



POLK COUNTY

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POLK COUNTY COURTHOUSE ★ DALLAS, OREGON 97338-3174
503-623-8173 ★ FAX 503-623-0896

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Commissioner Mike Propes

I have spent over 18 years attending meetings, discussion groups, and studies concerning another bridge crossing for the Salem area. I think this is one of the most important issues facing West Salem and the regional transportation system.

West Salem becomes an absolute gridlock every morning because there is only one access into downtown. Then in the afternoon, everybody who works in Marion County and lives in Polk County has to use four lanes to try to get home. This is totally inadequate when commuters are also competing with all of the regional traffic that has to go through Salem.

The number one tourist attraction in the state is the Spirit Mountain Casino, with over 3 million visitors per year. Many of those folks have to cross the Willamette at Salem to access that facility. The number two tourist attraction in the State is the Oregon coast, which is also accessed by the existing bridges.

The Salem bridges now have more traffic on them than Interstate 5 has at Market Street in Salem -- over 90,000 cars and trucks every day.

There has to be an additional bridge built to adequately address the gridlock problems that affect West Salem. This new bridge must have good access from Highway 22 to the freeway to address critical regional connections.

The Salem River Crossing project is being conducted by the City of Salem and the Oregon Department of Transportation. The purpose of the project is to work with area stakeholders to develop solutions for crossing the Willamette River in the Salem-Keizer metropolitan area that meet transportation needs, are compatible with the built and natural environments, and have broad community and regional support. After decades of study, the project's mission statement doesn't even include the words "build" or "bridge."

This project cannot continue to be put off with more studies and meetings. The cost of construction accelerates every time the bridge is put off to study it one more time. Everybody at the first meeting I attended 18 years ago, except one, felt it was time to build the bridge then before the costs accelerated. I believe the costs they were talking then were about \$20 million, compared to the more than \$200 million we are talking about today! We have to make sure this is our last study. We have to have enough participation and support to start building and stop getting lost in the transportation system bureaucracy.

This is where we need your help. We need YOUR letters of support that we can send to other elected officials. Look on our website and you will see the various ways that you can help with this project.

I hope you will feel free to visit BridgeWatch.net and comment on a regular basis.

Mike Propes
Polk County Commissioner