



MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Matt Ransom, Executive Director *MR*  
**DATE:** February 24, 2015  
**SUBJECT:** **Transportation Corridor Visioning Study (2008) – Retrospective Review**

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***AT A GLANCE – INFORMATION***

*The purpose of this memorandum is to provide background information on the Transportation Corridor Visioning Study conducted by RTC and planning partners between 2006 and 2008. The retrospective review of the Study is provided at the request of RTC Board members who asked that a refresher on the Study be presented.*

**BACKGROUND**

The Transportation Corridor Visioning Study was conducted between 2006 and 2008 in an effort to identify and assess potential new, longer-term, regional transportation corridors in Clark County. The Study also had a secondary purpose in addressing whether any of these new potential corridors had possibilities for extension across the Columbia River. This agenda item will provide a refresher on the Study, will address background information, and Study findings in light of subsequent interest. The full Study report is available on RTC’s website for you to review prior to the March 3 RTC Board meeting.

The Study began with a suggestion made by Battle Ground Mayor John Idsinga who asked that the future need for a corridor between the two rapidly-growing communities of Battle Ground and Camas be explored. In March 2006, Arch Miller, Port of Vancouver Commissioner and RTC Board member, articulated a challenge to the Board to look beyond the 2030 horizon of the Regional Transportation Plan adopted in December 2005 to research potential new intra-Clark County corridors. Furthermore, he asked whether any of the identified new corridors could potentially be extended across the Columbia River to result in options for a possible new Columbia crossing in addition to the existing I-205 and re-constructed I-5 crossings. Using the Padden Parkway as an example, both elected officials recognized that any new corridor takes well over twenty years to develop, fund and construct. Vision planning for new corridors goes beyond the traditional focus of the 20-year planning process required of State Comprehensive Growth Management Plans and federal and state-required, fiscally-constrained, Regional Transportation Plans.

The Study was guided by an RTC Board-appointed, eight member Steering Committee and eight accompanying senior staff members. Steering Committee membership included representation from Clark County, Vancouver, Battle Ground, North County, East County, Port of Vancouver, C-TRAN, and WSDOT. Consultant assistance was provided by JLA, PB and CH2MHill. Eleven meetings of the Steering Committee were held and two Think Tank workshops addressing land use and potential corridors.

Additional information on the Study is provided in this Memo in the form of questions and responses regarding the Study's purpose, assumptions, findings and post-Study activities.

### **WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The purpose of the Study, and its primary focus, was to answer the question “How will we get around within our own community in the longer-term future if Clark County reaches one million in population?” The study process was also viewed as an opportunity as a forum for discussion of future options for crossing the Columbia River.

The Study was viewed as only a first step in the necessary integrated land use and transportation planning process. It was regarded as a first phase of a multi-phase effort to establish a long term transportation/land use vision for the county and would provide and initiate a “50,000-foot level” planning analysis. New transportation corridors were mapped as broad swaths because it was recognized that arterial alignments would take additional steps to identify. In addition, any future vision would need full opportunity for public scrutiny and acceptance. The RTC Board was asked to endorse, rather than “adopt”, the published Study Report acknowledging that it was merely a first step in vision planning for the region.

### **WHAT LAND USE ASSUMPTIONS WERE MADE?**

At the March 3 meeting, RTC staff will explain the underlying assumptions which were made for land uses in order to assess the long-term future transportation needs. In summary, the Study assumed a population of 1 million people in Clark County and 4 million in the whole Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area together with half a million jobs in Clark County and 2 million employment in the entire metropolitan area. At the time the Study was undertaken, Clark County was using an optimistic 20-year population growth forecast at the top end of Washington State Office of Financial Management's forecast range.

In allocating the population growth, the continuation of existing Growth Management land use policies was assumed with continued expansion of the Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) in the County and an average 10% increase in densities in targeted areas within existing UGAs. Population growth was spread throughout Clark County at 8 housing units per acre filling areas of the County below the 800 foot contour level. Flood plains and conservation areas funded by Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET) were avoided. In Oregon, growth was accommodated through increased densities in urban centers and with some Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) expansion. Employment growth in Clark County was located below the 400 foot contour level.

These population and employment forecasts and land use assumptions were not adopted but were formulated for the purposes of this Study to take an initial look at possible future transportation corridors. The assumptions in the Study represent only one conceptual scenario for the future of the County.

## **WHAT WERE THE PRIMARY STUDY FINDINGS?**

The Study focused on where new transportation corridors might be needed to connect places and nodes of growth in Clark County. It was regarded as exploratory and informational with acknowledgement by participants that the land use assumptions would require further policy decisions by land use jurisdictions. The regional travel demand model was used to provide a high-level estimate of travel demand between urban centers.

