

Public comment on the CRC submitted for the record.

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Columbia River Crossing

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May 20, 2008

NOT

Re: the proposed Columbia River Crossing: it will accelerate commuter traffic; CRC means unaffordable new infrastructure for conditions that are irretrievably passing away.

GLOBAL  
WARMING,

As a Portland resident concerned with area growth and sustainability, I am strongly opposed to the building of a 12-lane I-5 bridge across the Columbia. I second criticisms made by Councilor Robert Liberty (Oregonian 5/18/08), economist Joe Cortright ("Before building it, tell us who'll pay for it," Oregonian op-ed), and the Coalition For a Liveable Future's paper "Climate Smart Columbia River Crossing." The Portland Mercury also carried an excellent critique, "Bridge To Disaster," in its issue of 3/13/08.

I confess that I would not relish the role of a public official with decision making responsibility on this proposal-- to listen to the unrealistic demands of Clark County commuters, construction contractors, operators in the imperiled trucking industry, and anyone else wishing to benefit, fleetingly, while placing a long-term financial burden on taxpayers and state and local government. Nonetheless too many strong warnings of uncomfortable and unavoidable change now demand to be recognized as reasons to abandon the unwieldy scale of this project.

1. "Conditions irretrievably passing away"-- would include affordable auto and truck fuel! Only a few visionaries were seeing \$4/gallon gas and diesel when this bridge's planning began in 2001. In 2008, plenty of analysts are predicting the price will rise even higher. This will kill mass commuting, no matter how ingrained the 30-to-40 one-way daily commute has become to many in contemporary generations. Such commuting is a recent phenomenon and a temporary one. The end will feel like a tragedy to many, and home investments will suffer further, but this has already started (not just with subprime mortgage recklessness, but with Peak Oil making fuel too expensive for the majority of people to live far from their workplaces.) Furthermore, tragedies happen on a sliding scale-- the hordes of refugees in WWII might willingly trade their situations with stranded commuters, for example.

Relocalization, the planning strategy that puts most community facilities and needs back within close reach of

residents, decreasing consumption of transportation fuel, is the strategy advanced by students of the now global predicament of expensive energy. Here I recommend the work of Prof. Richard Heinberg (latest book, "Peak Everything") and of author James Howard Kunstler ("The Long Emergency.")

As for long-haul trucking, much freight will have to be moved back to the railroads-- rebuilt and expanded railroads. Smaller trucks, becoming more fuel efficient, could once more make the local deliveries; they could load up at trackside warehouses (a common sight at companies like Railway Express "in olden times.") Semi-trailers are about to semi-disappear from the highways and bridges. There is nothing governments can do to restore their profitability. Let's remember, railroads built this country and trains are far more fuel-efficient hauling freight, while also outperforming airplanes in moving passengers without such a big carbon footprint.

2. "Accelerating climate change, not traffic"-- "in an era of climate change-- when a state task force has recommended drastically cutting greenhouse gas emissions to 75 percent below 1990 levels-- increasing lanes and thereby increasing commuter traffic is simply unacceptable." (Mercury, 3/13/08.) "...building more roads increases greenhouse gas emissions, even when improved fuel efficiency of future vehicles is taken into account, and even if the highway expansion initially improves congestion...also assume that new highway capacity will gradually be filled by new trips, and that congestion and stop-and-go driving will gradually increase to approximately the same level experienced prior to the highway expansion." (Sightline Institute of Seattle, quoted in the Mercury.)

In my point #1 I contend that commuting is doomed, so why would I also state that CRC adds to climate change?\*

Well, many Americans are determined to keep driving; our national government is reaching for any fuel source, no matter how polluting. Corn ethanol manufacture has a large carbon footprint. Mining tar sands in Canada etc uses up precious natural gas, pollutes water, emits gases. Wars for oil pollute mightily, and the military campaigns to get oil burn up a significant part of the "booty."

As global temperatures rise, new damaging results keep getting discovered, often more dangerous than previously-known effects. There is lately the "methane bomb"-- in the northern tundras and steppes permafrost is melting, releasing quantities of the frozen methane they contain. Methane is about 22 times more potent than CO2 as a greenhouse gas... cue the ominous music soundtrack.

\*Underlining here is in error.

For more thoughtful reading on potential reactions from the planet to our emissions, I recommend **Under A Green Sky** by the University of Washington's Peter D. Ward. We are now growing past 6 billion on this earth; we just don't know exactly what might hit us if we don't stop indulging our old habits, if we deny that we need to make major changes.

3. The unaffordable, possibly unfinanceable \$4.2 billion plus-- in his Sunday Oregonian article, "Is this project the best deal for Oregon taxpayers?" Robert Liberty exposes what, to me, is an alarmingly flimsy set of schemes for funding CRC. He also details misplaced priorities where filling other local transportation needs are concerned. I add to his list the difficulties of selling government bonds, tax-free or not. Auctions offering local and state bonds have been held with little or no sales; interest rates have sometimes been hiked imprudently high to move some bonds. There is a drawn-out global credit crisis unfolding, widely reported and analyzed. Some state baldly that major banks and government coffers are essentially insolvent, and that the printing of dollars by the Fed is driving an inflation that has a hazy ceiling.

Let us not go into this huge debt. It is a time to retrench, be frugal, not a time to preach that illusory gospel of constant growth, and nebulous new jobs--if we play along with the movers and shakers.

A slower, more modest, piecemeal approach such as that recommended by Metro Councilor Liberty should cause no greater frustration than the lengthy disruption of a major bridge build. Waiting things out will show that traffic volume is on the decrease, due to the fuel expense.

In sum: Alternatives to the big-project mentality seem to have been ignored or kept out of the CRC official paper. I want them included and given due consideration, some of it "out of the box."

I believe that withdrawing from the 12-lane proposal is the best course. That means continuing to use the present I-5 crossing. Workable modifications could include putting tolls on the present bridge to pay for ramp improvements, and to stop subsidizing sprawl by recovering some of its costs.) Perhaps a side bridge for transit could be built; besides light rail, electric hybrid buses could be chosen if they are truly fuel-efficient. They will need their exclusive lanes or tracks for fast travel.

I urge public officials to use the veto to prevent rushing into a 12-lane boondoggle, whose time has already come and gone.

Sincerely,



Thaddeus Kozlowski

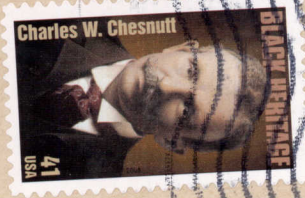
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