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Revised bridge plan would save millions

Columbia River | Proposed changes include 10 lanes instead of 12

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The Interstate 5 bridge over the Columbia River would shrink from 12 to 10 lanes, and that, along with other changes, could save up to a net of \$650 million, project officials said Thursday.

The cost range now would be \$2.6 billion to \$3.6 billion — down from the \$3.1 billion to \$4.2 billion that had been anticipated.

Columbia Crossing officials have briefed government and business leaders, including Portland Mayor Sam Adams and Vancouver Mayor Royce E. Pollard, about the changes over the past 10 days. The revised staff plan will be presented Dec. 4 at a meeting of key stakeholders, including the two mayors.

The highest-profile change is cutting the number of lanes. Actually, the idea is to reduce the overall width of the bridge's two spans, but the new design still would one day allow expansion to 12 lanes, with narrower shoulders. The new bridge would replace the old green six-lane Interstate Bridge.

The previous configuration called for two decks, each 96 feet wide; the new drawings call for decks 88 feet wide.

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Bridge: Light rail is essential part of project

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Crossing officials, for planning purposes, said 2030 might be the year when the bridge may be restriped from 10 to 12 lanes. The savings would be \$30 million.

The revised structure, which could be under construction no earlier than 2012 and completed no earlier than 2018, would still include light rail from Portland. That portion of the project would cost an estimated \$750 million and, because of federal funding rules, is considered essential to the overall package.

And while the revised pack-

age represents up to \$915 million in savings, added costs totaling up to \$265 million — mostly because of higher material expenses for project delays — renders a net savings of \$650 million.

Other highlights:

- The biggest single savings — \$275 million — comes from revised engineer estimates on the cost of building the bridge, which just had a recent design update. Also, better-than-expected stability of the Columbia River subsurface will save money. Engineers had thought each of 12 support piers would need 14 pilings — the supportive interior structure of a pier. It turns out that only nine pilings per pier will be needed.

- Build a walled bridge on Hayden Island — and not a structure with piers. Island residents had hoped for the pier design, which would have been more open to light and community-friendly. The change, how-

ever, is expected to save \$125 million.

- Reuse the existing North Portland Harbor Bridge with modifications. That will save \$110 million.
- Modify the Marine Drive intersection to eliminate a flyover, saving \$50 million.
- Postpone, at least for this project, improvements to the State Route 500 intersection at the northern end of the 5-mile bridge project area. Savings: \$100 million.