

**METRO**

October 19, 2006

Mr. Hal Dengerink, Co-Chair  
Mr. Henry Hewitt, Co-Chair  
Columbia River Crossing Task Force  
700 Washington Street, Suite 300  
Vancouver, WA 98660

Dear Co-Chairs Dengerink & Hewitt:

The members of the Metro Council greatly appreciate the briefing about the Columbia River Crossing Project provided by the project staff at our work session on October 3. We are also grateful for the time, energy and dedication devoted to this important issue by both the project technical team and the members of the Task Force.

Any improvements on the Oregon side will ultimately need to be approved by the Metro Council, after careful consideration of public testimony, before proceeding. Accordingly, the Council concluded that it would be helpful to you if we were to present our perspectives on this project sooner rather than later. Of course, individual Councilors may have additional comments, but we all concur with the following recommendations.

### **Recognize the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan**

In 2002, all of the stakeholders in this effort, from both sides of the Columbia River, agreed with the following five principles:

- The Interstate 5 crossing of the Columbia River should be a maximum of five lanes in each direction (three through lanes and two auxiliary lanes), for a total of ten lanes to accommodate additional auto and truck travel. These lanes could be a combination of freeway, arterial and managed lanes.
- Light rail transit is an integral element of travel in this corridor, including service into Clark County. Premium express bus service in the I-5 and I-205 corridors should be provided to markets not well served by light rail.
- Jurisdictions in the Corridor will develop and agree on a plan to manage land use and development in order to avoid adversely impacting I-5 or the region's growth management plans. Land use changes could dramatically affect commuter patterns and future demands on the interstate highway system.

- Commitment to a comprehensive use of innovative measures such as Transportation Demand Management /Transportation System Management strategies.
- Establishment of an environmental justice program that addresses potential impacts.

While conditions and circumstances have changed somewhat since 2002 and we are not opposed to looking at additional information and ideas, we believe that in the absence of compelling data to the contrary, these principles provide balanced guidance for the project. In addition to the above principles, we recommend the following actions.

### **Use desired outcomes as a guide**

The CRC has ably documented the transportation problems in the bridge influence area. However, we believe that the project would greatly benefit from clear definition and prioritization of desired outcomes. These desired outcomes should represent the common goals that all of us share in our region and should include actions that will enable us to achieve these joint goals. This approach will help the project avoid unintended consequences, and will ensure appropriate and realistic consideration of the geographic scope of the project's potential impacts.

As you know, the Metro Council has initiated an update to our Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). This RTP update represents a significant change in approach. The Council is developing policies that make it explicit that the transportation system is a means to achieving certain outcomes, including our regional land use plan. For example, level of service standards for identifying problems and designing solutions are rough methods that can be greatly improved and much better aligned with Council policies by creating new and better performance standards. We will need to work closely with you as your project proceeds and as the RTP policies are developed to ensure that your proposals are consistent with our new policies.

In addition, the Metro Council suggests the following desired outcomes for the Columbia River Crossing:

- Expand multi-modal choices for our citizens.
- Create a dazzling waterfront and gateway for both sides of the River. This includes actions that the Metro area could take to support the City of Vancouver's efforts to preserve and enhance their downtown.
- Improve the reliability of the transportation system for the freight industry.
- Maintain and improve air quality in the corridor.
- Explore how land use changes could help address the problem

One of the great challenges of transportation planning is that it is inextricably bound to land use. Transportation access greatly shapes land use and vice-versa. We believe that we cannot look at transportation solutions without considering land use. On both sides of the Columbia River, local jurisdictions have created land use plans that they hope to achieve. All transportation

solutions will play some role in either helping or hindering these plans. It is critical to coordinate land use and transportation.

Accordingly, we recommend that all transportation alternatives be evaluated for their land use implications. Obviously, added lanes of traffic, varying levels of transit, etc., and their impact on travel time and access will have an influence on settlement patterns and development. These implications need to be very carefully studied.

### **Determine project priorities**

Your problem statement includes a great many challenges, not all of which are of equal weight. We recommend that you consider each problem element and related goal and determine how important it is compared with the others. In this way you will help communicate what the project is trying to accomplish and help understand why one approach may be favored compared with any other.

### **Recognize financial limitations**

As you know, in a bit more than a year the Highway Trust Fund will be depleted. Resolution of this grave problem is critical, but a solution has not yet been found. In addition, maintenance and system preservation are taking ever-greater resources. Accordingly, we believe that transportation solutions must take into consideration cost, feasibility, and the place any one project may have in the overall transportation improvement picture. We must consider that there is an overall regional transportation budget that will not be able to fund every transportation need. Accordingly, we would be concerned that if a very costly project (initial capital costs as well as ongoing maintenance and preservation costs) were financed with revenues other than toll revenues, this could displace all other projects or greatly reduce the number of other projects because of limited funding resources. The Metro Council will be fiscally responsible when considering all public investments. Project cost and a comparison with the other projects proposed within the same time horizon will need to be considered.

### **Coordinate with the railroad bridge**

As we noted with project staff on October 3, the marine navigation challenge of the Interstate 5 bridges is related to the downstream railroad bridge. We recognize that the CRC project is taking this issue into consideration, but believe that options that involve even greater coordination, including possible improvements to the railroad bridge, should be further explored. We understand that the railroad bridge is privately owned. However, we believe that the railroad system, including this bridge, performs a public function, and the freight carried on it is part of a larger system that needs to be considered. Further, if a CRC alternative further restricts barge turning movements, mitigation in the form of alterations to the railroad bridge may be warranted.

**Provide alternatives in the DEIS that demonstrate the fundamental choices before us**

We believe a wider range of alternatives must be studied in order to find the solutions that deliver the best results at the lowest costs. In addition, we believe that alternatives should be considered in the draft environmental impact statement that include both capital intensive and alternative approaches – unless it is clearly demonstrated during the current phase of analysis that such approaches are not viable.

Non-transportation solutions may be effective in concert with transportation improvements. It is important to demonstrate to the public that we are making every effort to solve problems in new ways and that we are good stewards of limited public resources. This will take extra effort and may lead to some solutions that ultimately may not be workable. But there is the chance that new innovative solutions could be created and we should not avoid some level of prudent risk in finding new answers to old problems.

Further, we believe that, in the absence of compelling information to the contrary, alternatives included in the environmental impact statement should include:

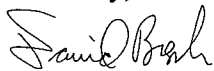
- 1) an alternative that reuses the present bridges;
- 2) an alternative that has a maximum of ten lanes (a combination of freeway, arterial and managed lanes).

**Provide thorough public vetting before closing options**

We recognize that in order to manage the project effectively, some options will need to be removed from consideration. However, before options are taken off the table, we believe that ample opportunity should be provided for community discussion and debate.

Again, we very much appreciate the work and dedication of the CRC technical team and Task Force members. It is our hope that by sharing our perspectives we can, working with all of the stakeholders, help create an effective and lasting solution to the complex challenges of the Columbia River Crossing.

Sincerely,



David Bragdon, President



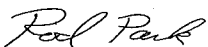
Rex Burkholder, Councilor



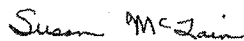
Carl Hosticka, Councilor



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cc: Doug Ficco, Co-Director, WSDOT  
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