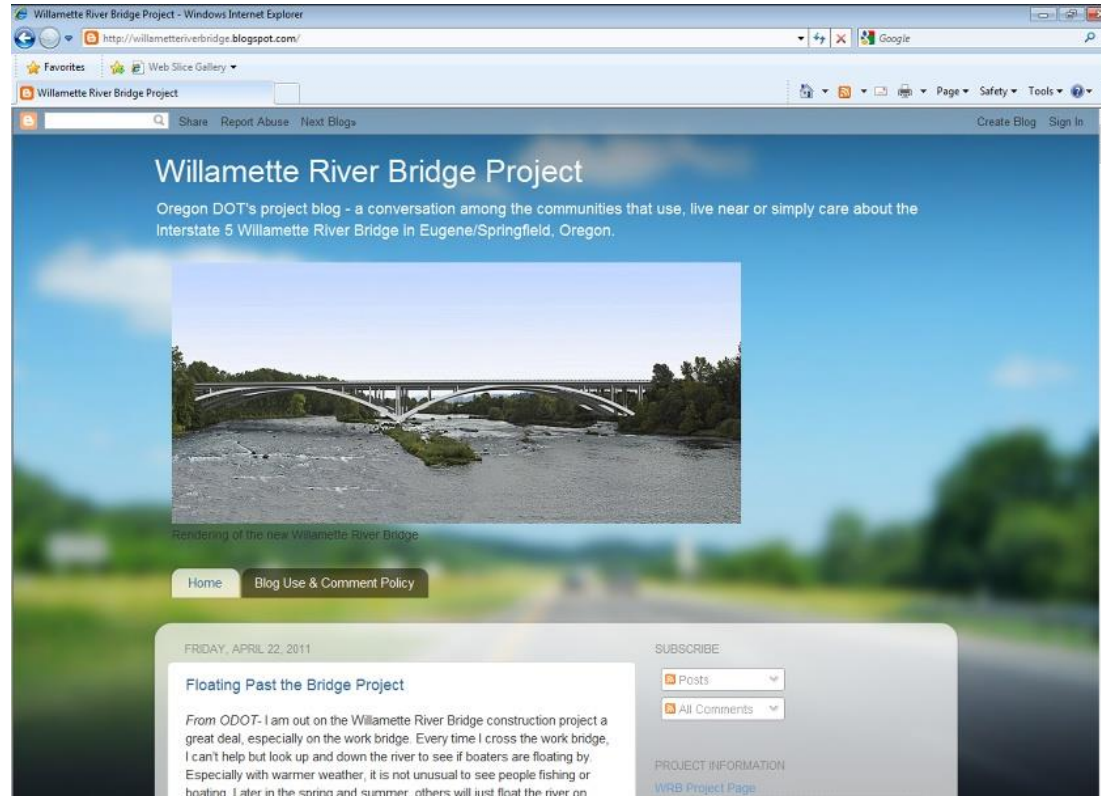




# *The Willamette River Bridge blog: ODOT's blogosphere debut*



**International Association for Public Participation  
PI Works! 2011 Conference**

*June 9, 2011*



## ***Agenda***

- Bridge program overview
- Willamette River Bridge project overview
- Blog background
- Launching the blog
- Issues/challenges/successes
- Interactive exercise
- Q & A

*Presented by:*

*Jyll Smith, Public Information Representative, ODOT Major Projects Branch  
Suzanne Roberts, Public Involvement Coordinator, Edelman*



## ***OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program***

- In 2003, the Oregon Legislature enacted the third Oregon Transportation Investment Act, or OTIA III.
- The OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program is part of ODOT's 10-year, \$3 billion Oregon Transportation Investment Act.





