

Bi-State Metropolitan Forum

Building a Healthy Economy for Oregon and Washington

March 16, 2006

Portland State University

2006

Divided We Crawl: Transportation Challenges in the Bi-State Region

Hosted by

INSTITUTE OF
PORTLAND METROPOLITAN
STUDIES

PORTLAND STATE
UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
VANCOUVER



PORT OF PORTLAND

LANDYE BENNETT
BLUMSTEIN LLP
ATTORNEYS



Portland General Electric

Background

The health of the transportation system in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area is a regional issue, regardless of whether one frames the subject in terms of moving commuters or goods, or via rail, roads, river, or air. Intel employees live in Vancouver and work in Hillsboro. Transported by truck, barge, and rail from growing areas in Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon, huge volumes of grain are shipped around the world from the ports of Portland, Vancouver, and Kalama. New Toyota, Hyundai, Honda, and Subaru vehicles are imported through Vancouver and Portland and distributed locally and nationally. Air passengers and cargo from both sides of the river move to world markets through the Portland International Airport.

The region's transportation system supports an integrated economy. A number of the region's key economic clusters depend on a top-quality transportation network and the growth of imports and exports. While the U.S. as a whole relies on exports for approximately 7.5% of its gross national product, about 15% of the two-state Northwest economy can be attributed to exports. In short, the region's success depends on the reliable arrival, departure, and internal redistribution of goods and on the efficient movement of people.

A Track Record of Collaboration. In the late 1960s, Oregon and Washington representatives participated in the Columbia River Association of Governments to deliberate over policy issues of concern to both states. Collaboration—with varying levels of success—continued through succeeding decades. In 1999, the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) and Metro created the Bi-State Transportation Committee to address regional transportation and land use issues.

The Columbia River Crossing is, without a doubt, the most highly visible inter-state project. Interstate 5 serves as the trade and transportation corridor for our two states and connects us to national and international markets. But this ongoing project is not the straightforward bridge-building project that it's often perceived to be. Because of its unique location at the heart of the region's transportation network, the Columbia River Crossing project must address auto, freight, transit, pedestrian, and river cargo needs while planning for impacts on the river and natural environment, historic and cultural resources, and nearby neighborhoods.

In addition to the Columbia River Crossing, the two states share a number of other transportation systems whose future capacity directly affects the economic vitality and competitiveness of the bi-state region. The rail network, used by two Class 1 carriers and short line railroads, serves major industries in both states. Choke points in either state affect delivery of products throughout the region. Similarly, Columbia River ports all over the region rely on the same river system to access international markets.

Successes

- **Continuing Collaboration.** Over the last five years, Washington and Oregon have laid the groundwork to enable the region to continue solving shared problems. In 2004, the cities, counties, Departments of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, ports, and transit agencies from both states approved a charter that created the Bi-State

- Coordination Committee (BSCC), a restructured Bi-State Transportation Committee with a broader scope and greater influence. The BSCC retains responsibility for transportation issues of regional importance; in addition, the committee is now charged with examining the connection between land-use and transportation in the critical I-5 Corridor. It is also charged with taking a multi-modal approach—including freight, rail, and transit—in considering the impact of its transportation and land-use decisions within the context of economic development and environmental justice issues.
- **Review and oversight of important projects.** The BSCC has provided critical oversight, guidance, and review for a number of projects of regional significance, including the I-5/Delta Park-Lombard Project, the Freight Rail Update, WSDOT Congestion Relief Project, and the C-TRAN 20 Year Strategic Plan. The I-5/Delta Park Project examined widening and improving access to a section of I-5 in light of a broad range of transportation, neighborhood, economic, and environmental issues.
- **The Columbia River Navigation Channel Deepening** is another high profile example of bi-state collaboration. Six ports including Vancouver, Kalama, Woodland, Longview, St. Helens, and Portland co-sponsored this project to deepen the navigation channel from 40 to 43 feet. After 18 years of study, work on deepening the navigation channel began in 2005. Over 27 miles of channel deepening is now complete. Deepening the channel will allow deeper-draft vessels to connect Oregon and Washington businesses and consumers to world markets.
- The region's success in securing nonstop **International Air Service** to Europe, Mexico, and Asia and more regular **International Container Service** also exemplifies bi-state collaboration. Both involved the work of bi-state committees convened by the Port of Portland. The business community's promised commitment to use the service played a key role in securing Northwest Airlines, Air China Cargo, and Lufthansa air service despite the relatively small market size of the region.

Opportunities

- **Strengthening the Columbia River Crossing**—a key component. The two interstate bridges and single freight rail bridge that connect Oregon and Washington over the Columbia River are critical lifelines for our region that must be maintained and improved.

The Columbia River Crossing project is currently addressing the I-5 component of this connection. The I-5 Bridge has served the region well for over 88 years but is stretched to capacity. Congestion will only increase in coming decades. Through an inclusive, collaborative process, the project will deliver a financially feasible solution that strengthens the regional economy and strives to support community livability.

- **Plan for long-term livability and multi-modal transportation.** The Portland-Vancouver region has long been a leader in emphasizing multi-modal transportation systems and their connection to livable communities where residents can walk, bike, and use transit as well as drive. In order to stay ahead, we will need to focus on improving bi-state transit connections, integrating transportation demand strategies, and applying successful multi-modal models to new locations throughout the region.

Challenges

- **Move ahead despite different funding, policy, and governmental structures.** The BSCC is a major step in bridging the gap in institutional structures between the two states, but coordination of transportation goals and solutions remains difficult. Current efforts hone in on 2040 population, employment, and growth projections. Metro is undertaking its "New Look at Regional Choices," which will reexamine the region's long-range planning while also amending the Regional Transportation Plan. Meanwhile, Clark County is revising its comprehensive plan under Washington's Growth Management Act. With so many variables, the already-difficult task of forecasting growth and demand on the transportation system becomes even more challenging for the region's transportation planners.

- **Plan to meet the needs of regional expansion.** As the Portland-Vancouver region expands to accommodate one million new residents by 2030, major new transportation investments will be required to serve both developed and developing areas. State and local funding for roads and transit is failing to keep pace with current needs, let alone the growth expected in the coming decades. Washington has recently passed major new revenue for transportation—including public transportation and rail. But on the Oregon side of the region, funding has been identified for less than half the \$10 billion cost of the projects in the current Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).
- **Address regional freight mobility.** Reliable freight transportation is essential if Pacific Northwest businesses expect to move and sell products efficiently to the larger California and Eastern markets. Despite recent investments in freight mobility projects on both sides of the Columbia, congestion persists for truckers, pinch points affect rail operations, river obstructions challenge barge traffic, and restrictions hamper air cargo operations. The Portland-Vancouver area and the Pacific Northwest can expect freight volumes to grow at rates faster than the national average. Between 1998 and 2020 import/export freight tonnage is forecast to grow 123 percent and domestic freight tonnage 76 percent. But the capacity of the road and rail network to accommodate growth is quickly dwindling. Congested freight movement will affect key segments of the economies in both states—including high-tech, wood products, and distribution and warehousing.