By Quietly Re-Drawing the Bridge Influence Area, Columbia River Crossing's Staff Disqualified Alternatives They Didn't Want

I-5 Corridor

The National Federal Register describes the Columbia River Crossing Study Area as the I-5 Corridor. The I-5 Corridor is defined as the northern terminus of I-5 and I-205 in Clark County, Washington down to the southern terminus of I-5 and I-84 in Oregon. See Figure 1. The Columbia River Crossing Study Area was narrowed from the I-5 Corridor to the Bridge Influence Area.

There is no documentation showing how this decision was made. This decision removed the majority of the reasonable alternatives brought in during the National Environmental Policy Act Scoping Process. Who made the decision?

Fig. 1

Key Industrial Areas Removed from Study

Narrowing the I-5 Corridor to the Columbia River Crossing's interpretation of the Bridge Influence Area removed important parts of the regional transportation system from study. This change removed: two deep-water ports, a transcontinental rail line, and Portland International Airport.

Large portions were removed altogether in both states. In Washington the I-5 Corridor from I-5 and I-205 freeway split in Clark County, south to SR 500 in Vancouver was removed. In Oregon, the I-5 Corridor south of Columbia Blvd., Swan Island, I-405, Rose Quarter, and I-84 freeway were removed.

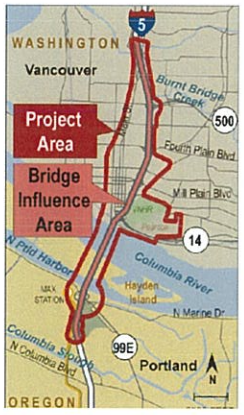


Fig. 2

Purpose and Need Statement

The Columbia River Crossing's Purpose and Need Statement describes the "center of the project area, I-5 intersects with the Columbia River's deep water shipping and barging as well as two river-level, transcontinental rail lines." The ports are no longer on the Columbia River Crossing's Bridge Influence Area map and it appears the center has moved to the I-5 Freeway. This creates a major discrepancy in that the **Columbia River Crossing's Purpose and Need Statement does not match up with its own Project Area Map.**

Columbia River Crossing Staff

The Columbia River Crossing's staff was given evidence that their interpretation of the Bridge Influence Area was inaccurate. Instead of correcting their mistake, the Columbia River Crossing's staff removed the term "Bridge Influence Area" from language and documentation and now simply refers to it as "Project Area." See Fig. 2 & Fig. 3.

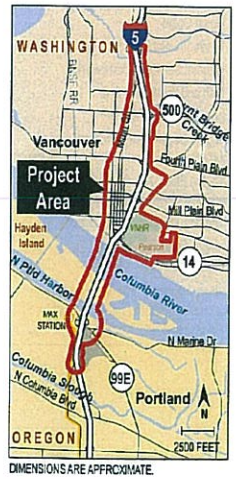


Fig.3

Predetermined Boundaries Equal a Predetermined Outcome

- Bridge Influence Area definition is inaccurate.
- Bridge Influence Area removes the majority of reasonable alternatives.
- No documentation can be provided on who allowed the changes.

Columbia River Crossing Project Map Does Not Match the Purpose and Need Statement. It Is an Enormous Problem That Must to be Addressed Immediately.

The Columbia River Crossing's Staff needs to be held accountable for making decisions beyond their scope and providing false and inaccurate information.

be presented to the committee at any time by providing 25 copies to the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section or by providing copies at the meeting. Copies of the document to be presented to ARAC for decision by the FAA may be made available by contacting the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section.

If you need assistance or require a reasonable accommodation for the meeting or meeting documents, please contact the person listed in the FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT section. Sign and oral interpretation, as well as a listening device, can be made available if requested 10 calendar days before the meeting.

Issued in Washington, DC, on September 20, 2005.

Anthony F. Fazio,

Director, Office of Rulemaking.

[FR Doc. 05–19207 Filed 9–26–05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–13–P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

Federal Transit Administration

Environmental Impact Statement; Portland, OR and Vancouver/Clark County, WA

AGENCY: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation (DOT) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration are issuing this notice to advise the public that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared for proposed highway and transit improvements in the Interstate 5 Columbia River Crossing (CRC) corridor between the Portland, Oregon and Vancouver/Clark County, Washington area.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Saxton, Area Engineer, Federal Highway Administration, Washington Division at 360–753–9411, Jeff Graham, Operations Engineer, Federal Highway Administration, Oregon Division at 503–587–4727 and from Linda Gehrke, Deputy Regional Administrator, Federal Transit Administration, at 206–220–4463.

