

# Issues Pertaining to Urban Development South of the Willamette River and Conservation of French Prairie Foundation Agricultural Lands

March 2015

## Summary of Problems with Proposals for Urbanization South of Wilsonville

- In Joint State Agency Comments on the Metro Urban and Rural Reserves process dated October 14, 2009, page 17, seven state agencies unanimously found that urbanization immediately south of the Willamette River and Wilsonville was detrimental public policy:

### “South Wilsonville

“ODOT, ODA, DLCDC, OWRD, DEQ, ODFW, and DSL support the preliminary recommendation from Clackamas County to designate lands south of the Willamette River (French Prairie) as a rural reserve. The reasons for a rural reserve designation include: threat of urbanization, high suitability for agriculture, very significant transportation limitations (Boone Bridge capacity and no alternate river crossing, poor multimodal connectivity), poor suitability for urbanization (services and distance to existing population), and concerns about encouraging urban development moving south along I-5 into prime agricultural lands.”

## Very Significant Transportation Limitations: *Detrimental Impacts to Commerce*

- **“Huge” Transportation Costs:** In an April 6, 2009, joint state agencies (ODOT, ODA, DLCDC, ODFW, and ODF) letter to the Metro Reserves Steering Committee, ODOT indicated that the South Metro I-5 corridor and Boone Bridge were at maximum traffic-handling capacity, and that the cost to increase capacity was “huge,” or “over \$500 million.”

ODOT states in this letter (page 3) that: “The analysis shows that the highways least suitable to accommodate additional trips and most expensive to improve, are... I-5, especially the segment from Or 217 to south of the Willamette River.”

ODOT further states in “Attachment 1, Oregon Department of Transportation Comments on Candidate Urban and Rural Reserves” (page 2):

**“Highway Section:** Inside UGB and from Wilsonville SCL [southern city limits] to Marion County line

**“Potential to accommodate additional traffic:** Very Low - FC 2035 RTP identified severe capacity problems on I-5 within and south of existing UGB and at Wilsonville Interchanges. Congestion is especially high in the segment between I-217 and I-205. Widening of I-5 including Boones Bridge will be very expensive.

**“Relative Cost to Improve:** > \$ 500 M = Huge”

- **Commuter and Freight Traffic Overload:** The I-5 Boone Bridge reaches peak traffic-carrying capacity during normal commute times and on many other occasions; adding new traffic generators on a congested highway furthers harms the movement of freight and conduct of commerce in the metro region and to areas further south, including Woodburn,, Salem and Albany areas.
- **No Alternate River Crossing:** The I-5 Boone Bridge is the only crossing over the Willamette River for a 28-mile span between Oregon City and St. Paul, resulting in a highway bottleneck without alternate routes. Placing additional traffic generators in the vicinity of the bridge increases reliance on the bridge for short, local trips, further restraining traffic flow and mobility while increasing the likelihood of freeway incidents that can result in major traffic tie-ups.

- **I-5 Boone Bridge Carries More Freight than “CRC”:** The I-5 Boone Bridge carries nearly as much traffic as the well-known I-5 “CRC” Interstate Bridge (only 4% less), but one-third (33%) more freight trucks, making this bridge a critical transportation link for commerce. Freight traffic that is split between the CRC and the Glenn Jackson bridges is converged at the Boone Bridge.
- **Poor Multimodal Connectivity:** The French Prairie region is composed primarily of narrow, farm-to-market county roads not designed for traffic circulation common to urban areas. The area is not served by transit services and is not bike or pedestrian friendly, lacking urban-type infrastructure for multi-modal connectivity. Again, the only Willamette crossing is the I-5 bridge.

### **Poor Suitability for Urbanization: *Absence of Costly Urban Infrastructure***

- **Distance from Population Centers Forces Commuting:** The French Prairie area lacks urban services and is distant from population centers and standard private commercial and public urban services that make the area a weak candidate for urbanization that would result in significant additional traffic generation and public infrastructure costs.
- **Lack of Available Water:** The City of Wilsonville’s water capacity south of the river is fully used by Charbonneau. ODOT has prohibited any additional conveyance devices on the I-5 Boone Bridge.

The City’s water distribution plan calls for providing capacity to planned industrial developments in North Wilsonville, where pipes were over-sized to accommodate the Coffee Creek Correctional Institution and planned future urbanization within the City’s Metro UGB areas, including Coffee Creek, Basalt Creek, Frog Pond, Advance and Villebois North.

Neither the Oregon Water Resources Department nor Marion County are permitting new groundwater wells that further draw-down the aquifer that is used primarily to support the region’s agricultural industry.

- **Lack of Waste-Water Treatment Capacity:** The City of Wilsonville’s \$45 million expansion in capacity for the wastewater treatment is already allocated to existing and planned new developments, including the 1,000-acre Coffee Creek and Basalt Creek industrial areas, and the 500-acre Frog Pond/Advance residential areas, and an additional 500 acres of adjacent urban reserves. There is no surplus capacity available.

The City of Aurora is under DEQ orders and a settlement with Willamette River Keeper pertaining to waste-water treatment discharge into the Pudding River.

- **Expensive, Difficult Area to Provide Waste-Water Treatment Services:** A “Sewer Serviceability” study conducted by Clackamas County and Metro during the Urban and Rural Reserves process found in 2009 that the French Prairie area would be “difficult” to provide waste-water treatment services, which implies expensive infrastructure costs.
- **No New Wastewater Outfalls:** DEQ is not permitting any new outfalls on the Willamette River, thereby producing a major problem for proposing new, expensive wastewater treatment facilities.

