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Oregon's Worst Chokepoints Identified in TRIP Report

Oregon's greatest traffic bottlenecks and potential improvements for each are examined in a report issued Thursday by the nonprofit transportation research organization TRIP.

The report, "Oregon's Transportation Chokepoints: The Top 50 Chokepoints and Remedies for Relief," contains recommendations for improving the various urban interchanges, highway segments, bus and rail transit routes, and sections of rural roads throughout the Beaver State that provide inadequate mobility.

"Oregon's network of roads, highways, and public-transit systems allows this fast-growing state to provide safe and efficient travel while enabling businesses to conveniently serve their customers," according to the report. "However, continued growth in Oregon's population and travel is straining the capacity of the state's surface transportation system and impeding quality of life by constraining commuting, commerce, and other travel."

Oregon's leading traffic chokepoint is the Interstate 5 Columbia River Crossing in Portland. The I-5 bridge connecting Portland with Vancouver, Washington, is one of the nation's top freight routes and a key commuting corridor. The bridge is responsible for the worst congestion in the Portland metropolitan region. The interstate surrounding the bridge is typically congested for four to six hours each day. This number is projected to increase to 15 hours by 2030.

That bottleneck could be eased by replacing the current lift bridge, extending light rail across the Columbia River into downtown Vancouver, fixing the crowded interchanges, and developing a bicycle and pedestrian facility, according to TRIP.

The other worst Oregon chokepoints making the report's top 10 list are likewise in and around the Portland metropolitan area. Those chokepoints include the I-5/I-84/I-405 interchange, Oregon 212/224 corridor, I-205/I-5 interchange, Oregon 217/I-5 interchange, Oregon 99W Newberg/Dundee Bypass, I-205/Airport Way Interchange, Cornell Road to 185th Avenue, and Oregon 217 corridor.

"TRIP's findings confirm previous research showing the cost of congestion to the state's businesses and residents," said Sandra McDonough, president and CEO of the Portland Business Alliance. "We support TRIP's work to demonstrate how essential transportation infrastructure is to keeping not just our cars and freight, but our whole economy moving."

Last year, in a step toward addressing those chokepoints and other transportation challenges, the state's legislature approved the Oregon Jobs & Transportation Act that provides more funding for local and state roads, highways, and mass-transit systems through increased state registration fees, licensing fees, and motor-fuel taxes. That act will provide \$100 million for nonroad transportation enhancements and, by the time all fee increases are implemented next year, will make an additional \$300 million available annually for local and state road and highway improvements.

"In addition to causing a headache for motorists, Oregon's transportation chokepoints stifle economic development and growth at a time when it is desperately needed," said Will Wilkins, TRIP's executive director. "Oregon can't get where it wants to go -- in both a literal and an economic sense -- without an efficient transportation system."

The 28-page report is available at tinyurl.com/TRIP-Report-Oregon.

Questions regarding this article may be directed to editor@ashtojournal.org.