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## Interstate 5 Willamette River Bridge Project Open House Summary December 15, 2009

### Introduction

The Oregon Department of Transportation held an open house on Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2009 for the Interstate 5 Willamette River Bridge replacement project. The open house was held at the Eugene Water and Electric Board facilities from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

ODOT advertised the open house through postcards mailed or e-mailed to the nearly 950 people on the project mailing list, display ads in the *Register Guard* and *Eugene Weekly*, posters displayed around the community, Twitter @OregonDOT and a news release.

Approximately 30 members of the public attended the informal open house. They included several members of the Design Enhancement Panel. ODOT's project team answered questions and provided information about the preliminary aesthetic design enhancements, project construction, the Eugene Millrace and the Greenway permitting process.

### Design enhancements

Most attendees spent the majority of the event viewing the preliminary aesthetic design enhancements from the three Art and Design Teams that were hired in the fall of 2009. Participants were encouraged to write down their opinions of the concepts.

In addition, ODOT posted the design enhancement concepts on the project Web site at [www.willamettebridge.org](http://www.willamettebridge.org) and asked for comments between Dec. 16 and Dec. 18. Verbatim comments from the open house comments forms and the virtual open house are included in the appendices to this report.

Each ADT is working on a separate portion of the project area and participants were asked to comment on each one separately. The project team received five completed forms at the open house and nine comments through the Web site.

Several participants expressed concern about the above deck and roadway designs. Specifically, they cited distractions to motorists, targets for vandalism, and a public perception of excess. Participants would like to see designs that are secondary to the natural elements of the area. They seemed to favor the rippling waters and rolling railing concepts for this reason.

Participants had some of the same concerns about the designs for the south bank and interpretive areas, though they were generally more positive. Specific comments were positive about the creative enhancements of naturally existing features in the area.

Participants said that the designs for the Whilamut Natural Area and roadway underpasses did the best job of enhancing the existing area. Some would like to see more Kalapuya history throughout the project.

### **Construction and the Eugene Millrace**

Open house attendees viewed a schedule of construction milestones and photos of the construction work to-date. They commented that the work has been conducted efficiently and with minimal impacts.

In addition, information was presented about the Eugene Millrace. This included a history of the structure and plans for an interpretive center. ODOT asked attendees to provide any historical information that they had about the Millrace. Attendees provided information about resources at the Lane County Historical Society and commented that the Millrace history should have a prominent place in the new designs.

Attendees were invited to complete general comment forms about the project. Two completed forms were received. They provided the Millrace historical resources and expressed desire for an arch over the bridge.

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**Appendix A: responses to design enhancements comment forms**

*Forms received: 5*

*1. Do you have any comments on the art and design concepts displayed?*

ADT #1: Above deck and roadway

- Highway Poetry: people will probably joke about it. Some may shoot holes in it.
- Windflowers: Again jokes, people will ask how much and where is the electricity used. What is the maintenance cost? How long until a piece flies off and impales a driver?
- Log weave: many will find it to be trash.
- Rippling Waters. The one concept that can work. If one concept should be used, it is the creation of sparkling concrete.
- Rolling Railing: It would definitely get people talking, asking how much it cost, and why does it obscure the water and views.
- Catenary Cable: something that does nothing for the bridge, but add clutter and something to break.

ADT #2: South bank and interpretive areas

- Can you make a basket the same size as the old columns and fill them with the “rubble” of the old columns since you cannot retain any of the columns intact? It would be great symbolism.

Combined ADTs

- I feel Bundles 1 & 2 are far too "arty": overtly self-conscious installations produced by artist/designers who are more accustomed to making statements that are really about themselves and their reputations, than about a harmonic synthesis of art and place.

Rather than framing the landscape, water and existing forms with their work, the Bundle 1 & 2 groups put their conceptualizations at the center, with a probabalistic link to the existing environment at the margin -- the frame. In my opinion, this turns the whole process inside out.

I particularly object to the use of gabions filled with rubble atop old bridge column stumps. This would only accentuate a heavy feeling of desolation already existing in the area, which serves as a default refuge for transients. What I like about the new south bank is the ecosystem restoration and enhancement of waters flowing into the Willamette, which is a kind of positive refuge for aquatic life. I prefer to see this emphasized, rather than the transformed ruins of structures which were never designed to exist in a synthesis with the river or riparian zone.

