



Crossing the Willamette:

Choices for the Future

Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study

What's this all about?

Do we really have a problem?

Haven't we done this before?

What are the options?

More options

SKATS Home Page

Bridgehead Engineering Study

MWVCOG Home Page



Center Street bridge on a typical morning.

What do we want to accomplish?

Define the problem, explore solutions, and reach consensus through community involvement.

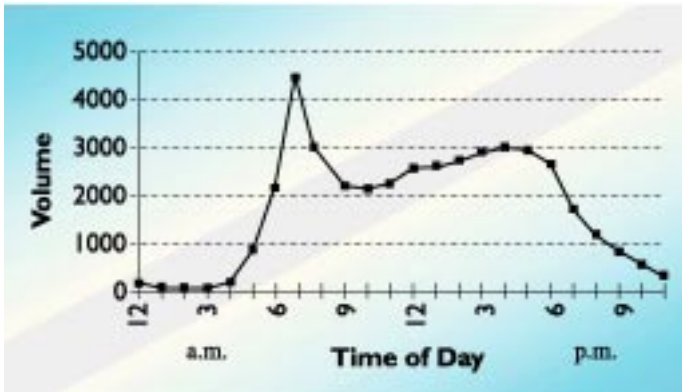
During the rush hours, area commuters are experiencing backed-up traffic on and around the Willamette River bridges. Traffic crossing the river is predicted to increase 40% by the year 2015. We can choose to live with it—accepting more delays and other related problems—or we can seek ways to alleviate the congestion.

In order for the community, as a whole, to determine the best way to provide the ability to cross the river, the Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study has been initiated. The study is in the process of evaluating different approaches to solving the problem, including construction of a new bridge. The study will also identify ways to make the best use of existing roads, bridges, and bus services. A basic premise of the study is that the existing bridges and transportation system should be used as effectively as possible before the cost of a new bridge can be justified.

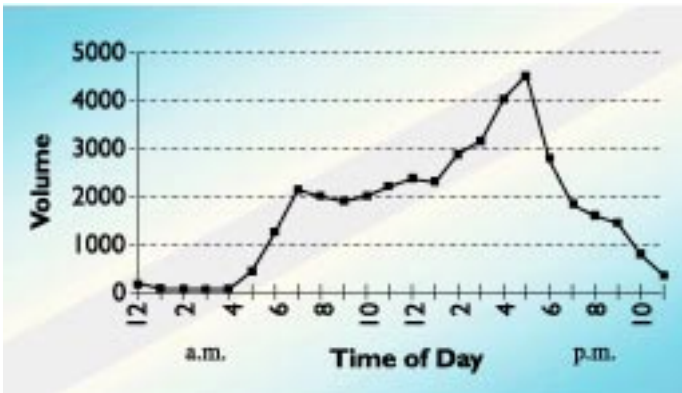
To help us guide the study process, a Task Force of over 30 area citizens was formed in December 1997. This Task Force has worked to identify who is crossing the river, what kind of problems they encounter during the crossing, and where they are going. In addition, the Task Force is looking at a wide variety of ways to solve the traffic problems and evaluate their impacts on the community and the environment.

Capacity problems on the bridges currently occur only during the morning and evening commutes; so if you don't use the bridges for going to and from work, you probably haven't noticed a big problem (unless, of course, there has been an accident!). The capacity problems we do have are actually related to getting on and off the bridges. Other than minor traffic weaving problems, the bridge spans themselves continue to work fine.

