

October 21, 2006

Hal Dengerink and Henry Hewitt
Co-Chairs
Columbia River Crossing Task Force
700 Washington St.
Vancouver, WA 98660

Dear Mr. Dengerink and Mr. Hewitt,

We appreciate the recent letter from the business representatives serving on the CRC Task Force articulating their objectives for the project. As other members of the task force-, we'd like to offer this summary of our objectives for consideration.

We believe that this project is about more than efficiently moving people and goods between our states. We understand that it will shape the way our communities look, feel and function for many decades ahead. Therefore, we believe that we must be very thoughtful. Yet, this process seems to be quickly moving toward answering the very narrow question: "what style and size of replacement bridge should we build?" Instead, the question we should be considering is: "what kind of bi-state region are we trying to create, and what type of transportation system in this corridor will help us achieve this?" Starting here would provide us a framework for wise and prudent decision-making.

A narrow focus on mobility or capacity will result in a shortsighted "solution" that externalizes costs and misses key opportunities. This is how we have planned transportation in the past. Yet, history has taught us that this is a mistake, and that it is a costly strategy. Given the current financial constraints, we must look at what is the most cost-effective investment strategy that will serve the bi-state region for the long-term.

Within this context, there are a number of critical issues to be addressed:

Choice and Access

This process should focus on creating more choices, not more lanes. Adding more lanes will not provide a long-term solution to congestion or freight mobility. Transportation researchers have shown us that more lanes lead to more driving and more congestion and pollution. Atlanta is the poster child for this – having aggressively invested in freeways during the 1990s, only to find itself with no congestion relief and out of compliance with EPA air quality requirements.

Creating choice is our best bet for supporting regional prosperity over the long-term. Tactics for creating choice include: building light rail and improving other transit service; managing demand through intelligent transportation system and transportation demand management strategies; investing in a premier bike and pedestrian facility; encouraging efficient land use; reducing the need to travel across the river to work; and exploring freight-specific management strategies, rather than assuming that more lanes will help

move freight more quickly. Creating more transportation choice is a smart economic development strategy for our region. Livability is one of our region's key economic assets that attracts businesses and talented workers. Light rail and the kind of development it can encourage are key tools for creating community livability.

Health

This project must prioritize improving public health and include health-related costs when assessing the performance of various alternatives.

Sightline Institute's "Cascadia Scorecard 2006: Focus on Sprawl & Health" recently found the following:

- * Car crashes are the number one cause of death for northwesterners under 45;
- * Riding a bus is 10 times safer than driving a car; and
- * More than 1 in 5 residents of Northwest states are obese, in part because of a lack of physical activity.

The hard costs of these health impacts are astronomical. Data compiled between 1995-2004 by the National Safety Council shows that residents in Portland spent as much on the impact of motor vehicle crashes as was spent on the entire transportation system budget (\$1.5 billion). Taking into account quality of life factors, they calculated costs topping \$4 billion! Additional costs associated with asthma and other respiratory problems in the corridor are a disproportionate burden to residents and employers of these residents who are negatively impacted by lost worker productivity and higher health care premiums. Each of the alternatives should account for these costs when being measured for performance.

Fiscal Responsibility and Public Accountability

Currently, the Columbia River Crossing Project is spending between \$1 – 1.5 million/ per month for this study, and the final tab is projected to be in the billions. In addition, we've already sunk millions into studying the crossing through two past studies. Even if we could raise the dollars projected to be spent on this project, at what expense would we do it? What other community needs will not be met as we siphon off limited public resources to pay for this? How long would the "benefits" last?

The project should explore low-cost alternatives, not just high-priced options that assume construction of a colossal new freeway bridge. The project must account fully and mitigate for environmental costs associated with energy consumption, water quality, air quality, wildlife and habitat impacts and global warming. Where possible, the project should also seek to enhance environmental quality, and reduce energy consumption and emissions.

This project must not make false promises to the public about what the project will deliver to citizens. Right now, people are being sold on a project that is going to address congestion. Yet, we have not seen any freeway-building project in the U.S. that has been successful in reducing congestion for any length of time by adding capacity. This false promise is bad for the credibility of the agencies, task force members and everyone involved in the project. It will undermine credibility with federal and state government. It will undermine credibility with the public. If we spend billions of dollars and increase future travel speeds in peak periods by five minutes, are people going to feel like they got

their money's worth? We must be truthful about what the project aims to deliver and be accountable to these outcomes.

Fairness and Equity

The public should have simple and meaningful ways to be involved in all phases of the project. Public involvement should be accessible to everyone, not only paid professionals and lobbyists.

The project must acknowledge the historic impacts on communities from past I-5 development (division of Portland and Vancouver neighborhoods and exposure to unsafe levels of air toxics) and establish a fund of at least 1% of the total project cost for community enhancements (bike and pedestrian projects, natural resource protection and restoration, health facilities, etc.) in affected neighborhoods. In addition, the project should not increase the burdens caused by I-5 in these neighborhoods. Alternatives that widen the bridge to beyond three lanes of car traffic will funnel more people into a bottleneck in North Portland, increasing pollution and its impacts on these communities.

We agree with the business representatives' recommendation for the need to discuss outcomes and goals. We would add that this discussion should be based on the vision and values we developed earlier in the process, rather than the narrow focus of congestion, capacity and access. In addition, we support discussion of performance measures that will assess how well various alternatives meet these outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to discussing these issues as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Lora Caine
Friends of Clark County

Scott Chapman
Columbia Group Sierra Club

Jill Fuglister
Coalition for a Livable Future

Anja O'Neil
Chairperson, Arnada Neighborhood Association

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