

COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING COALITION

CASE STUDY

GUNDERSON

July 21, 2008

Congestion increases costs for barge manufacturer

As a manufacturer of transportation equipment, Portland-based Gunderson is acutely aware of the need to maintain our regional transportation system.

The weakest link, said Gunderson spokesman Tom Sass, is the section of Interstate 5 that crosses the Columbia River.

"The crossing is not just archaic and unsafe but also the worst bottleneck between Tijuana, Mexico, and Vancouver, B.C.," Sass said.

Gunderson and its Portland-based parent, The Greenbrier Companies, support concepts proposed to build a new bridge.

The congestion and safety issues with the current bridge have serious ramifications for the Portland-Vancouver metro area — especially for manufacturers struggling to stay competitive on a global playing field.

"We know that our delivery drivers have a tough time getting here," Sass said.

About a third of the 15 to 20 trucks that make deliveries each day to Gunderson originate from the Port of Portland's Terminal 6, a shipping depot on the Columbia River just west of Interstate 5.

Although trucks headed to Gunderson from Terminal 6 don't cross the bridge, they do get caught up in the traffic snarl caused by the outmoded bridge.

Those deliveries take longer to arrive at Gunderson than they did in the past. "We have safety nets, mainly extra inventory for when those deliveries don't arrive as soon as scheduled. That increases our costs," said Sass.

Because Gunderson is located on a railroad spur in the city's northwest industrial district, it can receive the balance of its inputs via train.

"We're able to avoid a lot of the road congestion that way," Sass said.

And Gunderson's finished products avoid the roads all together. The company manufactures ocean-going barges, which are launched directly into the Willamette River from its waterfront facility.

Many Gunderson employees, however, commute across the Columbia.

Approximately 200 of Gunderson's 1,100 workers live in Clark County, just north of the river. Many of those people try to avoid the worst rush hour traffic by arriving to work in the very early morning.

However, with many other workers doing the same thing to avoid traffic, the rush hour is occurring earlier and earlier.

Sass said Gunderson is doing everything it can to promote the concept for a new crossing. He belongs to multiple civic committees that are working to address issues related to transportation infrastructure, including one dedicated to a crossing over the Columbia River at Interstate 5.

"An efficient transportation is a key factor in Gunderson's success," Sass said.