

9: I-5 Bridge Access: Portland

Traveling from Portland to Vancouver is confusing and disconcerting, even for experienced cyclists. The I-5 bridge crossing lacks adequate markings and has gaps and indirect connections, especially at Jantzen Beach.

SITUATION

- Connects Downtown Vancouver and Portland
- One of two spans over Columbia River in region
- Ties to paths along Vancouver waterfront and the 40 Mile Loop Trail

The I-5 Bridge is a vital transportation link in the Portland metro region, both for commuters between Oregon and Washington as well as for freight moving up and down the west coast. The I-205 Bridge is the only other bridge in the region that crosses the Columbia River.

The I-5 Bridge connects Jantzen Beach and Vancouver, Washington. The bridge has narrow multiuse pathways on both the east and west edges of the bridge. This corridor includes another span that connects the Jantzen Beach shopping center to Hayden Island and North Portland.

For bikers, the river crossing is confusing and dangerous. On the Portland side, cyclists can access the circuitous route along Marine Drive. On the Washington side of the river bikers more easily connect between downtown Vancouver's bikeways and the bridge.

PROBLEMS

- Lack of space for bikers
- Difficult connections for bikers
- Fast-moving vehicles
- Lack of alternatives
- Poor signage
- Debris on existing routes

For cyclists seeking to cross the Columbia River on the I-5 bridge, the primary problem is simply finding a safe access to the bridge, especially on the Oregon side. In North Portland, the approach to the bridge is nearly unmarked and confusing even for cyclists with a bike map. Bicyclists are required to take a circuitous unmarked route of roads, sidewalks, paths, ramps, and cut throughs. On Hayden Island the bike lanes lead off the freeway, placing the biker onto the busy off-ramp roads, where signs on the detour are confusing. Much of the area has debris.



The Vancouver end of the bridge is better but still is poorly marked. The eastern lane of the bridge lets bikers out into a parking lot with no signs. The western bridge path is marked by one small sign.

Bicyclists have limited alternatives to cross the river. Cyclists can take transit, placing their bikes on Tri Met or C Tran buses. The I-205 bridge is the only surface alternative, but this route is miles upstream.

SOLUTIONS

- Separated biking facilities
- Improved signage
- Planning in progress

An obvious and necessary improvement for bikers crossing the Columbia River would be a wide, separated pathway for bicycles along both the eastern and western sides of the bridge.

The only potential funding would come through a bi-state Columbia River Crossing project that is in the early planning stages. The process, seeking to solve auto congestion problems in the corridor, would hopefully include bicycle improvements, including wide pathways for bicyclists and pedestrians that are safe, comfortable, and that offer excellent viewpoints. New and improved connections to both downtown Vancouver and Marine Drive are essential components of either a new bridge or other planned improvements.



The unfortunate reality is that the larger freeway bridge project is estimated to cost \$2 billion and will not be completed for many years.

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