

Portland/Vancouver I-5 Transportation & Trade Partnership

November 2001 Open Houses Meetings Summary

Overview

Over 300 people participated in two public gatherings held by the I-5 Partnership in November 2001. About 85 people attended the meeting held on November 7 at Kaiser Town Hall in Portland, and about 230 people attended the meeting held on November 8 at Hudson Bay High School in Vancouver. The primary purpose of these open houses was to obtain public input to help inform the Task Force's upcoming decisions in drafting a strategic plan for the corridor.

Participants were asked to review the results of the evaluation of the option packages and then fill out a response form, which posed the major questions the Task Force is considering. The meetings were held in the format of a structured open house – participants were given a brief orientation in small groups as they entered the meeting and then were encouraged to visit the information stations. The evaluation results were displayed in progressive stations, clustering information around the key questions as they appeared on the response form. In addition to the staff available throughout the open house, there were specific tables to address technical questions, speak to a Task Force member, and, at the Vancouver meeting, discuss the origin and implications of the Vancouver interchange options.

The meetings were advertised through a postcard mailing to about 10,000 people, advertising in the major and several minority and local papers, several emails to the project email list of about 1000, the project website, canvassing to households, and presentations to community and neighborhood groups.

Key Messages

About 60 people from the Portland meeting and 125 people from the Vancouver meeting returned their response forms. **Detailed comments will be available by the end of the week and should be reviewed in full.** This summary only addresses the most prevalent themes for each question posed to the participants.

1. Should we invest in the Corridor to improve I-5 transportation conditions?

- There was near universal agreement (97% or 169 “yes” to 6 “no”) that some action is needed in the corridor.

2. Will just doing the Baseline satisfy our Region's transportation needs?

- Again, a very large majority (93% or 155 “no” to 12 “yes”) believed that the Baseline would not be sufficient.
- The comments reveal that there were different ideas about how the Baseline would be inadequate, with positions ranging from those who emphasized freeway expansion to those who emphasized alternative transportation to a few who focused only on transportation demand management.

3. Do we need additional Transit Service in the Region?

a) If "yes," do we need Light Rail?

b) If "yes," do we need Express Bus? (note: there was no distinction drawn between short and long express bus)

- 94% of the respondents said yes, we need more transit service.
- The primary variation in the answers under this category was the contrast between enthusiastic support versus tepid support.
- 87% of the respondents supported light rail,
 - There was near unanimous support for light rail (94% “yes”) by respondents at the Oregon Open House
 - A large majority of respondents at the Washington Open House supported light rail (83% yes – 78 respondents) however there was some dissent (17% “no” – 16 respondents)
- 78% of those responding said “yes” to express bus, with the support coming from both sides of the river. Support is stronger (83%) in Washington than in Oregon (69%).
- Regarding light rail:
 - People cited reliability, potential enhancement to the community, the permanence of the system (investment in land use), and its comfort and appeal.
 - Several supporters qualified their support for light rail, either suggesting it be implemented in stages or based on the ability to minimize displacements and other impacts.
 - The most common concerns stated for opposing light rail were the costs and displacements compared to the amount of anticipated riders.
- Regarding express bus:
 - The primary assets cited were its ability to carry riders nonstop between the city centers, cost, and coordination with the bus system.
 - Concerns included its ability to attract new riders and the cost of a fourth lane to provide for a longer dedicated HOV lane.
 - Although no distinction was drawn between short and long express bus. The nature of the comments appeared to indicate that many, if not most, were responding to the long express bus option.
- Many supported both systems. Some chose one over the other as first priority. Reasons stated for the dual support included:
 - Some feel they are both needed.
 - Light rail could provide more frequent service, while express bus provides non-stop service during the peak hour.
 - Light rail could be the long-term solution and express bus the short-term solution.
- Commuter rail and high-speed passenger rail were mentioned by several participants as preferred alternatives to light rail and/or express bus.

4. How wide should the freeway be?

a) Should the freeway be limited to 3 Lanes of through traffic?

b) Should the freeway be expanded to 4 Lanes of through traffic?

- A clear majority supported 3 lanes (72% “yes” or 102 to 39), of these:
 - Most expressed the opinion that three consistent lanes were needed
 - Some stated their position as “no more than three, if that.”

- Respondents were polarized regarding 4 lanes, with 46% or 68 in favor to 79 against
- Some participants stated the caveat that their preference for 3 lanes was based on the assumption that four could not be done without significant property impacts.
- Other concerns regarding 4 lanes included:
 - Cost for what was perceived to be a small system improvement
 - Attraction of more commuters and SOVs
 - Impacts to the surrounding community
- Many of those who supported 4 lanes emphasized the need to plan for the future.
- A number of participants supported 4 lanes with the caveat that it not be a general purpose lane – that be used for HOV and/or other alternative transportation
- HOV lanes were a controversial issue for both options, with strong comments in favor and against.

