

Columbia River Crossing Study – Tri-Cities

Final Report

(Part I)

January 27, 2011

Approved by the BFCG Board on February 25, 2011

Executive Summary

Background

The Columbia River Crossing Study for the Tri-Cities was initiated due to numerous discussions and previous work accomplished in the Tri-Cities area, focusing on congestion at the Pioneer Memorial Bridge. The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments (BFCG) initiated the study and partnered with the Cities of Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland, along with Benton and Franklin Counties and the Ports of Benton, Pasco, Kennewick and Walla Walla. The project team of Lochner and JUB Engineers was directed to consider an additional Columbia River crossing from a regional perspective and to lead an in depth review of alternatives. The resulting documentation could then carry the selected alternatives forward into the environmental and design processes, if the BFCG so chooses.

A Steering Committee was formed to guide BFCG and the project team in its work. In addition to the Steering Committee, a Data Group was requested and formed, comprised of the engineering and planning staff members of the agencies within the region. All traffic modeling was accomplished by BFCG staff using the 2005 BFCG regional model.

Study Scope

The scope of the study was defined to review up to ten crossing locations, to consider fatal flaws in any of the alternatives, and to winnow those ten alternatives ultimately to three locations to move forward into the formal environmental processes. The project team reviewed existing transportation data and conditions within the Tri-City area, including transportation data contained in current Comprehensive Plans, WSDOT traffic data, and BFCG current transportation data. The project team also reviewed and summarized relevant previous reports in an annotated bibliography.

Preliminary Purpose and Need for Study

This study is intended to provide foundational material for the NEPA process. A preliminary statement of Purpose & Need was drafted to guide the Steering Committee. This statement will require further review and definition during the NEPA process. In summary, it states:

1. Determine how congestion relief can be provided at the Blue Bridge.
2. Consider crossing options that address increased capacity and improved LOS as well as improved connectivity between the cities in the study area.
3. Analyze the economic impact of the various crossing alternatives.

Public and Agency Involvement

A Public Involvement Plan was developed by the project team and approved by the Steering Committee at the beginning of the study. That plan included the work by the Steering committee to guide the study.

A project website was created, along with an email list and a Twitter account, and maintained throughout the study to provide up to date information about the project. The web site was also used for two internet based surveys. Over 1,000 responses were received from the two surveys. Project information was provided at the WSDOT booth at the Benton Franklin County Fair in August 2010.

A public meeting was held at the Chiawana High School auditorium in Pasco, Washington on October 13, 2010 where information on the history, the process and the four final alternatives was presented and followed with a Q&A session.

Data Collection

A significant amount of data was developed through the course of the Columbia River Crossing Study. This report provides summaries of the data, which included:

- Historical Traffic Volumes;
- Origin Destination Study;
- Traffic Modeling;
- Environmental Data;
- Economic Development Potential.; and
- Planning Level Construction Cost.

Alternatives Considered

Six potential river crossing locations were identified in the request for proposals with up to four addition locations to be added by the project team in conjunction with the Steering Committee. The project team reviewed the list of crossings and added three additional locations, along with the existing SR 397 Cable Bridge.

The final alternatives considered were:

1. A new span from the North Richland area to Franklin County using Sagemoor Road and a new connecting roadway to SR 240/SR 225 (North Richland alternative.)
2. A new span from the North Richland area to Franklin County using Horn Rapids Road and Alder Road.
3. A new span from Richland to Franklin County using Van Giesen Street and Dent Road.
4. A new span from Richland to Franklin County/Pasco using Swift Boulevard and Dent/Powerline Road.
5. A new span between Richland/Kennewick and Pasco using Columbia Center Boulevard and Road 100.
6. A new span between Kennewick and Pasco using Edison Street and Road 68.
7. Widening the Existing US 395 Bridge between Kennewick and Pasco.
8. Using the Existing Cable Bridge (SR 397) and improve access both north to I-182 and south to the Intertie.
9. A new span from Kennewick to Pasco near Sacajawea Park using Haney Road to SR 397 and Sacajawea Park Road to US 12.
10. A new span from the Finley area to Walla Walla County.

Analysis & Screening Process

The analysis and screening process was designed to provide a detailed planning level of data to the Steering Committee, enabling them to accomplish an objective review of the alternatives.

The process was initially designed to work through three levels of screening. Ultimately due to efficiencies that developed during the study, the process was reduced to two screening levels.

Initial "Level I" Screening

The Steering Committee members were provided graphical layouts of each alternative with a list of advantages and disadvantages, a summary of Historical All-day Bridge Traffic Volumes since 1990, results of an additional license plate survey conducted in April 2010, a summary of forecast PM peak hour traffic volumes (based on the 2005 regional traffic model prepared for the 2006-2025 Regional Transportation Plan) for year 2025, and results of a region wide web based survey.