Public information contact: Amy Echols, CRC Communications Manager, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) at 360–737–2726 or *echolsa@columbiarivercrossing.org*.

Agency Coordination contact: Heather Gundersen, CRC Environmental Manager, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), at 360–737–2726 or *gundersenh@columbiarivercrossing.org*.

Additional information on the Columbia River Crossing Project can also be found on the project Web site at *http://www..columbiarivercrossing.org*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Proposed Action Background

The FHWA and FTA, as Federal co-lead agencies, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC), Metropolitan Service District (Metro), Clark County Public Transportation Benefit Area Authority (C–TRAN), and Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet), will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on proposed highway and transit improvements in the I–5 Columbia River Crossing corridor between the Portland, Oregon and Vancouver/Clark County, Washington area. The Columbia River Crossing study area generally encompasses the I–5 corridor from the I–5/I–405 interchange in Portland, Oregon in the south to the I–5/I–205 merge in Clark County, Washington in the north.

The existing I–5 crossing of the Columbia River is two side-by-side bridges, built in 1917 and 1958. In 1982 another river crossing—the Interstate 205 Glenn Jackson Bridge—opened approximately six miles to the east. Together, the two crossings connect the greater Portland-Vancouver region, carrying over 260,000 trips across the Columbia River daily. Growth in the region's population and border-to-border commerce is straining the capacity of the two crossings. This has resulted in trip diversion, unmet travel demand and hours of daily congestion that stalls commuters and delay freight, adversely affecting interstate traffic and commerce.

In 1998, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) formed a bi-state partnership to study transportation and potential solutions in the I–5 Columbia River Crossing corridor. ODOT and WSDOT engaged local jurisdictions and agencies, businesses, neighborhoods, and interest groups in Washington and Oregon to plan and implement improvements along the I–5 corridor between the Portland metropolitan area and Vancouver in southern Clark County, Washington. Two studies resulted from this initial work: the Portland/Vancouver I–5 Trade Corridor Freight Feasibility and Needs Assessment Study Final Report, completed in 2000, and the Portland/Vancouver I–5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Final Strategic Plan, completed in 2002. This bi-state work included a variety of recommendations for corridor-wide improvements, traffic management and improvements in the I–5 Bridge Influence Area (BIA)—an approximately 5-mile section of the I–5 corridor extending from the SR 500 interchange north of the river to Columbia Boulevard south of the river.

Other significant transportation studies in the corridor include the South/North Major Investment Study (MIS) Final Report (1995) and the South/North Corridor Project Draft EIS (1998). These studies investigated a variety of high capacity transit corridors and modes between the Portland, Oregon area and Vancouver/Clark County, Washington.

Building on the previous studies, the I–5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan (2002), called for adding capacity over the Columbia River with a replacement bridge or by supplementing existing I–5 bridges to ease impacts of bottlenecks on local travel and interstate commerce. Another recommendation called for considering high-capacity transit improvements in the area of the I–5 Interstate Bridge over the Columbia River. The studies also stressed looking at a range of financing options, increasing general purpose lane capacity to three lanes where there are currently two at Delta Park and ensuring that low-income and minority populations within the corridor are involved in planning. ODOT is undertaking an Environmental Assessment at Delta Park. The Columbia River Crossing Project will study these recommendations as well as others associated with the Bridge Influence Area.

Alternatives

A reasonable range of alternatives, including those identified in the Portland/Vancouver I–5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Final Strategic Plan and the South/North Corridor Project Draft EIS, will be considered. The EIS will include a range of highway and transit build alternatives, as well as a No-Build Alternative.

Probable Effects

FHWA, FTA, WSDOT, ODOT, RTC, Metro, C–TRAN, and TriMet will

evaluate significant transportation, environmental, social, and economic impacts of the alternatives. Potential areas of impact include: support of state, regional, and local land use and transportation plans and policies, neighborhoods, land use and economics, cultural resources, environmental justice, and natural resources. All impacts will be evaluated for both the construction period and the long-term period of operation. Measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate any significant impacts will be developed.

Scoping Process

Agency Coordination: The project sponsors are working with the local, state and federal resource agencies to implement regular opportunities for coordination during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. This process will comply with SAFETEA–LU Section 6002.

Tribal Coordination: The formal Tribal government consultation will occur through government-to-government collaboration.

