

I-5 Bridge Site Self-Guided Tour

Allow yourself almost an hour, but take as long as you like!

Start at the University of Oregon and drive east on Franklin Boulevard, heading toward Springfield. As the road curves to the left, glance to your left and notice the bridge in profile. Note the topography. Judkins Point to your right is the highest elevation along the Willamette River for miles in either direction. Notice the "pinch" of land width as this elevation intersects with the roadways. To your left, before the underpass, is where the Eugene Mill Race once began. After you pass under the highway, notice the whitewater below to your left.

You're now heading into Glenwood. The interstate highway is the official bisector of Eugene and Springfield. Turn around when you can (probably at Glenwood Blvd.), and head back east on Franklin.

OPTIONAL WALKING TOUR

If you have time and the weather is cooperating, park at the State Motor Pool lot on the south side of Franklin east of I-5 and get out for a short walk. Walk east along the bike path, and follow it under the interstate. You'll see a canal to your right, and you might spot a large culvert too. You'll also see the railroad on your left, which is oddly invisible from almost every other vantage. The path veers uphill and leads north to the Knickerbocker Bridge. If you walk halfway across this foot bridge and look east, you'll see the full profile of the bridge. This may be your only unobstructed view. If our new bridge ever lands on a postcard, the photo will be taken from right here.

If you're in a hurry, head back to your car. If not, keep walking across the footbridge to the north side. You're now in the Whilamut Natural Area, a source of great pride for the community. But for a few bike paths (which intersect oddly at the foot of the Knickerbocker Bridge) and the highway noise, land this natural in the center of an urban space is rare indeed. If you keep walking north, and then east at the next bike path intersection, you'll get to the canoe canal. Just beyond this area is a great fishing hole, but most who use it would prefer you not tell anyone. Retrace your steps and cross the Knickerbocker Bridge again. Count the pylons in the water for the two bridges currently standing. Eventually, there will be only a handful. Now get back in your car and head east again.

RESUME CAR TOUR

You can see the bridge in profile again as you approach it from the east on Franklin. Drive under I-5 and notice the experience of the underpass. Look to your left and right as the interstate passes over you.

Turn around when you reach Market of Choice.

You're driving east again, but this time, get on I-5 as if you're heading to Creswell or San Francisco (your choice). Notice the Laurel Hill neighborhood to the right as you begin to merge onto the highway. Wave.

Take the first exit. Get back on I-5, heading north. (You'll turn right three times.) Now you're driving over the Willamette River. This is the bridge experience that 20,000 motorists will take in every day (and that's not counting their passengers). But where does the bridge experience begin? Only when you are crossing the river? Notice how the approach to the bridge involves a slight uphill grade. This is required to get above the train tracks that run near the river.

As you cross the river, count the seconds. Take in the views. Notice that the end of the bridge experience is as hard to locate as the beginning. You've just traveled over the river, but you've also passed from a very populated and industrial area on the south side to a bucolic preserve on the north side. You've also passed on the line, with Eugene to your left and Springfield to your right.

At the next exit, you can choose to go back to Eugene (exit 194B), Springfield (exit 194A) or Salem (keep going.)

The first chance you get, scribble down some of your impressions from this tour. Here's some empty space for you to do that: