
WASHINGTON-OREGON STRATEGIC PLAN FOR I-5 CORRIDOR

OVERVIEW

The I-5 Partnership Planning Process brought together Washington and Oregon leaders and citizens to respond to concerns about growing congestion on Interstate Highway 5. As the only continuous Interstate on the West Coast, I-5 is critical to the local, regional, and national economy. At the Columbia River, I-5 provides a critical connection to two major ports, deep-water shipping, up-river barging, two transcontinental rail lines, and much of the region's industrial land. In addition, for residents in the Portland and Vancouver area, I-5 provides one of two crossings of the Columbia River for automobiles and transit. An average of 125,000 trips are made across the I-5 bridge every day.

In 1999 a bi-state leadership committee considered the problem of growing congestion on the highway and rail systems and recommended that the Portland/Vancouver region initiate a public process to develop a plan for the I-5 corridor. In January 2001 the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership was initiated with the overall goal of producing a strategic plan that would determine the overall level of investment needed in the corridor for highways, transit, and heavy rail, and to determine how to manage the transportation and land use system to protect investments in the corridor.

THE COLLABORATION

The Players

Washington's Governor Locke and Oregon's Governor Kitzhaber jointly initiated the planning partnership in 2001. The 26-member Task Force established to guide the development of the strategic plan included state elected and appointed officials from both Oregon and Washington, business representatives, neighborhood associations, land use and environmental justice advocates.

The Task Force had equal representation from Oregon and Washington. Key members of the Task Force were the mayors of both Portland and Vancouver, who made a commitment to attend all the meetings. The Bi-State Task Force was co-chaired by Ed Barnes, a member of the Washington Transportation Commission, and Henry Hewitt, the chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission. A neutral facilitator, Sam Imperati with the Institute for Conflict Management, Inc., was hired to assist the

collaborative effort. Staff from the various agencies provided technical support along with a number of consultants.

The Process

The Task Force met over an 18-month period, with four-hour meetings held once a month. The Task Force hosted seven rounds of public meetings to get ideas and feedback from the community. In addition, a Community Forum made up of interested stakeholders from both states was invited to closely follow the strategic planning process and to provide input at each milestone.

The process had five basic components:

1. Visioning and Development of Options
2. Evaluation of Option Packages and Land Use Analysis
3. Draft Recommendations
4. Re-evaluation and Additional Draft Recommendations
5. Development of Final Recommendations

The Task Force adopted ground rules at the beginning to guide the conduct of the meetings. One of the co-chairs set the stage by noting it was unlikely that anyone would get 100 percent of what he or she wanted, and that compromises would need to be made to reach a regional agreement. His goal was to have a plan that satisfied everyone at least 80 percent. A staff person noted that on each of the plan elements, the Task Force generally achieved this 80 percent agreement and that there appeared to be nothing in the plan that the members "could not live with". A key to the process was making sure the recommendations struck a balance among the competing perspectives.

Public involvement was a key element in the process and was encouraged through a variety of tools including: advertisements in newspapers; door-to-door delivery of project information; billboard and bus advertisements; a project website and web-based survey tools; a toll-free telephone line; and presentations to 275 business, community, and neighborhood groups. Outreach efforts resulted in participation by nearly 1,700 people.

The multi-modal option packages were based on ideas and comments from the public and consistency with the problem, vision, and values statements. The option packages that were analyzed all included new river

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crossing capacity across the Columbia River for transit and vehicles. The option packages also included a substantial increase in basic transit service levels and implementation of a strong transportation demand management program.

After adopting draft recommendations for the corridor in January 2002, the Task Force asked for additional evaluation and design work on the bridge and its influence area. The plan also has a component that focuses on the needs of the freight and passenger rail system.

An additional feature of the process was that two work groups of community stakeholders, one in Oregon and one in Washington, were invited to help the Task Force develop findings and recommendations around the area of environmental justice.

The strategic planning process was aided by a new land use and transportation model called MetroScope, which was used to conduct an analysis of the implications of making or not making improvements in the I-5 corridor.

The Agreement

The Task Force adopted the final plan by a vote of 25 to 1. The recommendations included the following components:

- Three through-lanes in each direction on a segment of I-5;
- A phased light rail loop in Clark County ;
- An additional span or a replacement bridge for crossing of the Columbia River, with up to two additional lanes for merging and two light rail tracks;
- Interchange improvements;
- Capacity improvements for freight rail;
- Bi-state coordination of land use and management of the transportation system to reduce demand and protect corridor investments;
- Community involvement along the corridor to ensure that the final project outcomes are equitable.

OUTCOMES

When the Task Force completed work on the plan, it was presented to state and local government agencies in Washington and Oregon for formal endorsement. The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council; the Ports of Portland and Vancouver, Washington; the

Oregon Transportation Commission; Metro; Multnomah County; City of Portland; and the transit agencies in Portland and Vancouver all endorsed the plan. Clark County, Washington, and the City of Vancouver, Washington have also endorsed it.

As a follow up to the work of the Task Force, a process to develop a Bi-State Land Use Accord is now underway. It is anticipated that this will be adopted in 2004.

The states of Washington and Oregon, along with the Portland/Vancouver region, are also working together to fund the widening of a segment of I-5 to 3 lanes. This project is anticipated to be ready for construction by June 2005. In addition, the bi-state region will be initiating an Environmental Impact Study for a new river crossing and potential improvements in the bridge influence area. This effort will include an Environmental Justice Working Group, which will participate in all projects in the I-5 Corridor to ensure adequate emphasis is placed on the potential impacts and benefits to low-income and minority communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ✓ **The inclusive Task Force composition** helped produce recommendations that reflected a range of interests. Having business and community leaders involved in the decision making, not just elected and appointed government officials, helped generate better recommendations.
- ✓ **Commitment by both governors made a difference.** Having the governors appoint the task force members, and then staying informed about the process, helped emphasize the critical importance of this effort. In addition, the key elected leaders who served on the task force made it a high priority to attend the meetings.
- ✓ **Community outreach was an important part of the process.** Early on in the process a decision was made to conduct an open process that paid close attention to the opinions of people in the community. The Task Force explored all reasonable ideas and used feedback forms at public meetings to help focus the comments. Even more outreach would have been beneficial.
- ✓ **Involving Environmental Justice advocates in the process** helped ensure that these issues received adequate attention. The Environmental Justice Action Group was included as a member of the Task Force, and a series of special meetings around this subject was

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convened to flesh out potential impacts of some of the recommendations. In addition, activist groups were paid to distribute information door-to-door about the project at key decision points.

- ✓ **Hiring a skilled neutral facilitator/mediator was a key to success.** This was a complex negotiation and the mediator helped ensure that all voices were heard and recommendations were worded in a way that encouraged buy-in.
- ✓ **A jointly owned and managed project was sometimes difficult to conduct.** Although there are clear benefits in sharing ownership and responsibility, it can be challenging to have two jurisdictions in charge.
- ✓ **Close working relationships among the staff** from the various jurisdictions supported the process. The project advisory committee of state and regional government agency staff provided input on key project decisions including the development of Task Force agendas. It was a critical factor in bringing many of the elected Task Force members along as the project progressed.
- ✓ **Balancing the varying needs of Task Force members for information was a challenge.** One of the challenges of the process was meeting the needs of all the Task Force members for information and discussion. Some members felt they needed more information, while others felt they already understood the issues. To bring all members to the same level of understanding about the problems and potential solutions for the corridor required that a significant amount of time be spent on education.

This case was adapted from the I-5 Corridor Final Strategic Plan (June 2002) and from interviews with project staff.