1996 Hourly Traffic Volumes Eastbound (Center Street Bridge)

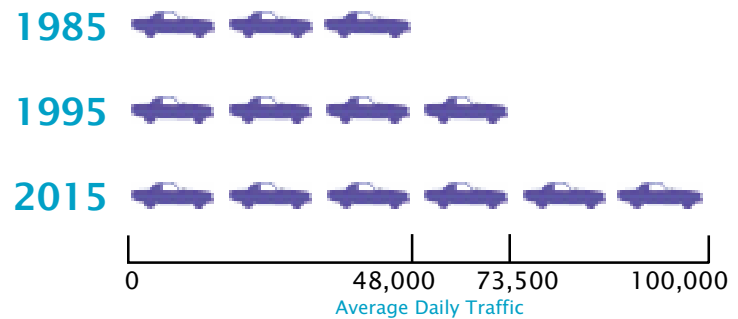


1996 Hourly Traffic Volumes Westbound (Marion Street Bridge)



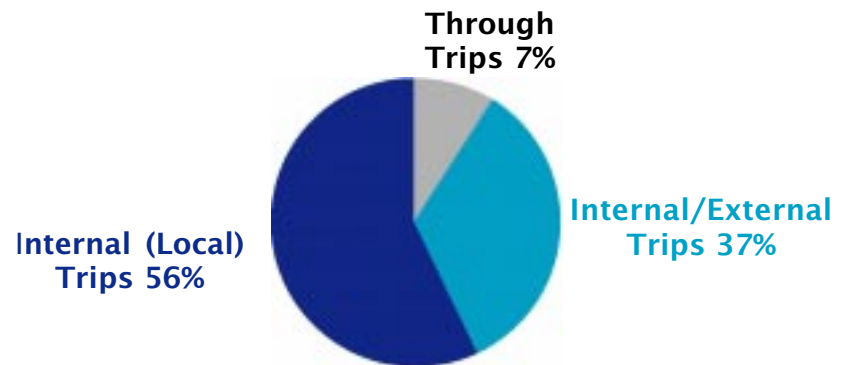
But as the traffic volumes on the bridges continue to grow, the periods of congestion will lengthen and the problem will become more evident at additional times of the day.

Bridge traffic volumes are expected to continue to grow



Bridge traffic volumes are directly related to growth in the West Salem area

Willamette River Bridges 1995 Two-Way Trip Volume



Haven't we done this before?



Before 1886

Ferries were used to cross the river.

1886 Wooden

truss bridge is built over the Willamette River in Salem.

1890 Truss bridge is

washed out and replaced by a steel bridge in 1891.

1918 Center St.

bridge was constructed.

1952-53

Marion St. bridge was constructed. Modifications were made to the Center St. bridge deck.

1965 Salem Area

Transportation Plan and 1970 DeLeuw-Cather study.

1973 Salem Bridge

Location Report.

1975 Salem Bridge

Study and Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

1977 Center St.

bridge-Front St. South-bound off-ramp was constructed.

1980 Center and Marion Street Bridge Final Environmental Impact Statement.

1981 Front St. bypass was constructed.

1982 The Marion St. bridge was widened to four lanes.

1983 The Center St. bridge was reconstructed to include four lanes.

1988-92 The SKATS 2005 Areawide Transportation Plan and Technical Advisory Committee Bridge Study Meetings.

Getting across the river has been a recurring issue in the history of the Salem-Keizer area. Many improvements have been made over the years, which have resulted in the two modern four-lane bridges in service today.

The location of the existing bridges was selected due to the existing road system and because it was the narrowest (cheapest) part of the river to cross. Previous efforts to increase river crossing capacity have resulted in improvements at the existing location primarily because those improvements were the most cost-effective, but also because of a lack of clear community consensus about the appropriate location for an additional bridge.

In order to develop a consensus, potential options must be thoroughly studied and evaluated before we can advance beyond the planning stage. In addition, we must develop a realistic and fair financing strategy that can be regionally supported.

Proposed Bridge Corridors

The current study effort is evaluating possible locations for a new bridge and ways to make better use of the bridges we already have.

New bridge locations

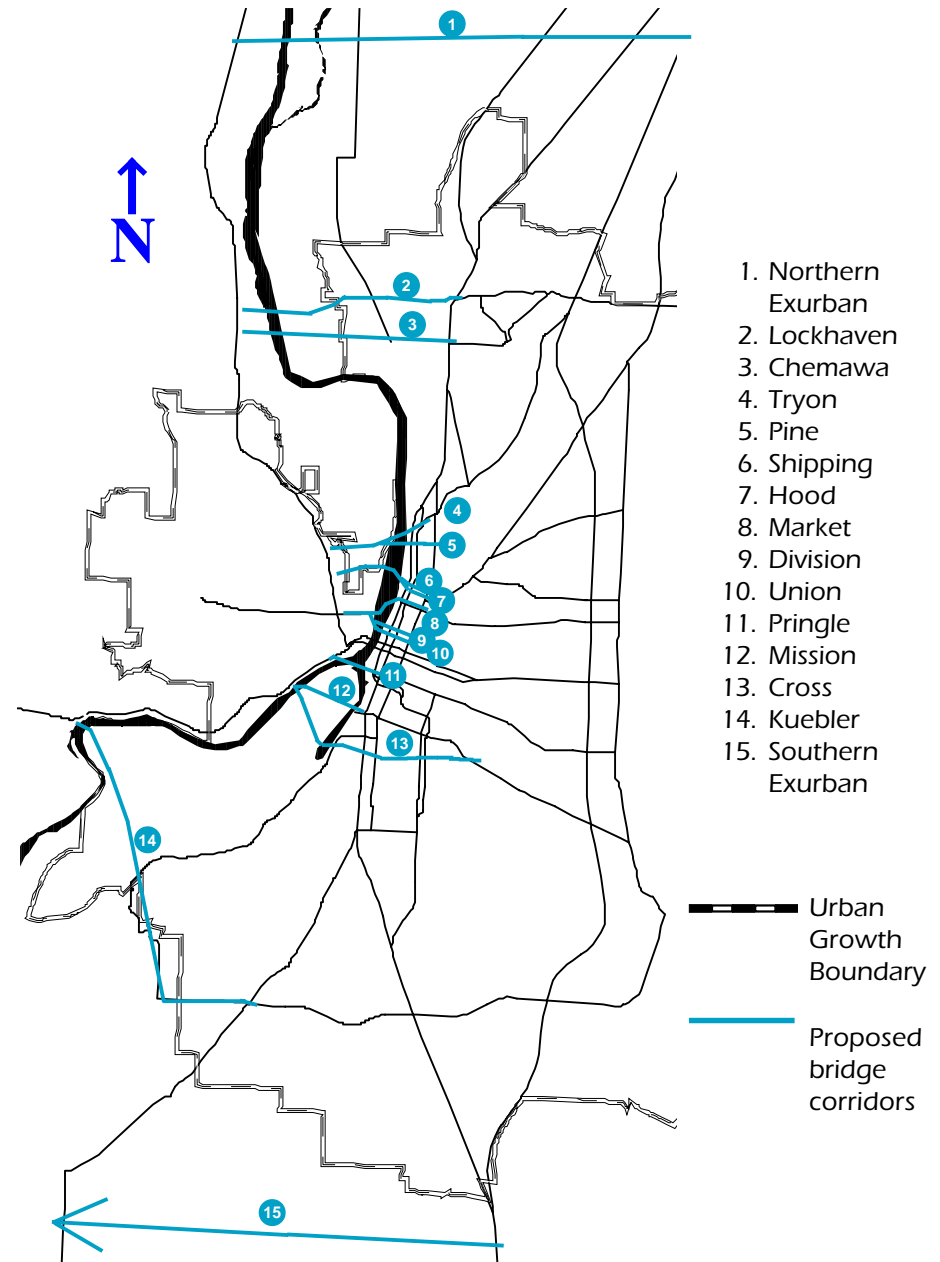
The map shows fifteen potential new bridge locations, most of which were proposed in earlier studies. These locations have been studied to determine how well they meet existing and future travel demand. Their potential impacts on the environment (including existing land uses) have been identified.



