

I-5 bridge labeled Oregon's worst choke point

Transportation construction group commissioned survey

By Erik Robinson
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As the \$3.6 billion Columbia River Crossing project continues to generate a backlash among local elected leaders, a Portland business group is highlighting a new report declaring Interstate 5 between Portland and Vancouver as Oregon's worst transportation chokepoint.

The report was generated by TRIP, a nonprofit organization underwritten by the transportation construction industry.

The group ranked the 50 worst congestion bottlenecks in Oregon.

Planners say daily traffic congestion — which engineers define as freeway traffic that moves at less than 30 mph — will increase from four to six hours a day on I-5 now to 15 hours in both directions by the year 2030 without a new crossing. The lack of alternatives for travelers contributed to the corridor's high ranking among transportation chokepoints.

"Buses get bogged down in congestion with everyone else," according to the report.

Local elected officials are struggling to put the finishing touches on a proposal to replace the twin three-lane drawbridges across the Columbia with 10 fixed lanes. The plan also includes four miles of improved freeway interchanges and extension of Portland's light rail transit system into downtown Vancouver.

"This report underscores the need for the Columbia River Crossing project to move forward," Sandra McDonough, president of

the Portland Business Alliance, said in a prepared statement.

Business groups have been generally supportive of the CRC project, not only for relieving congestion around the river but also because of an estimated 27,000 construction jobs that would be generated during the five-year project schedule.

David Bragdon, the outgoing president of the Portland area's Metro Council, has grown increasingly critical of the proposal in recent months.

The report does little to change his mind.

"It's just a restatement of the problem. The challenge is doing the right thing to fix it, to try to improve conditions," he said. "My point is, we shouldn't do something that would make the problem worse, which is what the highway departments are trying to do."

Bragdon said he remains concerned that the project will disrupt local neighborhoods while shifting congestion from the river south to the area around the Rose Quarter. He acknowledged that growing congestion on I-5 between Portland and Vancouver threatens to impede freight movement and economic vitality.

"Of course, everybody agrees with that," Bragdon said. "But it doesn't follow that, then we should do the most expensive, most counterproductive, stupid thing to make it worse."