

What we learned during our Oversight Subcommittee work

New Starts/Light Rail

1. The \$850 million federal New Starts grant is only for light rail, and would not be available to the project if light rail is eliminated from the project.
2. A portion of the \$850 million New Starts grant pays for elements of the bridge-structure itself, estimated by WSDOT at \$105 million.
3. Oregon says light rail is critical to their acceptance of the project.
4. According to FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff, this project is a high priority for the FHWA and FTA.
5. If light rail is removed from the project, a new EIS will be required, which would delay the project by several years.
6. While there is strong support for light rail, there is also strong opposition from those who would prefer bus rapid transit or an alternative transit mode.

Bridge Clearance

7. Despite considerable public process over the years, the design described in the FEIS still requires refinement, especially relative to the 95' bridge clearance described in the FEIS.
8. The project must secure a General Bridge Permit from the US Coast Guard before beginning construction. As a result, the Coast Guard's concerns about bridge clearance meeting the reasonable needs of navigation must be addressed in order for the project to proceed.
9. Bridge clearance needs to exceed 95' to meet the needs of existing upstream businesses. It appears that a 110' clearance is technically feasible, at an additional cost of \$36 million, and without significant additional environmental impacts. The project estimates that 20 vessels or users still would be potentially impacted by this clearance height. This compares with 53 vessels or users impacted by a 95' clearance.
10. Bridge clearance can't be as high as some suggest, or it may begin to encroach into Pearson Airfield airspace; also, if the bridge is too high, the footprint in Vancouver may become unacceptable, and the inclines may be difficult for freight traffic.
11. Putting light rail at the same level as the bridge deck would save perhaps five feet of clearance but not thirty feet, due to the box design of the bridge.

12. Some people believe the solution to the bridge clearance issue is to add a movable lift span. Due to the design of this curved bridge, adding a lift span would result in a structure of unprecedented complexity, would cost at least \$250 million, and would require additional environmental evaluation.

State and Federal Highway Funding

13. 2013 is critical for both Oregon and Washington to approve their equity contributions, in order for the project to submit the application for the New Starts grant in late 2013, and to apply for a TIFIA loan.
14. Washington's \$435 million equity contribution in 2013 could be reduced to \$260 million by delaying interchange improvements at Mill Plain Blvd, Fourth Plain Blvd, 29th Street, 33rd Street and SR 500.
15. The proposed \$400 million in the finance plan from FHWA isn't sure money by any means, but it's also the last money in for the project, so there's time to deal with uncertainty.

Tolls

16. The Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions have decided to jointly set tolls, and each state will issue toll-backed bonds, or the bonds backed by tolls will be TIFIA bonds.
17. Provided the Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions finalize a toll-setting agreement prior to the start of the 2013 legislative session, the two Commissions would set toll rates in 2014, and pre-completion tolling would begin in the summer of 2015.
18. Pre-completion tolling is expected to raise \$200 million, which would finance pay-as-you go construction.