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Skagit Bridge May Require Bond Issue

Sedro-Woolley C. of C. Host to County Bridge Enthusiasts; Span at Dalles Discussed; Financing Is Main Problem; Bond Issue Is Suggested

A bond issue, which may or may not have to be voted by Skagit county residents, was cited Wednesday night as the one means of financing construction of a bridge across the Skagit river between Concrete and the Dalles. With the entire delegation attending the dinner meeting at the Sedro-Woolley city hall agreeing that the bridge is vitally needed to assure this county's future support from logging the number one problem became that of finances.

Still unsettled as the meeting closed was whether or not the board of county commissioners can issue bonds in large enough amount to pay for building the bridge. Wendell Phipps, superintendent of schools at Concrete, said his understanding of an opinion rendered by the state attorney general was that the county could bond itself to the extent of about \$400,000—enough in his estimation to build the span. E. C. Carr, present county commissioner from this district, said that the county must have a vote of the people before it can issue bonds in quantity to pay for the bridge.

Lowell Hughes, chairman of the board of commissioners, said that the county has been attempting to get estimates of what a bridge will actually cost, and also surveys of where it should be built. He said that a man is expected to be in the county within "about two weeks" to make the survey. The commissioners said that when the figures are drawn up, the request for issuing the bonds will be put on the November ballot.

Representative speakers from Anacortes, Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley and Concrete stressed reasons the bridge should be built, and all said their towns would enthusiastically support construction of the span. Chambers of commerce delegates, forestry officials, prominent industrial leaders, county commissioners, aspirants to the office of county commissioner from this district, and other bridge enthusiasts spoke briefly at the meeting, presided over by Charles Wickler, Sedro-Woolley Chamber of Commerce president, and organized by Al Lisherness, commissioner candidate.

As the discussion closed, the group tossed the problem of building the bridge in the laps of the county commissioners and they in turn flipped it back to the voters, who they say must be educated to the fact that the bridge will save taxpayers money in the long run, and will ultimately increase the income of the entire county.

H. O. Walberg, county engineer, and State Senator Jess Sapp eliminated the possibilities of financial aid from the U. S. Forestry service or the state highway department. Walberg said the forestry service asked for appropriations totalling \$25 million and received \$5 million for each of three year's operations, so are finding it difficult to maintain existing forest service highways without building any new roads or bridges.

Sapp said that since there is no state highway which runs to the point where the bridge is tentatively scheduled to be built, the state cannot lend assistance either. He suggested a program of education of the public which would involve appointment of "key men" in various communities to lay the ground work for a program of publicity.

Declaring that Skagit county income will drop if timber which would come out through the county continues to go uphill to Darrington instead of downhill through this county, Hugh Ritter, district ranger for the U. S. Forestry service at Concrete, pointed out the forestry service will change its plans so its road system would connect up with the span.

Ritter said that construction of a bridge across the Skagit river would help removal of about 20 million board feet of timber a year from the watersheds of the Skagit river, Pressentine creek, Phinney creek and the Sauk and Suiattle rivers. He said that translated into dollars and cents that would mean about \$800,000 in profit and wages annually to residents of this county.

He said at present 80 per cent of the timber cut in this county is taken out of the county to be processed and manufactured.

Asserting that there is one and half billion board feet of commercial timber ready for harvest under a sustained yield plan in which just as much would be cut as can be grown in a year, Ritter said that 50 per cent of the Phinney creek timber, 100 per cent of the Suiattle river timber and a quarter billion board feet of timber on the Sauk would be taken out by way of Darrington because no bridge is available across the Skagit river at the strategic location.

School Superintendent Phipps, offering either a toll or bonding method of financing the span, said that the school districts benefit from the timber resources, and he again cited the safety of school children now being transported across the river by ferry as a prime importance in construction of the span.

He was supported by Howard Boulton, Concrete grade school principal, who said the lives of school children cannot be measured in dollars and cents, and cited the incident last spring of having to carry pupils by bus to Darrington, to Arlington, to highway 99, back to Sedro-Woolley and then to Concrete so they could attend gradua-

tion exercises. At that time the Skagit river was too high for the ferries to safely carry the children.

S. S. McIntyre, president of Skagit Steel and Iron Works at Sedro-Woolley, Lyle Stow, head of Selective Logging company at Rockport, and George Green of the Skagit county dairymen's association also spoke in favor of the bridge.

McIntyre, who also is president of the North-State, Cascade highway association, said the people of both Whatcom and Skagit counties are backing the move for construction of the span.