

Bypass #4 - Blue River Bypass, OR 126E, McKenzie Highway, Highway 15 (MP 39.68-41.01)

Description: The OR 126 corridor extends nearly 80 miles from I-5 at Eugene to Santiam Junction. It is a National Highway System route linking the southern Willamette Valley to central and eastern Oregon. The corridor connects rural communities in the McKenzie Valley and provides access to numerous recreational sites.

Near the rural unincorporated community of Blue River, OR 126E is a two-lane highway with passing lanes. The vision in the *Eugene to Santiam Junction: Oregon Highway 126 East Corridor Interim Corridor Strategy, Review Draft* (1997) says the corridor "serves as a scenic and recreational route, an important link in the state's transportation system, and access for local communities, while emphasizing the importance of protecting its significant natural resources." (page ES-v)

Construction in 1957. No Environmental Impact Statement.

Land use: Land uses in the vicinity of Blue River are rural residential, farm and forest land. The community is almost surrounded by the Willamette National Forest. Blue River had an estimated population of 307 in 1997. The *Interim Corridor Strategy's* buildable residential lands inventory for Blue River estimates that the community could add 24 additional dwellings under current zoning. The community includes a multi-level school.

Traffic volumes: According to the *Interim Corridor Strategy*, traffic volumes are seasonal and averaged about 3,800 ADT in 1997 in the Blue River area. By 2017 volumes are projected to grow minimally.

Crash rate: The average crash rate for 1998-2000 is 0.86 per million vehicle miles traveled, lower than other rural highways. The primary types of collision were turning movement and fixed or other object.

Analysis: Probably the intent of construction of the bypass was to remove through and truck traffic from the community in Blue River, to increase safety for the community and the public school, and to straighten the highway alignment. These purposes have been met. The bypass is in a very rural area and has no known land use development pressure.

Primary Source: *Eugene to Santiam Junction, Oregon Highway 126 East Corridor Interim Corridor Strategy, May 1998*