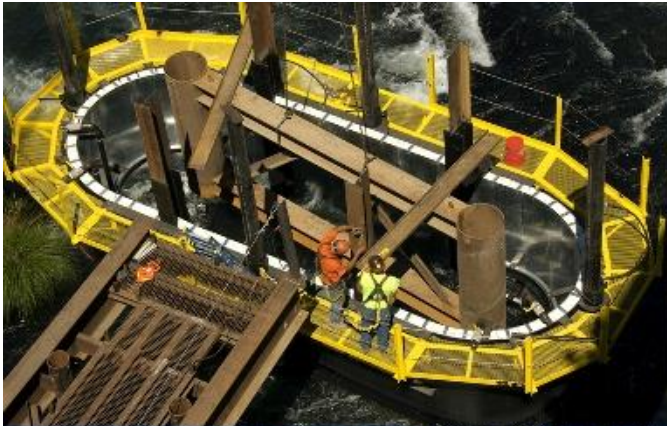
## *Investing in Oregon's bridges*

- The \$1.3 billion OTIA III bridge program is repairing or replacing hundreds of bridges around the state.
- When enacted in 2003, the bridge program was the largest investment in highway and bridge construction in Oregon since the building of the interstate system in the 1950s and '60s.



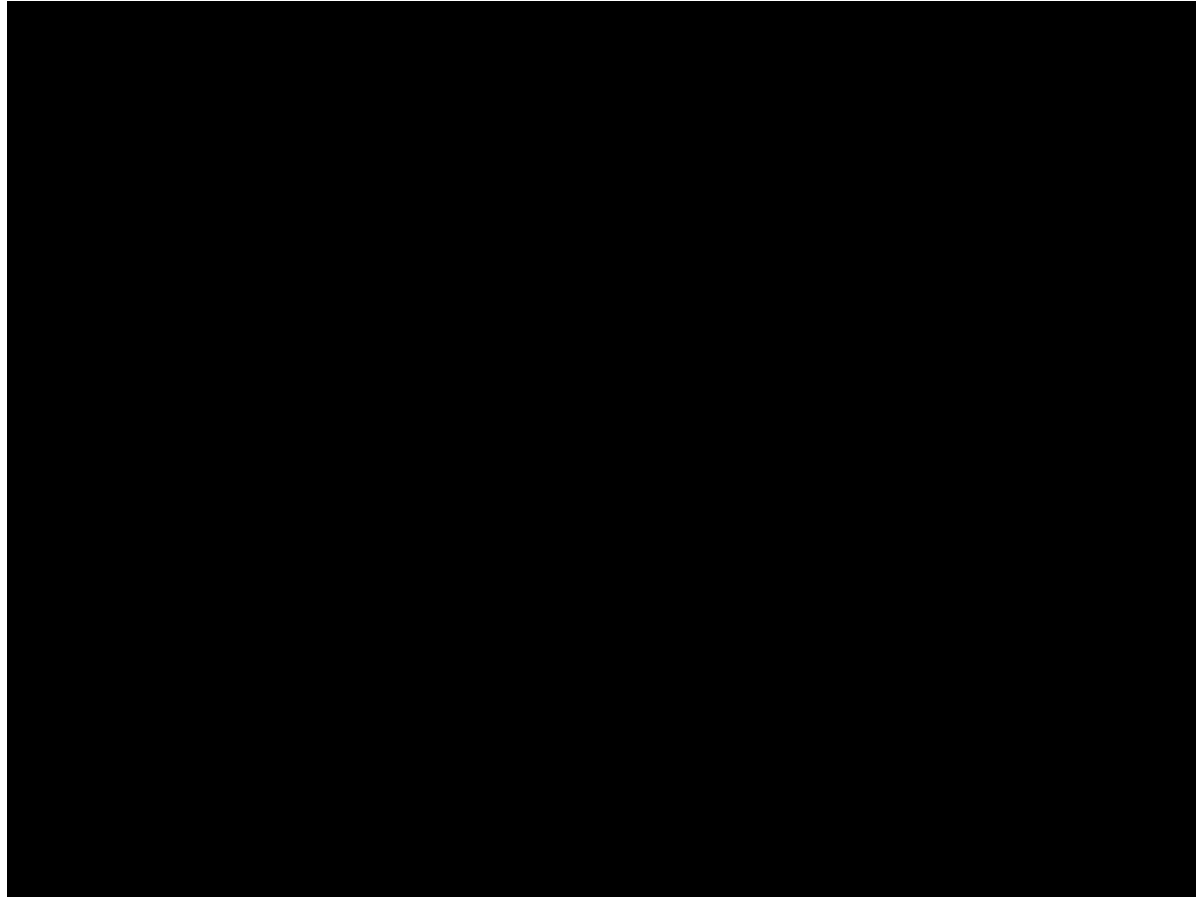


# *I-5 Willamette River Bridge*





## *Project overview*





## ***Why blog?***

- The Willamette River Bridge blog is ODOT's first.
- The blog complements existing public involvement efforts on the project.
- It modernizes ODOT's communications methods and directly engages citizens where they consume information.





## *Advantages of a project blog*

- Provides a new digital pipeline for information not available elsewhere, such as project photos from behind the construction cones.
- Creates a forum for agency-created content.
- Opens a dialogue with the public.
- Provides an opportunity to respond to potential issues or misconceptions.
- Keeps the project's Citizen Advisory Group better informed between meetings.

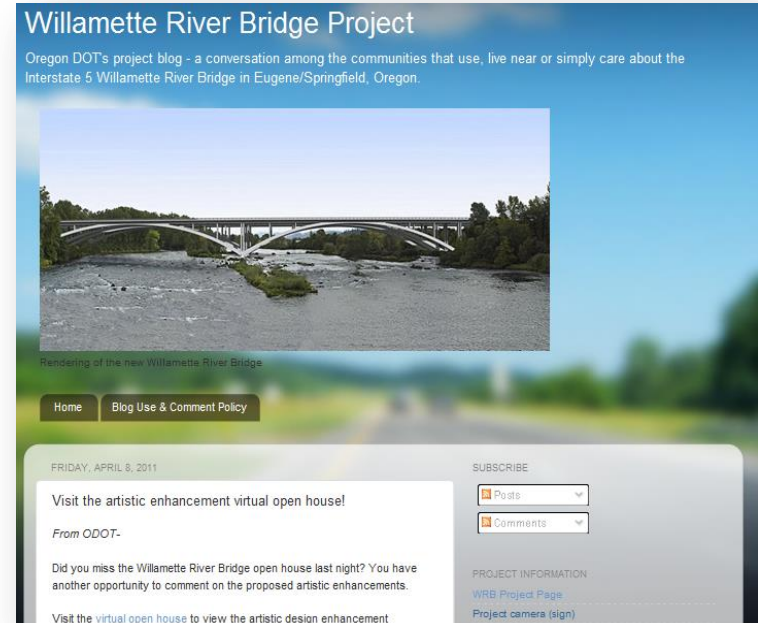






## ***Business plan goals for the blog***

- Post two to three times per week.
- Outline postings at least one month in advance of deadlines when possible.
- Increase awareness about the project to audiences who may not be reached by traditional media.
- Diversify the way citizens get information from ODOT.





## ***Business plan goals for the blog***

- Create opportunities for an ongoing and meaningful dialogue between ODOT and its stakeholders.
- Keep the Community Advisory Group and other public partners informed about the project.
- Provide feedback to the agency on how effective a blog would be for a specific project.





## ***ODOT's main concerns... and how they were overcome***

- **Concern:** Commenters would use the blog as a forum to "flame" ODOT.
  - Solution: A moderated comments section with clearly defined – and posted – guidelines.
- **Concern:** Lack of internal resources.
  - Solution: Use of consultants.
- **Concern:** External and internal vulnerability.
  - Solution: Moderated comments (external) and working with ODOT's information security team (internal).
- **Concern:** Public records documentation requirements.
  - Solution: Work in progress...



## ***You're approved! Now what?***

- Official launch date: June 1, 2010.
- The project team develops most topics in advance but has the flexibility to post quickly about more timely stories. All topics are approved in advance by ODOT.
- **CAWOOD** writes most of the blog posts.
- **Edelman** oversees the schedule and tracks each post from initial concept to final posting.
- **ODOT** maintains and monitors the blog platform and reviews, posts and responds to reader comments.





