

July 12, 2006

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Gentlemen:

The Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project, under the leadership of the Federal Transit Administration, Federal Highway Administration, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Oregon Department of Transportation, is currently evaluating alternatives to improve the portion of Interstate 5 (I-5) adjacent to and including the crossing of the Columbia River. This effort includes evaluating potential transportation improvements within the project area to address present and future travel demands in the corridor.

To support the project development process and to ensure that a broad range of perspectives help shape the eventual solution, the states of Washington and Oregon convened a 39-member Task Force, comprised of elected officials, residents of potentially affected neighborhoods, and representatives of business, freight, environmental, and other stakeholder groups. The CRC Task Force has been meeting regularly for the past eighteen months, creating a Vision and Values statement, developing recommendations for a formal Problem Definition, and helping to develop the evaluation criteria by which project alternatives will be judged.

The CRC Task Force is currently working with project staff to develop an initial set of project alternatives for further study. In reviewing the range of potential alternatives, the Task Force evaluated commuter rail linking Vancouver, Washington to Portland, Oregon. After careful consideration, the Task Force has concluded that the regional rail system does not have the capacity to accommodate commuter rail.

However, the information that we have reviewed makes it clear that freight and passenger rail service is, and will continue to be, a vital part of the regional transportation system for the Portland-Vancouver region as well as for the entire Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, it is equally clear that the demand for rail service in the region will soon exceed the capacity of the rail network.

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While we have concluded that the rail capacity issues should not be addressed as part of this project to improve the I-5 crossing, the CRC Task Force does recognize a critical need for an evaluation of regional rail needs, followed by a concerted program that will bring together federal, state, local and private interests to fund and implement improvements to the rail system. The CRC Task Force recommends that such a study be undertaken immediately, focusing on addressing the projected freight and intercity passenger rail needs, while also considering the possibility that improvements to the rail system may open up the potential for future commuter rail service linking the Portland/Vancouver region.

On behalf of the CRC Task Force,

Hal Dengerink
Task Force Co-Chair

Henry Hewitt
Task Force Co-Chair

Copies to: Governor Chris Gregoire
Governor Ted Kulongoski
Senator Maria Cantwell
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Gordon Smith
Senator Ron Wyden
Congressman Brian Baird
Congressman Earl Blumenauer