

COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING COALITION

CASE STUDY



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Antiquated I-5 bridge detriment for food processor

For Rob Miller, the question of whether to build a new Interstate 5 crossing over the Columbia River between Portland and Vancouver is clear.

“Development and maintenance of infrastructure is critical for the economic viability of our area. And the I-5 crossing is vastly outmoded,” said Miller, president of Trailblazer Foods in east Multnomah County., Trailblazer moves as much as 250,000 pounds of freight – both inputs and finished products – every day.

The company manufactures an array of products, including jams, jellies and syrups packed under a variety of labels. It also makes dressings, marinades, soups and sauces under the Jake’s brand.

Most Trailblazer Foods customers are not in the immediate vicinity – four of its top eight customers take delivery at distribution centers in and around the greater Seattle metro area.

“The only way we can get our merchandise to a great proportion of our customers is via I-5,” Miller said.

With Interstate 205 as the only redundancy in the section of I-5 between Portland and Vancouver, the crossing is an integral part of the transportation system for the entire West Coast.

Trailblazer Foods is situated closest to I-205. But the company and its vendors are affected by what happens on the I-5 crossing.

“I-205 is congested, and it will only worsen the longer we go without building a new bridge at I-5,” Miller said.

Congestion is costly for everyone.

Because of the inadequacy of the I-5 bridge, 18-wheelers are stuck in snarled traffic morning and afternoon, sometimes idling an hour during each crossing.

“It contributes to air pollution and is wasteful of diesel,” he said. “The situation just isn’t good for the environment. A new bridge, which needs to be built with

sensitivity to the river and surrounding land, would actually lessen our environmental problems.”

The slowdown caused by congestion is exponential.

“Time that truckers burn sitting in congestion takes away from time that could be spent moving a shipment to its destination. It drives up costs, pure and simple,” said Miller, referring to federal rules limiting the number of hours in one day that a trucker may spend on the road.

Occasionally, traffic congestion is to blame for an idle plant. That means when delivery of ingredients gets caught up in a bridge snarl, it can end up being a money-losing situation.

It comes down to a question of competitiveness.

“Downtime costs money and wastes energy. Delaying work on a new bridge means those types of unnecessary costs will continue to compound throughout our economy.”