**High Suitability For Agriculture: Oregon’s Best “Foundation” Farmland**

- **French Prairie soils are some of the best in Oregon and the world** and should be conserved for domestic food security and economic diversification purposes. French Prairie soils were formed over millennia by 10 major “Missoula Floods” that flooded the entire Willamette Valley, depositing multiple layers of organically rich silt on the lower watershed regions of the North Willamette Valley that compose French Prairie.

**Threat of Urbanization: Harm to Existing, Long-Term Ag Industry**

- **Irreparable Damage to Traditional Ag Industry Cluster:** Urbanizing 2,000 acres of prime, foundation farm land would displace existing ag operations and the larger French Prairie industrial agriculture cluster that make significant contributions to the Oregon economy, especially to Clackamas, Marion, Yamhill and Washington counties, which are among the top ag-producers in the state.

**County gross farm and ranch sales: 2012** (ODA, Oregon Agriculture: Facts & Figures, July 2014)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Value</u>	
1	Marion	\$ 639,326,000	TOTAL OREGON AG VALUE: \$5,480,802,000 Percent of Clackamas, Marion, Yamhill and Washington counties of Total State Value: 28%
5	Clackamas	\$ 343,514,000	
7	Washington	\$ 292,044,000	
9	Yamhill	<u>\$ 269,839,000</u>	
	TOTAL	\$ 1,544,723,000	

**Concerns about Encouraging Urban Development Moving South Along I-5 into Prime Agricultural Lands: Harm to Ag Industry Clusters and Communities South**

- **Lack of Natural Barriers Would Allow Urban Sprawl:** The Willamette River acts as natural barrier to Portland metro area urban expansion into the prime ag lands of the Willamette Valley. “Jumping” the river would remove the last remaining barrier to urban sprawl along I-5, further harming the ag industry cluster and mobility along I-5 in the North Willamette Valley. The overall effect would be detrimental to long-planned industrial economic development efforts in areas already approved through appropriate processes, and to public investments already on the ground and already under way in Woodburn, Salem, Albany and Wilsonville. Because of the high cost of urban infrastructure, the only way to make such an investment pencil is many hundreds or thousands of acres of development, so more than allowing urban sprawl, it would require it.

**Governance Conflicts and Lack of Urban Services: Recipe for Planning Disaster that Siphons Limited Public Resources**

- **Lack of Governance and Urban Services:** Attempting to develop south of the Willamette River presents a real problem in terms of municipal governance and the provisioning of urban services. No city or county is in the position to provide municipal governance and urban services, including water, waste-water, storm-water, fire protection and law enforcement. The area, which is located in Clackamas and Marion counties and bordering two cities and a state airport, would also be subject to conflicting aspirations of different government bodies.

### **Negative Economic Impacts to Planned Developments: *Devaluing Substantial Public and Private Investments Already Made***

- **Harm to Existing and Planned Private and Public Industrial Expansion Investments:** Already, both area governments and private developers have invested millions of dollars in planning and developing industrial parks in locations like Wilsonville, Tualatin, Canby, Woodburn and Salem that are recovering from the Great Recession and seeking to address high commercial/industrial vacancy rates. Bringing on-line additional industrial development in inappropriate areas unfairly competes with public and private investments already made and planned, harming these investments.
- **Unfair Competition with Coffee Creek and Basalt Creek Industrial Areas:** The cities of Tualatin and Wilsonville, Washington County, Metro and ODOT have invested over \$10 million in planning and building for urbanization of the rural, unincorporated region located near Sherwood, Tualatin and Wilsonville, including making key investments in capacity improvements to existing highways and roads. The 1,000-acre Coffee Creek and Basalt Creek Regionally Significant Industrial Areas have nearly a decade of planning, consensus-building and in-place infrastructure investments already sized and built to host planned industrial developments for over 4,000 new jobs. These areas were specifically studied, analyzed and designated through Metro and State public-approved processes as the most suitable locations to fill regional needs for industrial development.
- **Lack of Certainty Deters Private and Public Capital Investment:** The Urban and Rural Reserves process was designed to provide certainty to many stakeholders, including both private- and public-sectors, regarding the future disposition of land-use of specific areas for a 40- to 50-year period. This level of certainty for calculating long-term investments applies to both urban development interests as well as rural agriculture enterprises. Creating uncertainty regarding future land-uses deters investments with long-term beneficial economic impacts.

### **Dangerous Public Precedent: *Special Interests Appear to Trump Public Interests***

- **Poor Public-Policy Precedent:** Rewarding land speculators sends the wrong message to the public and development community that some can achieve favorable treatment outside existing rules and regulations that everyone must abide by.
- **See-Saw Policy-Making Furthers Lack of Government Credibility:** When both the general public and investors observe government making a decision one day and then reversing the decision another day, government suffers a loss of credibility that further alienates citizens and creates a confusing, uncertain investment climate.
- **Denigrating of the Public Involvement Process:** Residents of Clackamas County took a keen interest in the outcome of the two-year-long Metro process to determine the prime locations for Urban and Rural Reserves in the county. A grassroots, citizen-composed Policy Advisory Committee established by the Board of Commissioners held well-attended work sessions throughout the county. The Rural Reserve designation of the French Prairie area approved by the County at several levels, including the Planning Commission and the County Commission; subsequently the designation was unanimously approved by the 'Core Four' and Metro. A later challenge to this decision by the owners of the Langdon Farms Golf Course was rejected on every count by the Oregon Court of Appeals. Further, the Court confirmed that the County had used the correct process and had properly applied the 'factors' in arriving at that decision. Cavalierly over-riding a popular citizen-driven process and decision upheld by the courts harms the very fabric of a democracy.