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FAQ

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Preferred Alternative Questions

Why is the project taking so long?

Since the [Draft Environmental Impact Statement \(EIS\)](#) was published in April 2012 there has been additional discussion on which alternative is preferred for the area. This discussion is important to the project's success and for the community as a whole. The Oversight Team recommended a preferred alternative in February 2014. The Final EIS will be written over the next year, along with gathering local land use approvals and conducting a funding feasibility report. Once the Record of Decision (ROD) is approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the project would be able to seek funding and move forward for design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.

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What is going to be built?

No choice has been made about what to build. The [Oversight Team](#) (the project's decision-making group) has selected a preferred alternative, but the design is still being refined.

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I read the Draft EIS but the alternative that the Salem City Council suggested isn't in there. Where is that alternative?

The "Salem Alternative" was developed by the Salem City Council after considering public comments during several public hearings. It is very similar to the "Alternative 4" alignments from the Draft EIS; however, it is aimed at reducing the number of bridge piers in the river, the impacts to the east Salem neighborhoods, and the amount of elevated structures (viaduct, ramps, etc.). The Oversight Team recommended a preferred alternative, previously called the Salem Alternative, in February 2014 which will be studied in greater detail in the Final EIS.

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What is the preferred alternative?

The "Salem Alternative" was developed by the Salem City Council after hearing concerns from city residents about potential impacts caused by Alternative 4D. The initial "Salem Alternative" took much of the design from Alternative 4D, but

minimized the impacts by reducing the size and extent of the local road changes, reducing the number of lanes on the bridge from three to two in each direction, and minimizing elevated structures (ramps and viaduct). The project team refined the alternative so that it could function from a traffic engineering perspective, while respecting the policy input provided by the Salem City Council. Based on this analysis, a [detailed description and map](#) were developed. The Oversight Team recommended this as the preferred alternative in February 2014.

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What are the impacts for this alternative?

The initial analysis of the preferred alternative looks like there will be fewer impacts to neighborhoods, businesses, and the natural environment. There will be fewer lanes for vehicles to travel on, both on the bridge and on local streets. This will mean fewer physical impacts but also more congestion in most places during the “rush hours.” The Final EIS will include more details about this alternative.

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What bike/pedestrian facilities will be on the bridge and roads?

Any new roads or improved roads in the City will include space for people to bike and walk. The project team wants to balance the needs of multiple users including commuter bicyclists, recreational cyclists, pedestrians, and people using mobility devices (wheelchairs, etc.). The bridge is expected to have the following, but will be refined and finalized during the Final EIS process:

→ 2 vehicle lanes in each direction

→ A sidewalk in each direction (could be 10-foot-wide raised sidewalks separated from the road by a barrier and/or a shared use path with bikes and pedestrians together)

→ Bicycle facilities in each direction (could be 10-foot-wide bike lanes to the right of the vehicle lanes and/or a shared use path with bikes and pedestrians together)

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I heard that my house/business will be impacted. What can I do?

The preferred alternative has not been selected yet, so no properties will be purchased or impacted until a decision has been made and the Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) is completed and adopted by FHWA. After that, the local agencies will need to get funds to buy properties that would be purchased before construction starts. At that time, all residents and business owners would be contacted by ODOT.

More information is available about property owner rights and the steps involved regarding property purchases. If you have questions, please contact the people listed in these documents.

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Why is the westbound Highway 22 off-ramp to Rosemont closed?

The preferred alternative would have ramps connecting Highway 22 and Marine Drive. Once these ramps are constructed there are concerns about safety because of how close the on-ramp from Marine Drive and the existing off-ramp to Rosemont Avenue are. Cars trying to merge between ramps and the Highway travel lanes (also called “weaving”) would create a safety issue, particularly during off-peak times (outside of the “rush hour”) when speeds are higher. You can see this dangerous “weaving” behavior on the Marion and Center Bridges now, as cars cross between lanes to get where they need to go (often at the last minute).

Alternative 4D and other alternatives described in the Draft EIS only kept the Rosemont ramp open by moving the exit closer to the Marion Street Bridge. The Salem City Council rejected Alternative 4D since it had a significant impact on the Edgewater Street business district and greenway. The Oversight Team recognizes the need for improved access between Highway 22 and west Salem. What is not known is whether such access would be best provided at Eola Drive, College Drive, Doaks Ferry Road or at a new street connection. This issue will be analyzed by ODOT, working with the City of Salem and Polk County, through a future Expressway Management Plan for this section of Highway 22.