5. Should a new West Arterial Road between Portland and Vancouver be considered in combination with the other options?

- It is important to note that the staff did not ask whether a new West Arterial Road should be built in place of one of the other overall options, but rather whether it made sense in combination with one of the other alternatives.
- Oregon attendees were split on this option (29 yes to 23 “no” – 56% “yes”), and a majority of Washington residents (63 to 34 - 62% yes) supported this option.
- Supporters ranged from the enthusiastic (“fantastic,” “desperately needed”) to tepid or qualified (“move it 20 miles west,” “provided it doesn’t rule out transit options,” “not a high priority”)
- Supporters cited:
 - Provision of an alternative for trucks
 - Relief on I-5
 - Use of existing right of way
 - Alternative for Hayden Island
- The primary concerns cited were:
 - The difficulty of connecting to I-5 without straining 4th Plain and Mill Plain.
 - Concerns about environmental impacts and displacements

6. Do we need to improve I-5 transportation capacity across the Columbia River? If yes should that capacity be used for:

- a) **Transit Only?**
- b) **Vehicles Only?**
- c) **Transit and Vehicles?**

And

7. Should the new river crossing be a:

- a) **Supplemental bridge?**
- b) **Replacement Bridge**
- c) **Tunnel**

- A very large majority (93%) of participants indicated support for improving I-5 transportation capacity across the Columbia River
- The majority preferred that the new capacity:
 - Serve transit and vehicles (“kill two birds with one stone”) – 87% – and
 - Be provided by a supplemental bridge (make best use of what we have) – 79%.

- A smaller percentage of participants responded to the sub questions. Many of these, as well as some who did respond, expressed a lack of sufficient information to have an opinion.
- A notable number of people were also interested in the other crossing options.
- The most common concern raised regarding a replacement bridge was logistics.
- A number of participants made a selection, but expressed that they did not feel they had enough information to make a selection.
- Some suggestions and admonitions with this were:
 - Add capacity, but provide alternatives – “think of moving people, not cars”
 - Let SOV drivers pay
 - Only after New West Arterial is built
 - Remember bike and pedestrian
- Those who opposed additional capacity most commonly cited cost and/or increased demand.

8. Specific Areas

a) Should we address the traffic issues in the Rose Quarter area in Oregon?

- 76% said, “Yes.”
- The most prevalent sentiment is that the problem is complex and solving it will be expensive.
- Some see this as the crux of the problem and the point of the study, with strong concerns cited regarding safety, backups, and access.
- For the Portland participants – I-84 access was cited a number of times as a key concern.
- The transit vs. more lanes dynamic reflected throughout the meetings’ comments is echoed in the comments on this issue.

b) Should we address the traffic issues between Delta Park and Lombard in Oregon?

- A large majority (87%) chose “Yes.”
- Consistent with earlier public input, this is strongly supported on both sides of the river. However, for Washington participants it is most frequently cited as the highest priority, “the major bottleneck,” “without this, all else fails,” “please.”
- Those who oppose it (and a few who supported addressing the traffic issues) emphasized that the need should be addressed through transit in order to avoid impacts on the neighboring community, discourage additional SOV travel, and meter traffic into Portland.

c) Should we address the traffic issues at the Columbia Blvd. Ramps in Oregon?

- 80% chose “Yes.”
- Again, many comments focused on vehicle capacity needs, with a particular emphasis on truck traffic and industrial access and ability to achieve the Albina Plan, while some countered that alternative transportation should be the primary focus.
- Several participants linked the need for this to a decision on the West Arterial Road.

d) Should we address the traffic issues at the I-5 interchanges in downtown Vancouver?

- Concerns about this element were the primary reason for the large turnout at the Vancouver meeting.
- 69% total said “Yes,” with 66% of the Washington meeting participants supporting it, and 77% of the Oregon meeting participants supporting it.
- There were numerous admonitions to reduce or eliminate displacements and recognize the historic character of many of the homes.
- There were also suggestions about other potential modifications near the bridge and downtown that might reduce the need for this.

- Overall, it appears by the comments and the rate of support that the strong concerns regarding displacements did not override interest in seeing some improvement in the situation at these interchanges, but did drive a desire to explore different designs and approaches.

e) Should we provide alternative access to Hayden Island through the Marine Drive Interchange?

- 66% chose “Yes.”
- Many of participants expressed either confusion or a lack of sufficient information to make a choice. Some who did respond appeared to assume that this would be in addition to the existing access.
- Of those who supported it, the primary reasons cited included the current backups and safety, as well as alternate access for bikes and pedestrians.
- Supporters also cited caveats and concerns regarding:
 - Timing – not to be done prior to providing a new bridge
 - Maintaining southbound access
 - Addressing impacts to business
 - Not pushing the problem farther south
- The key issues of those who did not support included
 - The potential of the West Arterial to address the access need
 - Trade impacts

9. Assuming the Final Plan will include some or all of the following, please allocate 100 points between the listed strategies:

	Total percent	Portland Meeting	Vancouver Meeting
Light Rail	27%	29%	25%
Express bus	10%	10%	10%
3 Lanes	9%	8%	10%
4 Lanes	12%	10%	13%
Specific Area as a whole	3%	2%	3%
West Arterial Road	10%	11%	10%
River crossing I-5	14%	12%	14%
Land use Policy changes	3%	5%	2%
Transportation Demand Management	5%	4%	6%
Commuter Rail	7%	8%	7%