Public Meetings: Three public information meetings will be held in October 2005, including:

- Saturday, October 22, 2005, 11 a.m.–2 p.m., at the Jantzen Beach Super Center (central mall area), 1405 Jantzen Beach Center, Portland, Oregon;
- Tuesday, October 25, 2005, 4 p.m.–8 p.m., at Clark College, Gaiser Hall, 1800 E. McLoughlin Blvd., Vancover, Washington 98663; and
- Thursday, October 27, 2005, 4 p.m.–8 p.m., at OAME (Oregon Association of Minority Enterpreneurs) Main Conference Room, 4134 N. Vancouver St. (at N. Skidmore St.), Portland, OR 97211.

All public information meeting locations are accessible to persons with disabilities. Any individual who requires special assistance, such as a sign language interpreter, should contact Amy Echols, CRC Communications Manager at 360–737–2726 or *echolsa@columbiariverercrossing.org* at least 48-hours in advance of the meeting in order for WSDOT or ODOT to make necessary arrangement.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposal will be accepted at the public meetings or can be sent to the Columbia River Crossing project office at 700 Washington Street, Suite 222, Vancouver, WA 98660 or to Heather Gundersen at *gundersenh@columbiariverercrossing.org*

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding intergovernmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program.)

Issued on: September 20, 2005.

Steve Saxton,

Area Engineer, Washington Division, Federal Highway Administration.

Linda M. Gehre,

Acting Regional Administrator, Region 10, Federal Transit Administration.

[FR Doc. 05–19230 Filed 9–26–05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–22–M

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

[Docket No. PHMSA–05–21747; Notice 2]

Pipeline Safety: Grant of Waiver; Southern LNG

AGENCY: Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA); U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Grant of Waiver; Southern LNG.

SUMMARY: Southern LNG (SLNG) requested a waiver of compliance from the regulatory requirements at 49 CFR 193.2301, which requires each liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility constructed after March 31, 2000, to comply with 49 CFR part 193 and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard NFPA 59A "Standard for Production, Storage, and Handling of Liquefied Natural Gas."

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

SLNG, an El Paso Company, requested a waiver from § 193.2301. This regulation requires each LNG facility constructed after March 31, 2000, to comply with 49 CFR part 193 and Standard NFPA 59A.

Standard NFPA 59A requires that welded containers designed for not more than 15 pounds per square inch gauge comply with the Eighth Edition, 1990, of American Petroleum Institute (API) Standard API 620, "Design and Construction of Large, Welded, Low-Pressure Storage Tanks (Appendix Q)." The Eighth Edition of API 620 requires inspection according to Appendix Q which calls for a full radiographic examination of all vertical and horizontal butt welds associated with the container.

SLNG is proposing to use the current Tenth Edition, Addendum 1, of API 620. The Tenth Edition, Addendum 1, of API 620, allows ultrasonic examination—in lieu of radiography—as an acceptable alternative non-destructive testing method. SLNG proposes to use ultrasonic examination on its project, which consists of full semi-automated and manual ultrasonic examination using shear wave probes. SLNG also proposes to use a volumetric ultrasonic examination which combines creep wave probes and focused angled longitudinal waive probes.

Findings

PHMSA considered SLNG's waiver request and published a notice inviting interested persons to comment on whether a waiver should be granted (70 FR 40781; July 14, 2005). There were two comments from the public in response to the notice; both were in support of the waiver.

One commenter, a member of the API Committee on Refinery Equipment, Subcommittee on Pressure Vessels and Tanks, said that the use of ultrasonic examination in lieu of radiographic examination for large LNG tanks improves jobsite safety because it eliminates the hazards of radiation exposure. This commenter also said that ultrasonic examination is more capable than radiographic examination for detecting crack-like weld defects.

The other commenter provided a copy of NFPA 59A Report on Comments, dated May 2005 and stated that the NFPA 59A Committee approved the latest edition of API 620.

The 2006 edition of NFPA 59A was approved as an American National Standard on August 18, 2005.

Grant of Waiver

In its Report on Comments, dated May 2005, the NFPA 59A Committee accepted in principle the latest edition of API 620, Tenth Edition, Addendum 1. The Tenth Edition, Addendum 1, of API 620 adds ultrasonic examination as an acceptable method of examination. The Tenth Edition, Addendum 1, of API 620 indicates that both radiographic and ultrasonic examination are acceptable means of testing.