Most of the potential new bridge locations studied were found to have undesirable impacts on parks, schools, neighborhoods, and rural lands. Some of the potential bridge locations were found to provide inadequate relief to the existing bridges. Further consideration is being given to potential bridges in the Tryon/Pine Street and Kuebler Blvd areas.

Most of the urban area has been developed, so almost any new bridge corridor will affect existing development. Concerns about a new bridge include:

- Is it in the right place to divert traffic from the existing bridges?
- Does it enhance or detract from our future vision of the community?
- How will it affect the rest of the road network?
- Does it adversely affect schools, parks, or natural resources?



Can we avoid building more bridges by riding the bus more?

No, the current study has found that:

- Increased use of transit, carpooling, and bicycling will not be enough to eliminate the need for an additional bridge.
- Neither will a new bridge, by itself, solve the congestion problems on the existing bridges.

Therefore, we need to both dramatically increase the use of alternatives to the drive alone car and build an additional bridge in order for the existing bridges to function satisfactorily in the future.

Transit system improvements include expanded transit services, such as express bus service to and from the downtown area to west of the river, more frequent transit service on existing routes, additional West Salem transit routes, and dedicated “transit only” facilities.



Pricing strategies are designed to change travel behaviors by charging a fee (or toll) to regulate the use of transportation facilities. Charging a fee to use the bridges during the peak hours would provide a cost incentive for some to drive during off-peak hours, or to use other means of travel or other travel routes.



Transportation Demand Management (TDM) alternatives are designed to encourage alternative travel behaviors and include ridesharing programs, telecommuting, and alternative work schedules.



Bicycle and pedestrian alternatives are designed to encourage increased bicycling and walking by providing bike lanes, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and sidewalks.



Union Street Railroad Bridge alternative

The Union Street Railroad Bridge is owned by the Union Pacific Railroad and has been abandoned for railroad use. The city of Salem may have the opportunity to purchase the bridge and adjacent right-of-way for conversion into other transportation uses. Some possible uses include: a bicycle/pedestrian path connecting Wallace Marine and Riverfront parks, a reversible “peak period” bridge for use by cars or high-occupancy vehicles.

What if we don’t do anything?

One of the alternatives to construction or improving the transit system (and using it) would be just to “live with it.” Just living with the existing transportation system would leave it up to each individual or business crossing the river to individually decide how best to cope with increasing congestion and delay.

Share your opinion

Attend an open house and/or invite a speaker to one of your organization’s meetings. Help decide the best way to get across the river in the future.

The Willamette River Crossing Capacity Study is being conducted by the Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS). SKATS is a cooperative effort of Salem, Keizer, Marion County, Polk County, Salem Area Mass Transit District, Salem-Keizer School District, and the Oregon Department of Transportation, and is administered by the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments.