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JUL 01 2008

Columbia River Crossing Comments

To: Columbia River Crossing Project 
C/O Heather Gundersen, Environmental Manager
700 Washington Street, Suite 300
Vancouver, Washington 98660

June 28, 2008 Columbia River Crossing

Dear: Ms. Heather Gunderson and Columbia River Crossing Project Staff

I want to thank you and your staff for providing a public question and answer session at the Beaverton Public Library on June 14, 2008. Your knowledgeable staff answered many of my questions and provided additional information about the project.

Since, 1978, I have commuted to work using public transportation. My employer moved from Portland to an office building in Vancouver on Minnehaha Street and near St. Johns Avenue. Furthermore, my employer pays for my yearly bus pass. Typically, I drive to work once a week a 36-mile round trip. I use public transportation for the remainder of workweek. My work commute using public transportation starts at 5:10-AM in S.W. Portland when, I board a Tri-Met bus. This bus drops me off in downtown Portland where I wait for a 5:41-AM C-Tran #134 Salmon Creek bus. I ride this bus to the Salmon Creek Park and Ride where I transfer to the C-Tran #105 bus. I ride this bus to the 99th Street Park and Ride to transfer to a C-Tran #37 bus. C-Tran use to have the #134 bus stop at the 99th Street station but changed the schedule in May. I was able to get an earlier transfer. I ride the #37 bus to NE 63rd and Highway 99. Then I walk about a mile to office. In the afternoon, I ride the C-Tran #25 bus to downtown Vancouver where I transfer to the #105 bus to downtown Portland. Then I transfer to a Tri-Met bus that drops me off near my home. I am lucky to use public transportation for commuting to work because it reduces my car fuel and maintenance cost from \$2,000 to over \$3,000 a year. In 2007, I spent \$1.17 for gasoline every 7-miles driving a car. This year this figure will double or more because of rising fuel costs.

For several years, I have observed the daily chronic traffic congestion on I-5 near the Interstate Bridge during the rush hour. Traffic congestion deteriorates every year. Frequent vehicle breakdowns and accidents that further complicate the congestion problem of stalled vehicles. I seen two instances of near misses where a careless driver almost caused a major collision that could easily resulted in serious injuries or death near the Interstate Bridge. I try to avoid driving because of the rush hour congestion.

After reviewing information presented about this project, I have the following comments and additional questions.

1. Bridge Design:

A. **Bridge Appearance:** The current Pearson Airfield flight path now limits height and design of proposed bridge to a concrete structure similar in design to Glen Jackson Bridge. Although structurally functional, this bridge design has a poor appearance. Your project staff mentioned that Federal Aviation Administration FAA could change airfield flight paths to allow higher bridge height. Project staff should approve structural engineering studies to determine if more attractive bridge designs such as cable stayed, suspension, and arched bridges. Furthermore, alternative and innovative bridge designs may address the traffic congestion, environmental issues, commuting needs, safety, noise, and maintenance more efficiently at lower cost than proposed design. This bridge designed to last hundred years or more. Engineering staff has one chance to design a functional but beautiful bridge. What do I mean with the vague term beautiful? Do you want another Glenn Jackson or Marquam Bridge design or something that citizens can admire such as the St. Johns Bridge and Fremont Bridge. In past years, I have read newspaper Oregonian articles in past about Portland residences complaining about the Marquam Bridge design. This word means that bridge planners can balance environmental and aesthetics issues along with enhancing economic lives and safety of individuals using the bridge. Tri-Met seriously studying an attractive cable stayed bridge design for a Willamette River light rail crossing. The San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge provides an example of an attractive design. I hope Columbia Crossing staff avoids the design mistake of the Marquam Bridge. I have one other suggestion perhaps the project staff can conduct a design competition for engineering firms and perhaps the public can contribute or comment on the overall conceptual design alternatives.

B. I feel historical and archaeological sites at or near Pearson Air field need protection. The City of Vancouver owns the airfield. I have some questions about this airfield.

Will future air traffic from Portland International Airport curtail flights or stop flights coming from Pearson Airfield because of air traffic safety in the future?

Moving the Pearson Airfield can allow it to expand as a regional civil airport. At the present location, this airport growth remains static. Has the City of Vancouver looked at this issue?

Can the City of Vancouver use the land for Pearson Airfield that enhances the lives of Vancouver residents such as a park, recreation center, small retail businesses, museum, and so fourth? I am not advocating that the City of Vancouver sells or rents this land for strip malls, large box stores, or heavy industry.

