the past, there has been

vehement opposition to any projects that could result in condemnation. Others countered that the concern is about neighborhood or large scale displacements, not about isolated properties.

4. “In N/NE Portland, the community will want to see added community benefits.”

A number of the interviewees from this community stressed that, given the long history of impacts in this area, many in the community will want to see tangible benefits, particularly in terms of economic opportunity.

5. The project’s credibility was addressed from two primary perspectives.

Participants were unsure that project leadership could successfully build consensus among dissenting interests or channel resources needed for large-scale transportation projects. Various interviewees had concerns about several of the partner agencies; in particular, public perception of ODOT’s ability to build roads and use funds accountably was a frequent area of concern.

6. “We can’t pave our way out of the problem.”

The importance of coordinating regional land use, workforce development, and transit systems to address the problem was emphasized. Many people, business and neighborhood alike, did not think road expansion alone was a real solution to the problem.

Evaluating Cost Associated with Addressing the Problem

1. “The problem must be fixed.”

For the large majority of the participants the significant cost of their preferred strategies for improving mobility throughout the corridor did not change their minds about what needed to be done.

2. User-pay approaches to funding improvements were widely supported, but there were also critical distinctions made about *which* users should pay.

Interview responses in this area vary. The most common examples of user fees mentioned in the interviews were tolls for bridge users. A number of interviewees who supported tolls, believed that tolls should be placed on both bridges (I-5 and I-205) in order to be effective. Other ideas included employer taxes and fees targeted at the freight industry. Conversely, many in the freight business felt they are already paying more than their share.

3. Support for tolling was considerable across business, environmental, and community interests.

Tolling was viewed as an attractive option for financing improvements for several reasons:

- They create incentives for using alternative transit.

- They allow the regions' tourist and business visitors to contribute to local transportation resources.
- They allow people who frequently use the corridor to contribute more resources toward its management.

The primary concerns about tolls are as follows:

- There was some skepticism as to whether the use of funds would really be limited to funding bridge and/or regional transportation efforts.
- These fees would have a negative impact on low-income users and small businesses.
- Clark County commuters pay Oregon taxes with no direct benefit, so the Clark County neighborhood representatives opposed tolls because they increase the burden that they carry.
- To some this appeared inequitable, because users of other facilities are not required to pay a toll and because a bridge would benefit the entire region.

4. Increasing gas taxes was would only work if there was clear accountability.

Some people suggested that gas taxes would be a more equitable approach, if funds are needed, but stressed that in order for the public and the business community to accept it, they would have to know what it was going for and have a way of ensuring that the funds would be spent for the project. Others believed increasing gas taxes would encourage use of alternative transit throughout the region. Other ideas included creating a sales tax in Oregon or creating transportation tax zones in the Portland and Vancouver metropolitan areas to raise funds.

List of Stakeholders Interviewed

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

- Arbor Lodge Neighborhood Association
- Kenton Neighborhood Association
- Boise Neighborhood Association
- Humboldt Neighborhood Association
- Bridgeton Neighborhood Association
- Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association
- West Hazel Dell Neighborhood Association
- Northeast Hazel Dell Neighborhood Association
- Hayden Island Neighborhood Association
- Piedmont Neighborhood Association

- North Salmon Creek Neighborhood Association
- Arnada Neighborhood Association
- Asian Family Center
- Clark College
- Low Income Housing by Native Americans of Portland Oregon (LIHNAPO)
- Caring Community of North Portland
- Hispanic Roundtable
- National Vancouver Historic Reserve Trust
- Northeast Workforce Center, Inc.
- Enterprise Community Commission
- Oregon Association of Minority Entrepreneurs (OAME)
- Portland Community College (PCC)
- The Portland Observer
- Vancouver Civic Leader
- Vancouver Civic Leader

ENVIRONMENTAL / NATURAL RESOURCES INTERESTS

- Brownfield Showcase Community Advisory Committee
- Clark Public Utilities
- Columbia Slough Watershed Council
- For the Sake of Salmon

TRANSPORTATION ADVOCATES

- AAA
- Citizens for Sensible Transportation
- Oregon Trucking Association (OTA)

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC INTERESTS / ASSOCIATIONS

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- Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations (APNBA)
- Humboldt Neighborhood Target Area North Portland Business Association
- North Portland Business Association
- Bank of Clark County
- Central Eastside Industrial Council (CEIC)
- Columbia River Economic Development Council
- Columbia Sportswear
- Consolidated Freightways (CF)
- Downtown Vancouver Investor
- Halton Tractor
- Independent Dispatch, Inc.
- Lloyd District Transportation Management Association (LDTMA)
- Moss and Associates
- Nordstrom
- NE Portland Business Association
- Oregon Steel Mills
- Pacific Northwest International Trade Association (PNITA)
- Port of Vancouver
- Southwest Washington Medical Center
- United Parcel Service (UPS)
- Vancouver Oil Company
- Yellow Freight
- Westside Economic Alliance
- Interstate Business Association

NOTE -- Early in the preliminary planning process, interviews were held with the following:

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

- Neighborhood Associations/Coalitions
- Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, Portland
- North Portland Neighborhood Office
- Hayden Island Neighborhood Network (HINOON), Portland
- Central Point Neighborhood Association, member of Vancouver Neighborhood Alliance
- Hough Neighborhood Association, Vancouver

BUSINESS INTERESTS/ASSOCIATIONS

- Cement Operations – Glacier Northwest, Portland/Vancouver
- Columbia Corridor Association, Portland
- Salmon Creek/Hazel Dell Business Association, Vancouver
- Vancouver's Downtown Association
- Lloyd District TMA (LDTMA), Executive Director, Portland
- Northeast Economic Alliance, Portland
- N/NE Business Association, Portland
- Port of Vancouver
- Vancouver Chamber Transportation Business Interest Group (BIG)

SOCIAL/HOUSING/ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY GROUPS

- Environmental Justice Action Group (EJAG), Portland
- Coalition for a Livable Future/Portland Urban League
- Clark County Dept of Community Development
- 1000 Friends of Oregon
- Friends of Clark County
- Vancouver Housing Authority
- Oregon Environmental Council