For the reasons explained above and in the Notice dated July 14, 2005, PHMSA finds that the requested waiver is consistent with pipeline safety and that an equivalent level of safety can be achieved. Therefore, SLNG's request for waiver of compliance with § 193.2301 is granted.

Summary

This summary briefly describes the contents of the I-5 Columbia River Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), including who is leading the project, what studies preceded the project, and what problems the project is seeking to fix. It also discusses the different alternatives for addressing these problems, and the key effects and impacts of these alternatives. It concludes with a brief discussion of the next steps and methods by which the public can get involved in the project.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

What is the I-5 Columbia River Crossing project?

The Interstate 5 (I-5) Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project is a multimodal project focused on improving safety, reducing congestion, and increasing mobility of motorists, freight, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians along a five-mile section of the I-5 corridor connecting Vancouver, Washington and Portland, Oregon. The project area stretches from State Route 500 (SR 500) in northern Vancouver, south through downtown Vancouver and over the I-5 bridges across the Columbia River to just north of Columbia Boulevard in north Portland.

I-5 is the only continuous north-south interstate highway on the West Coast, linking the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In the Vancouver-Portland region, I-5 is one of two major north-south highways that provide interstate connectivity and mobility. I-5 directly connects the central cities of Vancouver and Portland. Traffic conditions on the I-5 crossing over the Columbia River are influenced by the five-mile section of I-5 between SR 500 in Vancouver and Columbia Boulevard in Portland. This section includes six interchanges that connect three state highways and several major arterial roadways. These interchanges serve a variety of land uses and provide access to downtown Vancouver, two international marine ports, industrial centers, residential neighborhoods, retail centers, and recreational areas.

Exhibit 1
CRC Project Area

DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE.

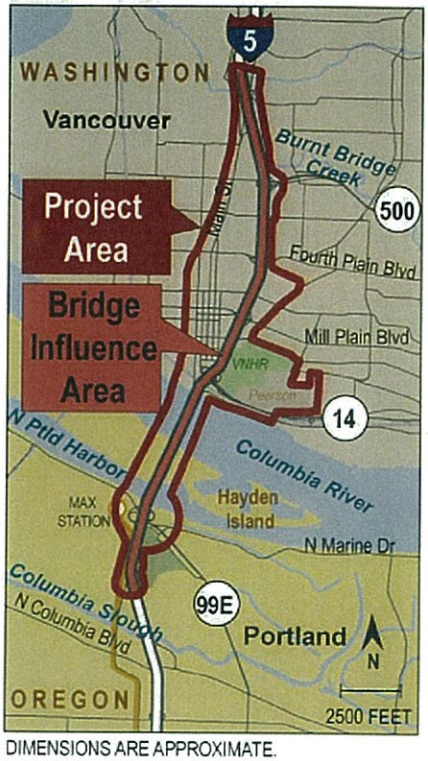
project milestones thus far. Meetings with this group throughout 2005 and into early 2006 provided important input during the formation of the Purpose and Need statement. In addition, a series of public Open Houses during the fall of 2005 provided more input from the public regarding how the project should define its goals and objectives.

The CRC project also worked with many other local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that the purpose of this project would not conflict with other local and regional goals and would not predispose itself to an alternative that would be difficult for agencies to permit or approve. Section 1.4 provides more detail on how this project has worked with local, state, and federal agencies in compliance with current federal regulations. The federal co-lead agencies for this project, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), were also instrumental in the development of the project's Purpose and Need. Appendix A provides further details, describing the agencies this project is working with and the coordination processes with this diverse group.

Ultimately, the preceding transportation planning studies of the CRC project area provided the underlying scope of this project, while coordination with stakeholder groups, the public, and a variety of local, state, and federal agencies provided important input on how this project should define why it is being imitated and what problems it seeks to address.

Exhibit 1.2-1

CRC Project Area and Bridge Influence Area



DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE.

1.3 Purpose and Need for the I-5 Columbia River Crossing Project

One of the first and most important steps of any major project is to define why the project has been initiated, and what problem(s) it seeks to address. The Purpose and Need statement provides this definition for all projects complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and serves as the basis for defining how alternatives will be developed and measured. A reasonable alternative must address the needs specified in the Purpose and Need statement for the alternative to be considered in a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), making the purpose and need an influential statement that guides all future development of the project.