2. Bridge Features and Construction Comments:

A. The proposed design of the bridge has a curve to go around the existing Interstate Bridge. Does the road surface design help prevent hydroplaning during rainy weather. For example, on I-5 the sharp Terwilliger curves have been a problem with numerous accidents. Oregon Department of Transportation had to cut grooves in pavement to reduce this problem along with lower speed limits. Interstate Bridges have experienced problems in past with truck skidding and sometimes jack knifing during wet weather.

Will the transportation departments specify a durable and high strength concrete mix to reduce number of repaving projects over the lifetime of the bridge? Repaving costs will increase in cost in the future. Furthermore, repaving can cause congestion.

B. I think bridge planners had a good idea utilizing unused space under the bridge deck between structural supports for a pedestrian and bicycles. The bridge deck overhead protects the users from weather but high winds can become a potential problem from the side. However, I suggest this space has a metal grating or fencing to prevent passer bys from throwing objects off the bridge or falling off the bridge.

How do bridge planners address security issues of crime for this design? Will this area have good lighting? Will this bridge pedestrian and bicycle lane attract transients and crime? Do police have adequate access to this lane to aid a crime victim or prevent a crime? What happens if someone has a medical emergency on the bridge, can emergency medical staff reach this area. Do planners plan to install emergency telephones along this path and in highway shoulders? Do maintenance crews have access for cleaning up garbage and cleaning the path. Furthermore, I think bridge planners should consider a design that provides enough space on this pedestrian and bicycle lane for emergency and maintenance vehicles.

C. The bridge has two tracks for light rail, do bridge planners have provisions in the track design or layout to allow trains to bypass a stalled or train blocking the tracks on the bridge. Another alternative, rail designers can put in track siding for stalled trains to avoid impeding other light rail traffic. In case, passengers need to leave a stalled train or during an emergency, the light rail line needs an emergency pedestrian walkway. I think idea of combining bus lanes and light rail tracks in one corridor a good idea but need way to prevent passenger vehicles from accidently entering the bus lanes. Do you want taxicabs and other commercial transportation vehicles use this bus lane?

D. Do bridge planners have a fire protection plan for the bridge? For example, how would fire fighters handle a burning overturned tanker truck? Will the bridge have freeze-proof fire hydrants along the bridge deck?

E. Do you plan to put up well-lighted signs to warn motorists of accidents, stalled vehicles and dangerous weather conditions such as fog and ice? Have planning staff consider option of installing heating cables embedded in pavement to prevent road-icing problems or will it just add another costly maintenance problem?

F. A stacked bridge such as the Fremont Bridge could reduce the overall footprint of the bridge if bridge height no longer a problem. The stacked bridge could reduce the number of bridge piers with possible reduction in cost. A covered bridge could reduce problems such as accidents from weather such as heavy rain, snow, and ice. See part A. This feature may add cost to the project unless structural design of bridge could allow addition of this feature with minimal cost.

G. I think the proposal to have up to 12 lanes constructed to accommodate traffic growth a good idea because tolls or mass transit has only slowing affect on traffic growth. Despite fuel price increases, economic and population growth will continue in metropolitan Portland and Vancouver and outside the region that results in an increase in vehicle and commercial vehicles usage of bridge. Bridge planners should design a bridge that allows for future traffic growth because in long run it becomes cheaper to put them in during bridge construction than trying to add lanes in the future.

H. Bridge design and materials selected to minimizing maintenance such as periodic painting of structural steel. Design of bridge should allow easy access for bridge maintenance and safety inspections.

I. The proposed bridge design and other design alternatives need strong barriers to prevent vehicles or trucks from skidding off the bridge during an accident. The Marquam Bridge has this problem. I think the barriers on this bridge inadequate to prevent vehicles from jumping the barrier and falling into river during an accident. Perhaps Oregon Highway Department officials have records of this problem. High fencing needed to prevent objects tossed from vehicles from falling to river or structures below.

3. Bridge Options with Routes Crossing the Oregon Slough

A. Comment: I noticed in your bridge proposals and maps that you plan to cross the Oregon Slough in vicinity of the Expo Center after passing through Hayden Island. While driving or riding a bus in this vicinity, I noticed a small boat repair and dry dock business next to Marine Drive in this area. Will your bridge construction force this business to close? Can this business relocate? Apparently, the boats in the dry dock are repaired or have hull paint stripped and repainted. In the past, these paint-stripping practices generated allot of paint waste that contained heavy metals such as lead, copper, zinc, and so fourth, that may have dropped into slough bottom. I am not saying present owner doing this. Has your planning staff conducted or plan to conduct an environmental study to determine if heavy metals are a potential environmental hazard in this area if disturbed during construction?