## ***Blog challenges***

- Time commitment.
- Security clearance.
- Internal processes.
- Simplifying technical terms for a wide audience.
- Negative comments.

**Anonymous said...**

Well said "Anonymous!" When we can't even keep our schools open, due to the of lack of funding, yet we can afford artwork for a bridge? Obviously we have lost our priorities on spending... and that would be our children! this truly saddens me; watching our children loose teachers, and gain more students in their classrooms! Our children should be coming first over bridge artwork!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

April 13, 2011 12:41 PM

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**Anonymous said...**

I agree with the previous poster. In fact, that any money has been spent on this project is baffling to me. My first reaction was "Huh?". Can we stop this before it costs more money? I live in the River Road area near the river, how do I get a vote on this project?

April 13, 2011 12:49 PM

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**Anonymous said...**

With the need for road repairs, school funds...this is a senseless waste of money. Somehow Common Sense left the building on this. People should be watching the road and traffic, not ogling some oddball artwork. Not sure whose idea it was, but it is not a good idea

April 13, 2011 7:11 PM

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**Anonymous said...**

Read the comments on KVAL website pertaining to this ridiculous waste of money.

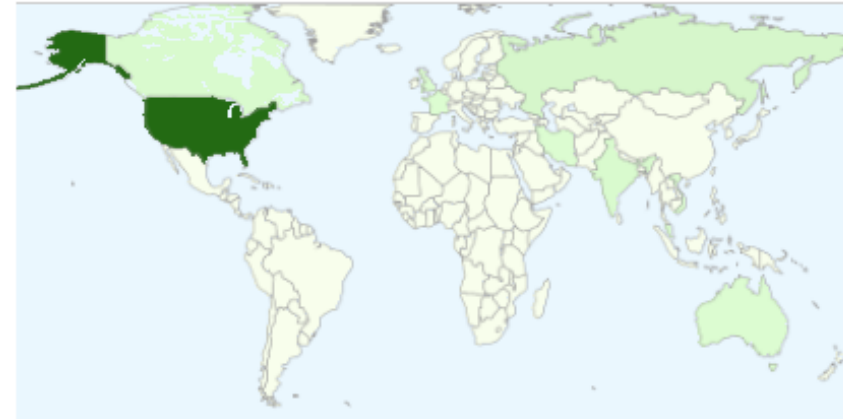
April 14, 2011 8:38 AM



## ***Blog successes***

- The blog has received more than 10,200 worldwide page views.
- Recently it has averaged almost 90 hits weekly.
- The blog won a 2010 Public Relations Society of America award and has been covered in traditional media stories about the project.

Pageviews by Countries



United States	243
Russia	11
India	8
Canada	6
Malaysia	6
Vietnam	4
France	3
Iran	3
Australia	2
United Kingdom	2



## *Lessons learned*

- Most site views occur during the week.
- Use of the blog archive continues to increase, indicating visitors do look back at older blog posts.
- Biggest referral sites:
  - Self-referring/bookmark.
  - Google search.
  - The Willamette River Bridge project website.
  - Yahoo search.

### Search Keywords

willamette river bridge

willamette river bridge blog

safety bridge posts

bubbleator pile driving willamette river bridge

independence willamette bridge work

jobs needed to build bridge

odot hwy 22 willametter river

odot occupational safety and health

odot willamette river bridge blog

pictures safety hazards at construction sites

*Top search terms:*  
Willamette River Bridge in combination with a range of other words, including I-5, project and sound wall.



# *Interactive activity*







# Case study: Design enhancements

How the blog helped address citizen concerns.

## The problem:

Negative comments on the blog and external media websites about design enhancement funds.

Comments (30) Loading... [X]

Sort by: [Date](#) [Rating](#) [Last Activity](#) [Login] [v]

[Login or signup](#) now to comment.

 **lostNreality** 107p · April 13, 2011 18:58:43 +22 [thumbs up] [thumbs down]

How much is this ugly "art" costing the tax payer? How about filling holes in the road and all that before spending money on bad art? We don't have any money, but we can buy crap like this?

