

February 22, 2007

Project Bridge Watch
C/o Polk County Board of Commissioners
850 Main Street
Dallas, OR 97338

Dear Commissioners,

As the former Polk County Community Development Director, I commuted across the two bridges crossing the Willamette River from Salem and Marion County to Polk County for 29 years. In my capacity working on community and economic development issues I became aware of the need for another bridge to cross the Willamette River for the following reasons. I am sure there are other reasons as well.

- Transportation of goods from the significant resource based lands and industries in Polk County, i.e., timber, aggregate and agriculture is critically important. This also included the transport of workers and services across the bridges.
- Another bridge would improve the freight movement of the existing non-resource based industries and as has been a negative issue in recruiting these kinds of industries because of their need to reach I-5 from sites west of Salem.
- The significant recent increase in tourism dollars spent in Polk County evidences the need for ease of access to these services. Joint marketing efforts have and can result in more dollars spent in the region that may be impacted by the limitation on river crossings between the east and west sides of the river.
- With the recent incidents on the existing bridges and the increased emphasis on emergency response planning, there is a need to provide for another river crossing to serve the public safety interests of the citizens living in the four counties west of the Willamette River.

It was interesting to recently conduct research on the history of the Polk County planning commission's minutes dating back to 1959 and 1960 to find that a significant amount of time was spent by the commission discussing the need for another bridge at that time (the two bridges were in place then). I am encouraged by the efforts of those like Project Bridge Watch to encourage, after 50 years, the foresight of those citizens to assure that a safe and adequate transportation network is in place to meet the needs of the entire region.

Best regards.


Gene Clemens