The Purpose and Need statement developed by CRC Task Force and the project co-lead agencies is provided below.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve Interstate 5 corridor mobility by addressing present and future travel demand and mobility needs in the Columbia River Crossing Bridge Influence Area (BIA). The BIA extends from approximately Columbia Boulevard in the south to SR 500 in the north (Exhibit 1.2-1). Relative to the No-Build Alternative, the proposed action is intended to achieve the following objectives: a) improve travel safety and traffic operations on the Interstate 5 crossing's bridges and associated interchanges; b) improve connectivity, reliability, travel times and operations of public transportation modal alternatives in the BIA; c) improve highway freight mobility and address interstate

The Bridge Influence Area (BIA) encompasses the I-5 corridor within the CRC project area.

Columbia River CROSSING

I-5 Columbia River Crossing
Statement of Purpose and Need

Project Purpose

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve Interstate 5 corridor mobility by addressing present and future travel demand and mobility needs in the Columbia River crossing Bridge Influence Area (BIA). The BIA extends from approximately Columbia Boulevard in the south to SR 500 in the north. Relative to the No-build alternative, the proposed action is intended to achieve the following objectives: a) improve travel safety and traffic operations on the Interstate 5 crossing's bridges and associated interchanges; b) improve connectivity, reliability, travel times and operations of public transportation modal alternatives in the BIA; c) improve highway freight mobility and address interstate travel and commerce needs in the BIA; and d) improve the Interstate 5 river crossing's structural integrity.

Project Need

The specific needs to be addressed by the proposed action include:

- **Growing Travel Demand and Congestion:** Existing travel demand exceeds capacity in the I-5 Columbia River crossing and associated interchanges. This corridor experiences heavy congestion and delay lasting 2 to 5 hours during both the morning and afternoon peak travel periods and when traffic accidents, vehicle breakdowns, or bridge-lifts occur. Due to excess travel demand and congestion in the I-5 bridge corridor, many trips take the longer, alternative I-205 route across the river. Spillover traffic from I-5 onto parallel arterials such as Martin Luther King Boulevard. and Interstate Avenue increases local congestion. The two crossings currently carry over 260,000 trips across the Columbia River daily. Daily traffic demand over the I-5 crossing is projected to increase by 40 percent during the next 20 years, with stop-and-go conditions increasing to at least 10 to 12 hours each day if no improvements are made.

- **Impaired freight movement:** I-5 is part of the National Truck Network, and the most important freight freeway on the West Coast linking international, national and regional markets in Canada, Mexico and the Pacific Rim with destinations throughout the western United States. In the center of the project area, I-5 intersects with the Columbia River's deep water shipping and barging as well as two river-level, transcontinental rail lines. The I-5 crossing provides direct and important highway connection to the Port of Vancouver and Port of Portland facilities located on the Columbia River as well as the majority of the area's freight consolidation facilities and distribution terminals. Freight volumes moved by truck to and from the area are projected to more than double over the next 25 years. Vehicle-hours of delay on truck routes in the Portland-Vancouver area are projected to increase by more than

90 percent over the next 20 years. Growing demand and congestion will result in increasing delay, costs and uncertainty for all businesses that rely on this corridor for freight movement.

- **Limited public transportation operation, connectivity and reliability:** Due to limited public transportation options, a number of transportation markets are not well served. The key transit markets include trips between the Portland Central City and the City of Vancouver and Clark County, trips between North/Northeast Portland and the City of Vancouver and Clark County, and trips connecting the City of Vancouver and Clark County with the regional transit system in Oregon. Current congestion in the corridor adversely impacts public transportation service reliability and travel speed. Southbound bus travel times across the bridge are currently up to three times longer during parts of the am peak compared to off peak. Travel times for public transit using general purpose lanes on I-5 in the bridge influence area are expected to increase substantially by 2030.

- **Safety and Vulnerability to Incidents:** The I-5 river crossing and its approach-sections experience crash rates nearly 2.5 times higher than statewide averages for comparable facilities. Incident evaluations generally attribute these crashes to traffic congestion and weaving movements associated with closely spaced interchanges. Without breakdown lanes or shoulders, even minor traffic accidents or stalls cause severe delay or more serious accidents.

- **Substandard bicycle and pedestrian facilities:** The bike/pedestrian lanes on the I-5 Columbia River bridges are 6 to 8 feet wide, narrower than the 10-foot standard, and are located extremely close to traffic lanes thus impacting safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Direct pedestrian and bicycle connectivity are poor in the BIA.

- **Seismic vulnerability:** The existing I-5 bridges are located in a seismically active zone. They do not meet current seismic standards and are vulnerable to failure in an earthquake.

Columbia River Crossings at Portland-Vancouver