

Submitter: Philip Carver
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB2781

Philip H. Carver, Ph. D.,
Co-Coordinator 350 Salem OR

350 Salem OR is a chapter of 350.org, an international non-profit dedicated to reducing climate pollution and human-caused climate disruptions.

SUMMARY

The problem a third bridge over the Willamette River in or near Salem is supposed to solve is modest congestion during the morning and evening rush hours, primarily due to commuters residing in Polk County and working in Marion County. This problem is the responsibility of Polk County and commuters. No one else would substantially benefit from a third bridge. No one else should pay for it or for studies related to it.

Property taxes should not be the primary funding source for large transportation projects. Instead use road tolls, fuel taxes or other mileage related fees.

Over the last fifteen years the Salem area has endured a comprehensive bridge planning process – The Salem River Crossing (SRC) project, which concluded in 2019. A third bridge, like the one proposed by the SRC, would cost roughly a billion dollars. We don't need to waste money studying a third bridge again.

APPROPRIATE JURISDICTION FOR A CAPITAL RIVER CROSSING

This bill and companion bill HB 2137 attempt to re-do the \$10 million planning process that ended in a decision to adopt the no-build alternative by the Salem City Council. It is entirely appropriate for the Capital City to have a large role for a bridge within its boundaries and that would serve portions of the city in Marion and Polk Counties.

If you don't like the outcome of a fair process, demand a new process! The three relevant counties included in the proposed bridge district under HB 2781 already do extensive joint transportation planning, as required by the Transportation Planning Rule. Marion, Polk and Yamhill counties coordinate their transportation priorities through the Mid-Willamette Valley Area Commission on Transportation.

It is preposterous that Benton County should or would join the proposed special district. Access to I-5 from from Benton County is available at bridges over the river at Corvallis and Albany. These bridges provide two separate and completely viable routes to I-5 and to Salem that do not use Highway 22. As such, it seems inclusion of

Benton County in the bridge district would violate ORS 198.720(3) which requires that: "The boundary lines of a district formed under ORS 198.705 to 198.955 shall include only such territory as may in reason be served by the facilities or services of the district."

As Benton County does not belong in the proposed bridge district, no new planning process is needed.

HISTORY AND APPROPRIATE FUNDING SOURCES

Polk County is a bedroom community for jobs in Marion County. There are 4.3 persons per job in Polk County compared to 2.2 for Marion County. Other nearby counties have values close to Marion's. From 2000 to 2022 Polk County's population grew by 42 percent. Over the same period Marion County grew by only 22 percent, less than half the growth rate of Polk County.

Property taxes are not the appropriate way to fund a billion dollar bridge project. The proposed bridge district would levy the same operating property tax rate on residents of Polk, Marion, Benton and Yamhill Counties. Bond levies for construction of a bridge would also be paid by a flat tax rate. This would be grossly unfair and is politically infeasible.

CONGESTION "RELIEF"

Projects such as the proposed SRC don't solve congestion. Because of lower land costs in Polk County, builders are have an incentive to build there. Traffic congestion is the only constraint on development supported by commuters to Marion County. New homes will be built in Polk County until congestion rises to roughly where it is now.

The Legislature should instead focus on alternatives to reduce the need to commute, including promoting tele-commuting, transit and developments in walkable and bike-able neighborhoods near jobs.