

COUNTY TO ADD THIRD BRIDGE PAGE TO WEBSITE
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By Phil Walker, for the West Side

Dallas—In its January 23 work session, the Polk County Board of Commissioners agreed to put an interactive page on the county's official website to support construction of a third bridge over the Willamette River at Salem. The webpage will be designed to collect comments regarding a new bridge from across western Oregon.

"One of the big problems we have right now is that most decision-makers think this is only a West Salem issue," Commissioner Mike Propes said. "As representatives of the whole county we know this is important to everyone in the region. One of the reasons we lost the Tyco circuit board plant in Dallas was poor freeway access, for instance.

"Unfortunately, the survey and traffic count data being collected by ODOT continues to support the notion that this is only about West Salem. We hope the responses we collect from this interactive page will help to prove otherwise."

The multi-jurisdictional river crossing project being conducted by ODOT and the City of Salem is currently in the process of analyzing options for addressing congestion on the exiting Salem bridges. In a recent Salem City Council work session, members of the task force indicated they may be able to identify a third bridge as the "preferred alternative" by the summer of 2008.

Federal permits, land use, environmental mitigations, location, design and identifying sources of funding remain as challenges after that. If the process stays on track, a new river crossing in Salem may be in the construction phase in a decade.

In discussion, commissioners noted there are many ways bridge construction can be delayed or even stopped. They agreed the best way to expedite the process, or at least keep it on track, is to demonstrate solid citizen support from the entire region. Responses from the new page will be used to do that.

Polk County Information Services Director Dean Anderson hopes the new page can be up and running by spring. The county's website can be found at www.co.polk.or.us/.

The Salem River Crossing Task Force website address is: www.salemrivercrossing.org.