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General Questions

Why are you doing this project?

The Marion Street and Center Street bridges in Salem are the only crossings of the Willamette River within the Salem-Keizer urban area. More traffic and continued population growth in the region are causing congestion that exceeds ODOT standards. Both bridges are operating near capacity and the connecting streets are over capacity. Without additional transportation capacity across the Willamette River, the levels of congestion on the bridges and connecting streets in downtown Salem and West Salem are forecast to worsen. Read more about the [project's background](#).

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Is the congestion problem on the bridge due to growth in west Salem or more regional traffic demands?

Based on 2006 traffic count data, approximately half (46%) of the traffic using the bridges originates from or is destined for points in western Polk County and beyond. The other half (54%) originates from west Salem.

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How is this different from previous studies?

The need for a third bridge across the Willamette River in the Salem area has been discussed for many years. Many of the same issues identified in previous studies (for example, development in West Salem, traffic congestion on the bridges) are still relevant today. The most recent study of a new river crossing was the [General Corridor Evaluation](#) completed in 2002. The current Salem River Crossing project used this previous study as a starting point.

The Salem River Crossing project will produce an environmental impact statement (EIS), which is the next step needed to secure federal funding for identified solutions.

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Are you doing a new traffic study?

Yes. One of the first steps in the Salem River Crossing project was to collect current traffic information and to develop updated forecasts of future traffic growth to the year 2031.

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What is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

Whenever a transportation project is planned, there are potential impacts to the human and natural environment. An environmental impact statement is a document developed under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements that evaluates economic, social, and environmental effects of a proposed transportation project for which federal funding is being sought. The report is prepared with public participation for the purpose of informing decision-makers of an array of action alternatives, including doing nothing.

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What is the difference between a Draft EIS and a Final EIS?

A draft environmental impact statement (Draft EIS) is a document that discloses the benefits and impacts associated with different alternatives (see description above) to help decision-makers select a preferred alternative. While the word “draft” makes it sound like the document isn’t finished, this document is actually a completed document that stands on its own. The Draft EIS is often a long document, considering several subjects. An executive summary, which explains the details in fewer pages, is also written at this point. View the [Draft EIS page](#) for more information and regular updates about the project team’s progress on the document.

When the Draft EIS was published in April 2012, government agencies and the public provided their comments. A final environmental impact statement (Final EIS) will respond to all comments that were made about the Draft EIS. This might

result in the document being corrected, clarifications made, or additional analysis provided. This is usually a shorter document that also explains why the preferred alternative was chosen and any changes made to that alternative since the Draft EIS.

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What is CETAS?

CETAS stands for the Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement for Streamlining. In response to federal directives, CETAS was created as a process to coordinate review of transportation construction projects. The process establishes a working relationship between the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and ten federal and state transportation, natural resource, cultural resource, and land-use planning agencies. The agencies include:

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- Army Corps of Engineers (ACE),

 - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),

 - Federal Highway Administration (FHWA),

 - National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS),

 - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS),

 - Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ),

 - Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW),

 - Oregon State Historic Preservation Office,

 - Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), and

 - Oregon Department of State Lands (ODSL).
-

ODOT uses the CETAS process for all Draft EISs. The goal of this group is to identify and implement collaborative opportunities to help each participating agency realize its mission through sound environmental stewardship, while providing for a safe and efficient transportation system. To learn the role of CETAS specific to this project, read [Who's Involved](#). To read more about CETAS, please visit their [Web site](#).

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Who will approve the project?

Federal, state, and local authorities and the public are involved throughout the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. The process concludes with a formal "Record of Decision" by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which documents the agency's approval of the alternative recommended in the EIS.

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Who's involved in the project?

The project will rely on the input of the general public, the Salem River Crossing Task Force, an Oversight Team, a Project Management Team, Elected Officials, CETAS, ODOT, and FHWA. These groups include representatives of a number of local, state, and federal agencies in addition to citizens. Read a more detailed description of their [roles](#).

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How can I get involved?

There are a number of ways to get involved in the Salem River Crossing project. Opportunities have included [public meetings and open houses](#), among others. There are no public events currently planned, but the public is open to attending [Oversight Team meetings](#).

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What is the project schedule?

View major milepoints and a description of the current tasks on the [schedule](#) page.

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What needs to happen for a new bridge to be built?