I feel better about the Bundle 3 concepts which I saw; these are far more respectful of the existing parkland and the indigenous culture which once predominated in the Willamette Valley - the Kalapuya. Here there is an acknowledgement that nature is predominant, and that the Kalapuya knew how to successfully live with it. The Bundle 3 group appears to carry this forward, which I very much appreciate. Their emphasis on education and working with school children and environmental educators is an affirmation of the continuum of history, and our responsibility to create and sustain a positive future.

It would have been very helpful to have witnessed presentations by the three Bundle teams at the open house, however. The storyboards are simply not sufficient. We need to hear from and have the opportunity to interact with these artists and designers, and more than once.

- It's important to me that the Kalapuya are represented in all 3 bundles-that when anyone discusses the bridge-it's there as part of the art. I didn't see the Kalapuya in especially above the bridge and think that needs some attention.

**2. *Would you like to be informed of the final designs? If so, please provide your e-mail address.***

- Except for artists and architects and few others, most of the concepts are pointless and a joke waiting to be made.

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**Appendix B: Virtual open house--responses to design enhancements comment forms through  
the project Web site, Dec. 16 through Dec. 18**

*Online comment forms received:* nine

**1. Do you have any comments on the art and design concepts displayed?**

ADT #1: Above deck and roadway

- Who's smoking what? All are too distracting and don't blend with any thing. We what are money back from these guys! Just go with some thing like the stone work with the lights in them on the Springfield Bridge.  
<http://bridgehunter.com/photos/11/66/116656-M.jpg>. (see image at right)
- Practically speaking, I'm uneasy about above-deck elements that are too distracting for drivers. Aside from local drivers, who will become very familiar with the bridge, hundreds or thousands drive over it for the first time every day. There is often a slowdown on either side of the bridge and I'd hate to have Californians rubbernecking at our beautiful wind turbines and rear ending people.
- I do like the idea of using the ADT#1, as it would add some aesthetics above the deck w/o adding too much cost. (It would be nice to see some more details, as the sketch is fairly rudimentary.)
- I support a combination of the Poetic Utility and Rolling Railing. The discussion of aligning the rhythm of the landscape with the highway is important for the actual I-5 travelers over the bridge. Making the point to the traveler that south bound traffic is crossing over the river from the flat Willamette Valley and entering the mountains of Southern Oregon and visa-versa for the north bound traffic. A rolling railing could emphasize to the I-5 travelers this important crossing and landscape change from mountainous topography to the flat valley floor. I had hoped for above-deck arches for this architectural design feature. But, if done right, a rolling railing could also accomplish. Larger waves at the south end representing the mountains and also in response to the transportation routes below, with highest over the railroad tracks and then tapering off to the north representing the flat topography of the Willamette Valley. Above deck enhancements of this type of design would go a long way towards replacing the loss of the above deck arches that were originally proposed. The Poetic Utility signage could be used in combination with the rolling railing to emphasize this major river crossing and landscape change.
- I am not in favor of the low cable, why is it needed? Looks not so good.



- The wind turbines are a waste of material unless they are really needed, and also a hazard for the flying birds. If they are going to do a wind project it should be as an energy efficiency measure and offset some of the bridge power needed.

#### ADT #2: South bank and interpretive areas

- I love the south bank ideas. As a regular user of that area, before construction I found that bicyclists and pedestrians would often gather there for a little break. I have also been fascinated by those huge piles of work bridge timbers since they started showing up on the old bridge, and making them into art is a great idea. The landscape elements sound interesting and inexpensive.

#### ADT #3: Whilamut Natural Area and roadway underpasses

- North bank habitat restoration also sounds very nice. The rubble garden sounds practical and beautiful. I don't really understand how the elements on the longhouse section fit together.

#### Combined ADTs

- Thank you for making sure I was aware of this information. I regret that I assumed the "Land Use Meeting" last night had nothing to do with the landscape.

I have mixed feelings about the "designs" they seem very ran[d]om in nature combining many elements and providing for a lot of potential vandalism sites. These are treatments are for the most part "tinsel" unlike Conde McCullough's bridges that were art in themselves, they are inspiring to cross... I never go to Coos Bay without a smile because of the bridges along the way! even when they stick the stupid green signs on them they still look magnificent.

I think these treatments would enhance the area, but due to the nature of the populace (college town) I feel that it would be better to keep it simpler rather than something you would find in a State park. The "Catenary Curve" sagging cable ...how long will it take before some UofO or OSU student tries a "stupid human" stunt involving the cable? The poetry signage with the required signage and the sound walls could end up creating some confusion for a tourist.

Speaking of Required Signage how will it affect the art whether poetry, cable, art fence, or weave; if it just gets covered like the Bike Bridge down the road then why do it. And are the billboards to remain? When you put all of the signage elements in one picture I think you will find adding poems will just be a mess.

