

Our River: Keep Navigable!

The Mount Vernon city council is going to guard the "navigable" status of the Skagit river.

A suggestion that a letter the city was being asked to write to the U. S. Engineers might lead to a holding that the river isn't any longer navigable, drew a spontaneous and anything but a figurative roar from Gene Hopkins, chamber of commerce manager, out in the audience.

"What's going on here?" asked Hopkins, forgetting the amenity of asking to be heard. "We're talking with the engineers right now for a six-foot draft to Concrete, a hearing is already scheduled, and \$50,000 has been appropriated!"

Councilman James Kean brought up the question after Mayor Don Lindbloom had read the letter, drafted by the county engineer's office, in which the city would win in requesting that the old Riverside bridge be declared a fixed span. On first reading, nearly everyone thought the letter also was asking the engineers to declare the Skagit river to be non-navigable. But after considerable discussion and careful rereading of the letter, it was concluded the engineers were being invited only to declare the river "non-navigable" for vessels too big to pass under the Riverside and the Great Northern Railway bridges in closed position.

Mayor Lindbloom indicated doubts about any Skagit river navigation project, saying that "historically, the trend is the other way."

Councilman Kean said he had no objection to either bridge be-

ing declared a "fixed span" but he would oppose declaring the river non-navigable. He said navigation under the bridge was possible during normal water, however, and he did not object, when it was finally decided the letter referred only to vessels too tall to get under them.

The Great Northern already has obtained U.S. Engineer approval to discontinue maintenance of its bridge as a swing span. The railway bridge, it was pointed out last night, is six feet nearer the river surface than the old Riverside bridge. The latter bridge's maintenance fell jointly on shoulders of the county and the city when the new super-highway bridge went into service.

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Hopkins said the chamber of commerce and county development workers felt the effort to get the river channel cleared for barge transportation was vital, to give present and potential industry lower shipping costs. He said the cement plant at Concrete would welcome barge transportation, to send its limerock to Seattle. And Scott Paper company took an option on land at Hamilton to put in a chipper plant in event river freighting should become available. Hopkins said river transport could mean a 60 per cent as against a present \$1.25 shipping rate in some instances.

Councilman Charles Christensen expressed doubt river navigation proponents would be able to convince the engineers that the project would be economically justified.