

DATE: January 25, 2016
TO: City of St. Helens
FROM: ECONorthwest
SUBJECT: ST. HELENS ECONOMIC EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY

ECONorthwest recently completed an economic existing conditions analysis and interviewed local economic development entities to understand the economic development potential from a transportation improvement in the City of St. Helens. This memorandum summarizes the conclusions from that work. It also outlines recommendations for the next steps.

Conclusions

- 1. The industrial parcels are best situated to capture spillover light industrial industry from Portland, as well as growing light industries located in the region that need more space.**

A strong local workforce, that currently commute to Portland and Scappoose, is set up to complement a light industrial manufacturing industry in St. Helens. The waterfront parcels are not good for heavy manufacturing because there is no deep-water access and the sites do not compete well for these uses compared to other sites in the region. Light industrial shovel-ready property is much needed for local businesses in St. Helens and the surrounding area.

- 2. Improvement to intersections along existing roads (solid blue line on map) is the best option in the near-term.**

The other two alternatives, Railroad Ave. route and partial bypass alternative, are likely to cost more money without providing much benefit. The existing road allows access to the Veneer site, which has the most potential for economic development in the short-term.

- 3. The most urgent needs are 1) understanding parcel “shovel-readiness”, 2) updating site constraint information, and 3) identifying the location(s) of developable pockets of parcels.**

While there are many acres in contiguous ownership zoned to support employment-related development, most of these sites are constrained. They may be brownfields, have wetlands, or have slopes that complicate development. While the data are imperfect and should be updated, the preliminary look at buildable acreage suggests very limited amount of unconstrained land in the area. Understanding more about the site constraints and where developable land is located will be important to determining whether a new transportation connection is cost beneficial. These results will inform where transportation connection alignment options should be considered, and the economic development potential.

- 4. The best long-term option is the Railroad Ave. route – only if the land is suitable for industrial or employment-related development.**

In the long-term, the Railroad Ave. route (yellow line) would cost the most, but could provide the most benefit if the undeveloped and vacant parcels in the study area are

buildable, given environmental constraints. Without understanding which parcels have the most development potential, we cannot be certain that this transportation alignment improvement could, in fact, be beneficial to this area.