I have lived in the neighborhood for over 15 years and graffiti is one of the bigger problems. We have even had people steal the grounding wire from the bike path lighting. I think a lot of the informative art ("Whilamut Passage") under the bridges would soon become damaged and require upkeep beyond what anyone really wants to pay. unlike what the script says "the scale of the place demands that art won't get lost, overrun, or destroyed in this low maintenance environment." The lack of understanding of the area and its inhabitants is remarkable.

Looking east on the bike path from the "Rubble Garden" looks very barren, where currently many trees now grow, In fact it looks like the intent is to "Clear cut the area" and make it an interpretive art site??? ... leave the trees alone!!! I say this because most of the illustrations of the view to the north show barren slopes with stumps. Why not return the field to its former status with natural even native plants instead of stumps and rubble.

Filling the Mill Race with Camas Lilies ...many of us would like to see the Mil Race flow thru town again, not be a cesspool it has become because of city management that is so lacking. Putting "mill stones" on display ... most of "the mill races" power was used to cut wood not mill grain. Not historically inaccurate.

Like I said before for the most part this is just tinsel and does nothing to make the bridge any better. Instead of tinsel why not a substantial bridge something inspiring not tinsel, something real! Most of the concepts I would not want to wake up to every morning and I will have to because they are in my back yard, literally! I just hope it doesn't need to be replaced in 40 years.

I'm sorry but I feel like we have aliens trying to design things, like the ridiculous Federal Courthouse we are stuck with. A total disconnect from the community instead of inspiring architecture we get the curious and odd bit nobody wants... well I guess we have to be known for something.

#### Other comments

- Generally speaking I'd love to be involved in any community events associated with this project, from the initial restoration to ongoing maintenance.

One thing I'd like to suggest is consideration for the presence of undesirable individuals in these re-developed areas. I don't have anything against folks who need to find a dry place but the profusion of beer bottles and litter in the millrace and river trail areas is disheartening. If it's not included, a recycling station in the area would be nice. If there is a problem of labor to maintain such an area, I'll bet you could find enough bicyclists who would be willing to organize pedal-powered collection of litter.

- I have commented before and would like to reiterate that safety and cost containment should be paramount in the design and construction of this bridge and all improvements by ODOT. A design that meets transportation needs safely at the lowest possible cost should be the ODOT mantra. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.
- It would be my hope that the new bridge retain the ability to be modified in the future so an offramp from the south bound lanes to Franklin Blvd is able to be built at the least possible cost at some future date.
- I think the bridge would look best if it was built to the same number of lanes on either side of the bridge, and without provisions for a full direction interchange with Franklin Blvd. Widening I-5 to six lanes (even if striped for four, now) is not going to be needed on the downslope of petroleum production. Traffic levels have peaked and as oil becomes more expensive and less available, travel demand will decline. It's just the laws of physics and geology, which are not

subject to politics, wishful thinking or economic models.

A few years ago, the city of Hagerstown, Maryland spent \$65 million on upgrading an airport to attract commercial aviation. But their investment was poorly timed, just before the peak of oil, and the subsequent drop in aviation (and obvious long term impacts on flight that are looming on the horizon). This "stranded infrastructure" investment is similar to ODOT's plans, endorsed by local governments, to widen I-5 and all of the other major highways in the area. Meanwhile, no money has been appropriated to fix the broken bridge for the railroad over the Willamette between Junction City and Harrisburg. If the Amtrak Cascades is ever going to meet its potential, some money from I-5 widening (under the guise of bridge repair) would need to be shifted to intercity rail. [Mark Robinowitz; seven attachments: VMT-vs-GasPrice.2008-07-31.jpg; Oregon\_vmt.jpg; o\_g\_dpd.jpg; Alaska-peak.jpg; us-oil-prod.jpg; Americas\_oil.gif]

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**Appendix C: Responses to general open house comment forms**

*Forms received: 2*

**1. Do you have any comments about the construction of the new Willamette River Bridge?**

- Yes, I am saddened that the design includes no overhead arches. It is very modern and utilitarian design, but not at all McCulloch elegant.

**2. Do you have any historic information about the Eugene Millrace?**

- Yes, Lane County Historical Society has photographs, artifacts, and oral histories. Suggest more balance between Native American interpretation and Millrace interpretation. Currently Native American heavy and Millrace light.
- I don't know about it except what's there now.

**3. How did you hear about this open house? .**

Newspaper ad       News article       Television       Poster  
 Postcard       Twitter @OregonDOT       Other: \_\_\_\_\_