[Reply](#) ▶ 1 reply · April 14, 2011 04:54:33 [Report](#)

 **deleted7278332** 103p · April 13, 2011 18:59:20 +22 [thumbs up] [thumbs down]

STOP WASTING MONEY ON NONSENSE.what does it take to get politicians to get serious

[Reply](#) ▶ 1 reply · April 14, 2011 04:55:24 [Report](#)

 **bigjuan** 71p · April 13, 2011 19:11:46 +15 [thumbs up] [thumbs down]

Thanks, lostNreality and da1woody...came here to say exactly that myself. +1 to each of you!

[Reply](#) [Report](#)

 **DougieDowner** 73p · April 13, 2011 19:17:52 +15 [thumbs up] [thumbs down]

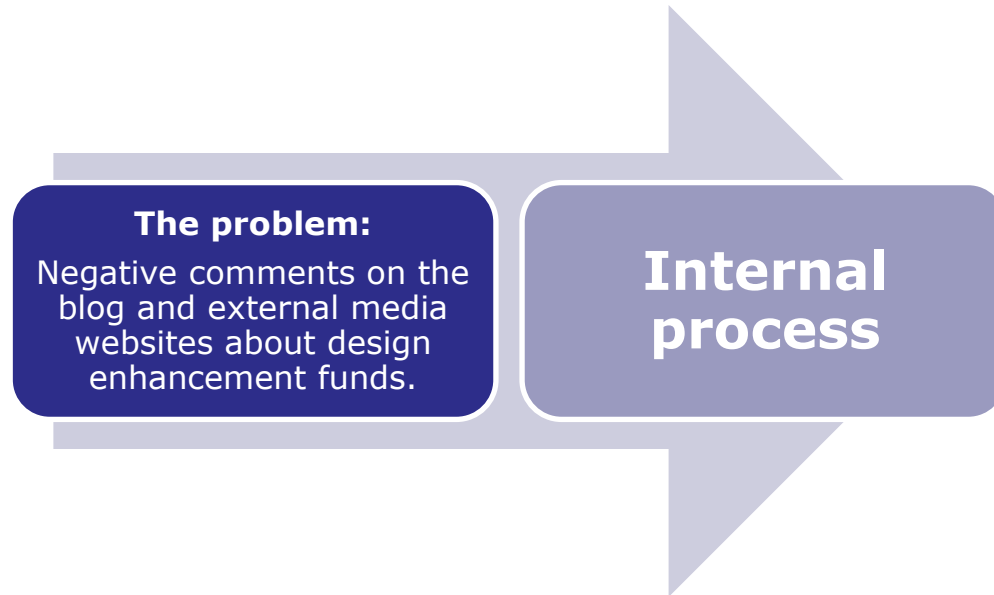
The Willamette River Bridge is a routine interstate highway crossing that does not warrant any artistic embellishment. Artwork designed to attract the attention of freeway motorists is a potentially dangerous distraction. "Whilamut" is one of many EuroAmerican phonetic constructs that may not accurately represent the Kalupuya's historical oral intent and may confuse travellers requiring knowledge of the current accepted spelling of "Willamette." In my opinion, in this recession, no public funds should be expended on any of the proposed artwork; however, if allocated funds must be spent, the educational and economic development needs of the public would be better served by a more accessible historical interpretive site perhaps containing some scaled-down artistic elements.

[Reply](#) [Report](#)



# ***Case study: Design enhancements***

*How the blog helped address citizen concerns.*





# Case study: Design enhancements

*How the blog helped address citizen concerns.*

## The problem:

Negative comments on the blog and external media websites.

## Internal process

## The solution:

An informative blog post

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2011

### Where the aesthetics funds come from

*From ODOT-*

We understand the current economic environment leads to many questions about how public money is spent. It is often challenging to understand the restrictions placed on dedicated funding. Even within ODOT, frustrations are voiced when money targeted for modernization improvements can't be spent on pavement preservation. We have received questions about how the design enhancements are funded and would like to provide more information for you.



## *More Willamette River Bridge info*



- **Willamette River Bridge blog**
  - <http://willametteriverbridge.blogspot.com/>
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