4. Remove Existing Interstate Bridge

A. I support proposal to remove the existing Interstate Bridge after completion of a new bridge. The project staff mentioned that the existing bridge piers are structurally weak. Furthermore, a major earthquake can cause the massive concrete counter weights to swing and toppling the support structure. The span would then collapse. It would take construction crews months to clear the wreckage. Interstate Bridge costs money to maintain and repair. A crew needed to lift the bridge for barge traffic.

5. Bridge Tolls

A. Comments: Although, I have no problem of using tolls to pay for new bridge or specifically used to fund mass transit projects, equipment, and maintenance. I am against bridge tolls that go to the general fund of Oregon or Washington State or local governments. I am against permanent high tolls except for specific reasons above. Furthermore, I am against a toll for the Glenn Jackson I-205 Bridge because bridge already paid off.

I heard argument that tolls will reduce pollution. The recent fuel prices increases will do more to reduce vehicle use and encourage commuters to drive high efficient vehicles such as hybrids than tolls.

The US Congress considering a bill to ban the states from charging tolls on Federal funded highways.

You may want to research the experiences Los Angles toll highway system.

B. Your staff and web site mentions that no tollbooths used to collect tolls but instead uses radio frequency identification technology and video cameras to collect tolls. I have the following comments about this system of toll collecting.

How do you collect tolls from an out of state driver or trucker that lives some distance away from Oregon and Washington? You send a bill such as \$2.00 to these individuals. They then throw the bill away in the trash and do not pay it. How are you going to make them pay for this bill? The administrative staff cost to collect the bill more than the toll fee. Highway staff spending thousands of dollars a year to collect out of state toll bills. You could threaten to pull their vehicle registration or driver licenses but you need agreements from all 50 states to do this. This effort would require considerable staff expense. You would need a hearing process to make someone pay.

How would you penalize Oregon and Washington drivers for nonpayment?

I have traveled to Chicago metropolitan on business trips. Chicago has an extensive system of tollbooths to collect tolls from drivers. The tollbooths located on freeway exits and entrance ramps. Drivers can get change to pay the toll. You have less toll evasion but higher staff costs to operate the booths. Vehicles stop before entering freeways because of ramp signal lights. You use the ramp system to collect tolls while drivers wait to get on the freeway. From my perspective, I see no evidence that Chicago's toll system reduces traffic congestion.

C. The use of electronic tolls raises privacy issues or questions.

Who will have access to tollbooth records such as marketers, law enforcement, auto insurance companies, Internal Revenue Service, and other commercial organizations? Does the commuter have access to their toll records including video record if a dispute on payment occurs and have any say how these records are distributed?

Will State of Oregon and Washington governments use this tollbooth information other than gathering statistical information and toll enforcement for other purposes such as tax collections, tracking criminal suspects, enforce child support payments, complying with court subpoenas, and so fourth?

The Privacy Clearing House web site has posted article titled Privacy Today: A Review of Current Issues updated April 2008. about transfer of electronic data to various government databases. In article 6 Data Profiling, the authors talk about electronic transponders used for tollbooths where the data records a specific time and place of your transaction. This data shared with comprehensive databases that employers, law enforcement, and information broker industry. The article provides two examples where data profiling can cause harm.

My comment on this issue, if tolls are necessary, I prefer the old fashion tollbooth or buy a monthly or yearly pass rather than installing an electronic transponder system.

D. Lower income commuters who must drive a vehicle to work and unable to use public transportation are more affected than higher income commuters.

E. Some alternatives to bridge tolls are regional income taxes or sales taxes. A small charge tacked on to vehicle registrations and driver license fees. Small portion of traffic ticket fines allocated to the bridge payments. Utility bills have a small charge for the bridge construction.

6. Vancouver Light Rail

A. I prefer a light rail with minimum impact on downtown Vancouver businesses. In long term, I think rail planners should consider routes that allow eventual expansion to the C-Tran 99th Street Transit Center, Fishers Landing Transit Center, and Salmon Creek Transit Center. Furthermore, a light rail line should service areas were light rail benefits

the most businesses, commuters, schools, and other organizations. Traffic congestion has no affect on light rail service and good supplement to express bus system.

B. Any light rail system into Vancouver needs to address the crime, security, and fare evasion issues.

C. Occasionally, I ride a C-Tran to the Delta Park light rail station to ride a Max to downtown Portland. I never experienced any problems with the light rail.

7. Miscellaneous Comments:

A. On Vancouver side of project, I noticed in planning map a large bridge pier in vicinity of the Burlington Northern railroad. What steps bridge designers plan to use to prevent soil disturbances from damaging the rail bed and tracks?

I hope these comments are useful to you and your staff.

Sincerely Yours,

Harvey Schowe



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