The Study report includes sections on Committee Participation, Study Process, Identification of Potential Corridors, Corridor Assessment, Land Use Assessment, Corridor Preservation Strategies, Potential Next Steps and Further Study. In addition, the report includes a full set of Appendices that provide detailed information and data to support the Study's findings and the challenges that would have to be overcome if any of the candidate corridors were to move forward. A map summarizing new regional corridor candidates is on page 35 of the Report.

Potential new corridors were screened using criteria that they should connect two of more non-contiguous urban centers, provide at least 10,000 daily trips and primarily provide for regional trips defined as trips of 8 miles or more in length. During the study process, there was much discussion on whether new corridors should be "regional" or "sub-regional" facilities. By definition, regional corridors carry a high volume of longer distance trips (e.g. SR-500 or SR-502) whereas sub-regional facilities would be more like Mill Plain Boulevard or NE 78<sup>th</sup> Street that also provide access to and circulation within a subarea.

Within Clark County, the Study revealed that if the Study's conceptual land use forecast was built, there would likely be future demand for a new north-south corridor on both the west and east sides of the County as well as new east-west corridors in North County. Analysis of model results revealed a substantial demand for sub-regional trips in the potential new corridors rather than regional trips which are defined as longer than 8 miles in length. During the study process, the importance of completing a grid system to enable route choice, particularly in the Discovery Corridor Subarea, was recognized. The Study also found that most creek and river crossings were well over capacity. It should be noted that no transit expansion was assumed beyond the 20-year forecast and there was no optimization of existing corridors for efficiencies.

Following the initial focus on internal Clark County transportation corridors, the possible new north-south corridors identified were assessed regarding their potential for extension to cross the Columbia River. A potential new westside transportation corridor would provide minor relief to I-5 and some I-205 trips would backfill onto the I-5 Bridge with minimal relief to I-205. For the westside corridor there are land use implications with environmentally sensitive lands, wildlife refuge, and impacts to downtown Vancouver, Port of Vancouver and Port of Portland activities. On the Washington side, the corridor exhibits characteristics of both a regional and sub-regional corridor though river crossing trips are predominantly regional (over 8 miles average trip distance). Cross-river travel would increase by about 3 to 4% due to latent demand for trips.

A potential new eastside transportation corridor would be challenging because of existing land uses in the 192<sup>nd</sup> corridor and in the Camas downtown, because of crossing of watersheds such

as the Lacamas watershed and because of highly parcelized lands that would have implications for right of way acquisition for a new corridor. An eastside corridor would provide no impact to the I-5 corridor and some relief to I-205. On the Washington side, the corridor exhibits characteristics of carrying primarily sub-regional trips (shorter distance) with river crossing trips also predominantly sub-regional (less than 8 miles average trip distance). Cross-river travel would increase by about 7 to 10% due to latent demand for trip making.

### **WHAT WERE THE RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS?**

In April 2008, the RTC Board chose to endorse rather than adopt the findings of the “50,000-foot level” Study. The Board recognized that more work would need to be done particularly on land use assumptions, advanced study of candidate corridors and the impacts of the candidate corridors on land uses before any of the candidate corridors could be advanced into the Comprehensive Plans for the County and its jurisdictions and into a fiscally-constrained Regional Transportation Plan. In addition, it was recognized the next steps in a multi-step process would have to include outreach and participation of the public in articulating a future vision for their County.

### **HAVE ANY OF THE NEXT STEPS BEEN ADVANCED?**

Following publication of the Study report (April 2008), some future steps were taken to pursue future visioning for Clark County with integration of land use and transportation concepts. In April 2011, the Federal Highway Administration and Volpe Institute conducted a Transportation and Land Use Scenario Planning workshop in Vancouver, hosted by RTC. In October 2011, a values assessment was proposed similar to the Envision Utah process successfully conducted in Utah and the Salt Lake City region. However, lack of funds, staffing, a champion to pursue the values and visioning process together with the recessionary economy combined to halt further progress.

Discussion among land use and transportation planners at the February Regional Transportation Advisory Committee meeting, affirmed that local jurisdictions have not individually taken steps to incorporate findings of the Study into local plans. RTAC participants pointed out that growth has not been as rapid in this region as the growth forecast provided by OFM back in the early 2000s. In transportation planning and project development, recent efforts have focused on concerns for funding to preserve and maintain existing transportation systems into the future and to optimize existing corridors with focus on operational efficiencies.

### **RTC BOARD DISCUSSION AT THE MARCH 3<sup>rd</sup> BOARD MEETING**

This Memo, together with the full Study report and its appendices available on RTC’s website, will provide the input for a PowerPoint presentation at the March 3 RTC Board meeting when Board members can discuss the Study, its findings and how the Study fits within today’s planning efforts for a future Clark County.

**Attachment:** Provided through RTC website link: [Transportation Corridor Visioning Study Report](http://www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/vision)  
[www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/vision](http://www.rtc.wa.gov/studies/vision)