A number of steps are required before a new bridge could be constructed. First, a decision must be made through the EIS process that a new bridge is the preferred alternative to solve the identified transportation problems. Second, the FHWA must sign the Final EIS and approve the Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD would not be approved until all local land use actions are complete and funding and mitigation plans in place. If an approved funding plan is not in place, the FHWA will not approve construction of a bridge, only the location of a bridge. The [current schedule](#) shows the timeframe for the project.

Once the EIS has been approved and permits have been granted, the primary remaining barrier would be funding. It is not known at this time how much a bridge would cost nor how it would be funded, but the project is beginning to think about the [funding issue](#). Once funding is in place, construction could begin.

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Who do I contact for more information?

For general questions or concerns, please use the [comment form](#).

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What do all these acronyms (like CETAS, FHWA, ODOT, etc.) mean?

→ **CETAS** – Collaborative Environmental and Transportation Agreement for Streamlining. You can read more about CETAS and their role in this project on this page or the [Who's Involved](#) page.

→ **EIS** – Environmental Impact Statement. There will be a Draft EIS that will be reviewed by ODOT, other agencies, and the public. The final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) will consider comments from the Draft EIS and be reviewed by FHWA before the ROD is approved.

→ **FHWA** – Federal Highway Administration. You can read more about the FHWA on the [Who's Involved](#) page or their [website](#).

→ **MPO** – Metropolitan Planning Organization

→ **MWVCOG** – Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments. You can read about their role in this project on the [Who's Involved](#) page.

→ **ODOT** – Oregon Department of Transportation. You can read about ODOT's role in this project on the [Who's Involved](#) page or on their [website](#).

→ **ROD** – Record of Decision. If the final EIS is approved by FHWA and the land use actions, funding, and mitigation plans are in place, they will issue a ROD.

→ **SAFETEA-LU** – Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users. Congressional authorization of \$286 billion in spending for the five-year period 2005-09 for numerous surface transportation programs, such as highways, transit, freight, safety, and research. Also sets goals, rules and regulations for that period. Read more on their [website](#).

→ **SKATS** – Salem-Keizer Area Transportation Study

→ **UGB** – Urban Growth Boundary

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Funding Questions

How much will this project cost?

Estimated costs for the Salem River Crossing project range from \$150 to \$693 million, depending on which alternative is chosen. The lower cost alternatives include widening the existing bridges or constructing only a new bridge that connects to

the existing street system. The higher cost alternatives include a new bridge that also has direct connections to Salem Parkway and Highway 22 and other local circulation changes. Actual costs will be better known after the draft environmental impact statement (Draft EIS) is completed and a preferred alternative is chosen.

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Will the state and federal government pay for this project?

No. The federal government will likely pay for only a portion of the project and the state government may not pay for any of it. A significant amount of local funds will be needed to make up the difference.

Why? Government funds for transportation projects today are very limited. Historically, these funds have come from the collection of gas taxes. However, the federal gas taxes have not been increased since 1993 while at the same time transportation need and costs have gone up dramatically. As a result, jurisdictions are struggling just to maintain existing roads and bridges. Paying for new facilities is an even greater challenge.

All major transportation projects in this country are facing similar funding challenges. In short, it is a new era in transportation funding. More information on this topic can be found in the [Funding Booklet](#).

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What local funding sources are being considered?

Four ways to pay the local share of the project costs are being considered: local fuel taxes, vehicle registration taxes, property taxes, and tolls. Based on input from stakeholders and the project Oversight Team, these four options are the most acceptable sources from a larger list of funding options initially considered. For more information, see the [Funding Booklet](#).

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Will the community have enough money to pay for other needs too?

The Salem River Crossing project is a large and expensive project. While the project will address key transportation needs in the Salem-Keizer area, there will be many competing demands for the same local funds – for transportation, schools, parks, etc. Part of the decision to move ahead with the project will be for local citizens and elected officials to agree that the project – and the cost that will be borne by local citizens and road users – is acceptable and worth the tradeoffs against other needs.

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When will funding decisions be made? Who will make them?

Before the project can be constructed, a funding plan must be developed by the Project Team and approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The funding plan will specify exactly how much the project will cost and where the money will come from. The funding plan will not be completed until after the Draft EIS is published and a preferred alternative is selected.

Once the preferred alternative is selected, community leaders and local elected officials will likely speak with their constituents before determining which forms of local funding are most agreeable and effective for the costs that need to be paid.

Local elected officials and voters will decide what local funds are used for the project. Some local funding sources, such as property tax increases, require voter approval. Others, such as tolls, do not necessarily require voter approval but may be referred to voters through the initiative process. Without strong local support to share in the project costs, the project will be unlikely to go forward.

