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Project Bridge Watch  
c/o Polk County Board of Commissioners  
Courthouse  
Dallas, Oregon 97304

Dear friends:

I live in the 97304 area code that includes West Salem. While I am acutely aware of the gridlock many of my neighbors face trying to cross the Willamette River every working day, it is a serious mistake to conclude that congestion on the Salem bridges is just a "West Salem problem".

In my private sector career, I am a commercial grower of tree fruits and nuts. Sooner or later, everything I grow has to reach the I-5 corridor on the east side of the river to get to domestic and world markets.

This is a fact that is repeated in all of the resource-based industries west of the Willamette and out to the coast. My fellow producers on farms and in the forest, and the industries that add value to our raw materials, must get to the freeway to move the vast majority of what we produce.

To avoid crossing at Salem and going through a metropolitan area to get to I-5, some are now choosing to go to Corvallis and crossing there for southbound loads. Others have resorted to putting 80,000 lb semi-trucks on the Wheatland Ferry. The latter is something that has to be seen to be believed.

Getting our products across the river to the I-5 corridor is becoming increasingly cumbersome. Congestion on the Salem bridges is hurting our ability to compete in world markets and retain family-wage employers in the region. It is clear that we need a new lifeline across the Willamette that will serve not only West Salem, but all of western Oregon.

Thanks, Bridge Watch for your efforts to accelerate the process of building this western Oregon lifeline. Our future depends on it.

Best regards,

  
Phil Walker