

Submitter: Susan Dunfee
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB2137

Dear Co-Chair McLain, Co-Chair Gorsek and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation.

My name is Susan Dunfee. I'm a Mortgage Loan Officer and a resident of Keizer. I am in support of HB2137 regarding the Establishment of a Task Force for the Willamette River Bridge.

Due to the tremendous backlog of traffic on the existing bridges, especially during rush hour, I try very hard to avoid downtown as I do not like still in standstill traffic. This causes pollution issues as well as sometimes forcing me to drive out of the way, just to avoid the traffic issues caused by the current bridges. In the past, I commuted from Salem to Yamhill County for work, and traffic became a total nightmare when an emergency occurs on the bridge so one, or both, was blocked. I remember a "jumper" closing the bridges more than 10 years ago that created a traffic jam that took people multiple hours to get home, which led to many undue hardships on those stuck trying the few alternate routes available. This restricts emergency vehicles' ability to get across, which slows emergency response in life-and-death situations. The congestion also impacts where some of my lower income clients will seek housing, as they cannot afford to be late to their jobs due to unexpectedly long waits in traffic, so they are only able to seek housing in areas that they are less likely to be impacted by congestion and traffic issues. This impacts others as well; however, it hits harder at the lower income population. It's a common reason I hear clients say they don't want to live on one side of the river or the other.

I am aware that the Oregon Department of Transportation will be proceeding with the modernization of the Brooks Interchange, soon, so this is a perfect time to run traffic to and from that interchange over an additional bridge to avoid the congestion of the interchanges in the downtown area.

In reading this specific bill, it creates a task force with a tight timeline to make recommendations as to the future of such a bridge. It is not a commitment to build a bridge, but it is a recognition that the need for another bridge is a serious issue which requires prompt consideration. We have an opportunity to receive strong federal support for these types of building projects right now. Due to this we must move quickly in this matter because the opportunity as Federal support potential will weaken over time. This bill empowers Marion County and Polk County to choose the members of this task force, creating a balanced opinion and equal representation. In addition, it provides for non-voting legislative representation on the task force.

This bridge issue has been under study and discussion through a many years process. The only reason it stopped is that this bridge was seen as a key City of Salem project and the Salem City Council decided to vote against proceeding. However, this is not only a Salem project, nor is it a Keizer project. An additional bridge is needed to provide through traffic from I-5 to highway 22 and even on to the coast without having to deal with local traffic in the City of Salem. This is a regional, and really, a project that would benefit much of the state in various ways.

I urge you to please vote in support of this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Susan Dunfee