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Tolling Questions

Tolling is only one of several alternative funding sources being considered for the Salem River Crossing project. No decisions have been made to use or not use tolling. However, many people have questions about tolling because it hasn't

been used in Oregon for several years and because tolling has changed dramatically since the old days of manual toll collection booths.

Why are more and more highways and bridges being tolled?

Tolling is becoming increasingly used as a way to pay for new transportation projects and maintenance of existing facilities both in the U.S. and around the world. Without enough government funds for needed and wanted projects, tolling is one of a few ways to pay for expensive projects. Many people also like that costs for the road or bridge are then paid for by the people who use and benefit from it. Tolling is common in California, Florida, Texas, Illinois, Indiana, Virginia, and other states.

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Are there toll roads or bridges in Oregon?

There are no toll roads in Oregon at this time. However, transportation officials are exploring using tolls to pay for many new facilities throughout Oregon. The most publicized is the I-5 Bridge between Oregon and Washington. The current study for that bridge assumes tolls will be used to either expand the existing bridges or build a new bridge. Between 1960 and 1966, a 20-cent toll was charged to pay for the current I-5 Bridge.

In Washington, tolls are being used to pay for the new Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The toll is less expensive for cars equipped with electronic transponders (see [next question](#)) than for cars that pay cash (large trucks pay even more).

In addition to paying for road construction and maintenance, tolls are also used to manage congestion (see [What is Congestion Pricing?](#) below).

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Won't toll booths just cause more congestion?

No. If tolls are used on this project, almost all tolls will be collected using electronic tolling. This means cars do not stop to pay the toll but are instead outfitted with an electronic device (transponder) that automatically collects the toll as the car passes through an electronic "gate" at full speed. The toll is then subtracted from the driver's account, similar to a credit or debit card. Almost all new toll roads now use this technology because of the great benefits it has to travel time. There are also ways to quickly collect tolls from cars that don't have electronic transponders.

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Without toll booths, how are electronic tolls enforced?

When a new electronic tolling project is started, there is a lot of publicity to make sure everyone gets a transponder before the tolls are collected. When cars pass through the electronic toll "gate" without a transponder, an automated system photographs their license plate which allows a bill to be mailed to them so the toll can be collected. Because non-local drivers likely won't have a transponder, this system can be used to collect the toll from them. Fines can also be used this way for repeat offenders. Decisions such as how to capture non-local users and when to charge fines will not be made until after a preferred alternative is selected, assuming tolling is chosen as a way to pay for it.

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Given the high costs of collecting tolls, are they really worth it?

Collecting tolls costs money, both to purchase and maintain the electronic equipment and for the many people who manage the system. While these costs can be significant (several million dollars per year or more), initial estimates show that enough revenue would be generated by tolls to pay for these costs and to pay off the project in about 30 years.

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Why would both the existing bridges and the new bridge have to be tolled?

The purpose of this project is to reduce congestion across the river and on the connecting street system.

Tolling is being explored as a way to pay for the project but it does not work if only one bridge is tolled. If only the new bridge

is tolled, many people would choose to use the existing (non-tolled) bridges instead of the new one. This would result in little improvement to congestion on the existing bridges. Since so many fewer people would use the new tolled bridge, not enough money would be generated to pay for it. If both bridges are tolled, traffic is balanced between the new and existing bridges and tolls are captured for a much larger number of trips across the river.

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Would everyone pay the same toll?

Most drivers would pay the same toll. However, with electronic tolling, it is possible to adjust tolls depending on who is driving. For example, it is possible for people with low incomes to pay less. Deciding how to make the tolls equitable and fair is something that will be considered in great detail if tolling is selected for the project.

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Can tolls be used to pay for other local needs too?

Typically, tolls can be used only for construction and on-going maintenance of the facility on which they are collected. Tolls are not typically used for the public transit system or for civic improvements. With legislative changes, however, some exceptions may be possible and these can be explored later in the process.

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What is congestion pricing?

Congestion pricing is a way to use tolls to manage congestion, in addition to generating revenue. The term means that tolls would be adjusted based on the amount of traffic on the road. Drivers pay more to drive during the most congested parts of the day. The most advanced systems adjust the price automatically as traffic conditions change throughout the day, keeping traffic moving more smoothly. While congestion pricing increases costs for drivers in the peak travel hours, it can dramatically reduce congestion by spreading traffic into the less congested times of day. The SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane between Renton and Auburn Washington uses congestion pricing.

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