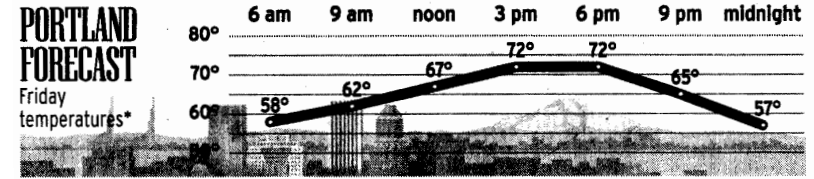


# Portland



\*This 18-hour chart may not reflect the highest or lowest temperature of the day.

## To ease road congestion, officials tackle rail tie-ups

*A bi-state committee discusses ways to speed train traffic so that freight can be shifted to railways*

By **BILL STEWART**  
THE OREGONIAN

VANCOUVER — A group of Washington and Oregon officials, concerned about freeway congestion, turned its attention Thursday to railroad traffic jams.

The Bi-State Coordinating Committee, named to accelerate movement of freight, commerce and motorists in the Vancouver-North Portland area, discussed using taxpayer money to remove certain rail choke points.

If train traffic through the area could be accelerated, more cargo could be carried by trains rather than trucks, thereby eliminating some highway traffic.

The committee includes representatives of Metro, the regional government; Portland; Vancouver; Clark County; small area cities; Oregon and Washington's departments of transportation; and the ports of Portland and Vancouver.

The panel is advisory but its members represent cities and other agencies that deal with transportation grants.

The panel agreed Thursday to create a division to act as a Rail Forum to champion rail projects when state or federal money is available.

Two areas where trains are delayed for hours each day are the Port of Portland's Rivergate Industrial area and the single track that feeds more than 43,000 rail cars a year across the main north-south and east-west tracks to the Port of Vancouver.

One estimate puts a \$170 million price tag on fixing Portland-Vancouver rail bottlenecks. The fixes vary from additional tracks in key switching yards to a new rail spur west of Vancouver Lake.

"That is a lot of money," said Don Wagner, regional administrator for the Washington Department of Transportation, "until you realize we have spent \$100 million to upgrade BNSF Railway tracks in Southwest Washington because our passenger trains use those tracks."

One solution to east-west railroad congestion, according to

Ann-Marie Lundberg of the Port of Portland, would double the train-carrying capacity of tracks in the Columbia River Gorge by making the tracks one way.

Today, with two-way traffic, a train heading through the gorge often has to wait for an oncoming train to get out of the way. With one-way traffic, trains wouldn't have to wait for opposite traffic.

"The BNSF Railway has tracks on the north side of the river, while the Union Pacific's tracks are in Oregon," Lundberg said. If the BNSF tracks carried only west-bound trains and the UP tracks carried eastbound trains, the corridor's capacity would double overnight from 90 to 180 trains, she said.

"The problem," said Todd Coleman, facilities manager for the Port of Vancouver, "is that BNSF and UP don't see their congestion as a railroad issue. . . . They also are not accustomed to working together."

The Bi-State committee also was briefed on Oregon's efforts to widen Interstate 5 to three south-bound lanes through Delta Park in North Portland. The Oregon Department of Transportation is conducting meetings and forums to

collect public ideas on the project, with construction to start in 2008.

Kate Deane, project manager for ODOT, said the first phase will be the widening, but subsequent phases will involve surface streets that will affect some neighborhoods.

She said a number of Kenton residents fear that one option for surface streets related to the freeway widening will block future development on Argyle Street west of Denver Avenue. TriMet is working on a development proposal in the area.

Deane said the state is looking at a list of "community enhancement" ideas in connection with the Delta Park project. She said a list of potential improvements, such as trails, a canoe launching area, air quality monitors and sidewalks, "has resulted in a balancing act between the project and enhancements."

But she said the widening project has gotten unanimous support at the various public meetings and forums.

Matt Garrett, regional administrator for ODOT, responded to comments from several groups that want a committee's report

calling for a new 10-lane bridge across the Columbia River set aside in favor of other corridors across the river.

Vancouver Mayor Royce E. Pollard said he, too, has heard talk "of scrapping 18 months of work."

"I have heard fears that we would disregard or dilute" the report Garrett said. "What that report said was not lost on us. . . . The (federal highway agency) recognized that report and gave us a positive reaction." No federal construction money has been awarded yet.

Pollard said his primary interest is improving the region's economic vitality. "I am not interested in building a way for our people to go to Oregon to buy things."

Eric Holmes of the Battle Ground City Council said, "We need to get (the bridge) right or we will be in the same position in 40 years, and then we really won't be able to afford it."

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