The Steering Committee members scored each of the alternatives independently using a simplified unweighted methodology. The result identified four alternatives to be carried forward:

- Alternative 1 – A new span located just north of the Hanford 300 Area and connects to Columbia River Road and W Sagemoor Road on the east (North Richland alternative.)
- Alternative 5 – A new span from Columbia Center Boulevard in Kennewick to Road 100 in Pasco
- Alternative 6 – A new span from Edison Street in Kennewick to Road 68 in Pasco
- Alternative 7 – An additional bridge parallel and next to the existing US 395 "Blue Bridge"

Final "Level II" Screening

For the Level II analysis, the project team provided the Steering Committee a more detailed review of the alternatives. To aid in this evaluation, the project team and Steering Committee divided the criteria into the six categories. Based on this information and further discussion, the Steering Committee selected a scoring methodology with specific weights for each category:

○ Congestion/Capacity/Mobility	25 points
○ System Connectivity	15 points
○ Economic Benefits/Development Potential	25 points
○ Environmental Impacts	10 points
○ Project Costs	15 points
○ Community Support	10 points
Total Possible	100 points

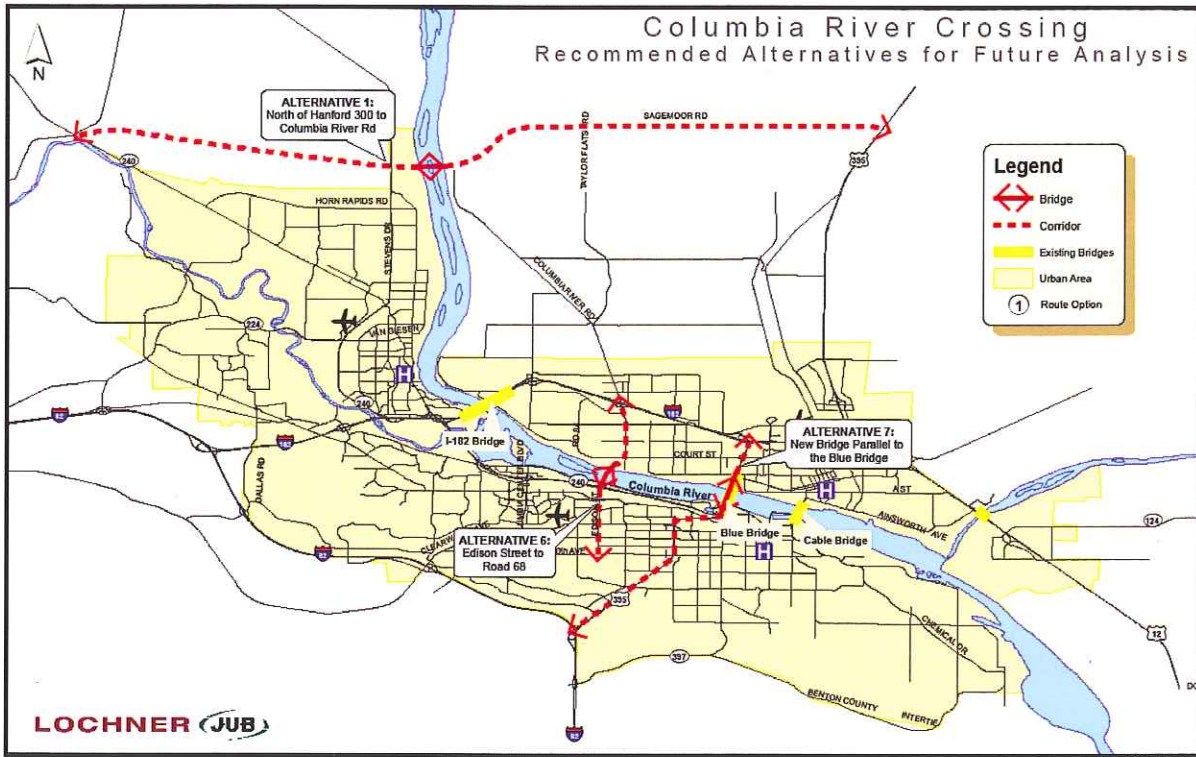
A full NEPA Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is probably needed for the new river crossing. The Steering Committee agreed that only a set of final alternatives will be selected through this study for further environmental and engineering analysis.

At the third Steering Committee meeting on October 14, 2010, the Steering Committee discussed the merits of each alternative. Among their findings were the following:

- Long term development and economic issues, including the future of the Hanford area and Battelle Northwest and Washington State University facilities, are areas of concern.
- The Blue Bridge is on the national historic register with the challenges that represents.
- Due to numerous Native American burial sites on Bateman Island, Alternative 5 would likely result in strong opposition from Native Americans.

Based on this information, the Steering Committee agreed that the following alternatives should be carried forwarded into more detailed engineering and environmental analysis.

- Alternative 1 – A new span located just north of the Hanford 300 Area and connects to Columbia River Road and W Sagemoor Road on the east (North Richland Alternative.)
- Alternative 6 – A new span from Edison Street in Kennewick to Road 68 in Pasco
- Alternative 7 – An additional bridge parallel and next to the existing US 395 "Blue Bridge"



The BFCG Board approved the completion of the CRCS T/C at the February 25, 2011 meeting. Approval by the BFCG Board recognizes the Scope of Work of the study and the Final Reports as complete. Any implementation of study recommendations will be considered in the future.