

# The Register-Guard

## State seeks citizens' help on span plan

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A new Interstate 5 bridge spanning the Willamette River could be as ordinary as a flat deck with no architectural flourishes or something more elaborate, with arches that rise above the roadbed where the bridge crosses the river.

The state Department of Transportation wants area residents to help make this decision. So starting today, the design options will be available online and people will have a month to express their preference.

Inspectors found the old I-5 bridge to be so decrepit that in 2002 the state detoured truck traffic away from it until a temporary bridge was completed in 2004. That bridge bought the state time to come up with a more permanent fix.

The \$180 million project is just one in a series of improvements to Oregon's roster of more than 300 aging bridges that will cost \$1.3 billion to repair or replace in the next decade.

Asking for local input on such decisions is part of a federal requirement, but the state Transportation Department has had a history of working with local communities ever since the completion of the Marquam Bridge in Portland in 1966. That double-deck cantilevered structure, which funnels Interstate 5 traffic across the Willamette River, was functional and didn't cost a lot. But according to a Wikipedia description of the bridge's history, many Portland residents complained about its uninspiring appearance.

So when transportation staff members began working on Portland's Fremont Bridge in the early 1970s, they asked residents to help with the design. The result is the more compelling steel tied-arch bridge with a single arching span that carries Interstate 405 traffic across the Willamette River.

State transportation spokeswoman Lissa Willis called the controversy over the Marquam Bridge a milestone for the agency, which led the state and other city and county agencies to recognize the need for improved public participation.

"All that learning and improving — a dynamic and never-ending process — currently guides our public involvement efforts on the Willamette River Bridge in Eugene-Springfield, and technology has afforded us new ways of receiving input, such as the survey we're launching this week," Willis said.

Three of the bridge designs do little to make an architectural statement that drivers can appreciate, although those who float the river would see the sleek look of the box girder bridge and the curving lines of the deck arch bridge.

The only option that provides an aesthetic that drivers could appreciate is the through-arch design with curves rising above the road deck.

A compelling bridge over the Willamette River could function as a gateway to the Eugene-Springfield area, said Eric Gunderson, an architect with the local firm Pivot Architecture.

Beautiful bridges often become a telling signature for a community, he said.

"Think of the Newport Bay bridge," Gunderson said. "You can't imagine a picture of the city without that bridge."

Conde McCullough designed that and many of the other graceful structures along the Oregon Coast's Highway 101 from Astoria to Gold Beach, and all of them catch people's attention, he said.

Gunderson wishes there were more options than the four available for the local bridge, but of them, he prefers the through-arch design.

Images of the bridge and the survey are available on the state Department of Transportation's Web site. The final design will be made public in September.

The simpler the bridge design is, the less expensive it is, but the state agency says its budget could accommodate the most elaborate of the designs, the through-arch system.

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