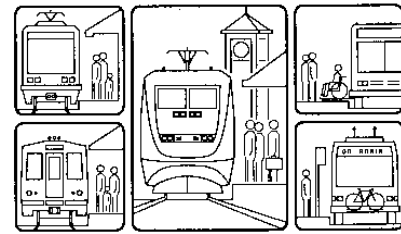


Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Memorandum

Date: Jan. 2, 2007
To: Columbia River Crossing Task Force
From: Jim Howell
Subject: Response to Nov. 27, 2006 Memorandum from staff

The Memorandum of November 27, 2006 to the Columbia River Task Force from Doug Ficco and John Osborn regarding Jim Howell's Proposal contains significant inaccuracies and omissions. In addition, the memo contains conclusions for which they provide no evidence. Last, but not least, going into the EIS with only two variants of the same high-cost freeway bridge proposal not only does a disservice to informed decision-making, but may not meet NEPA requirements for a range of alternatives.

The description of our proposed concept in the second paragraph indicated that the two-lane roadway extends south to Marine Drive. This is incorrect. We proposed in our revised version that it not connect to Marine Drive, but continue under Marine Drive to connect to Expo Road via a short road extension next to the Expo MAX Station. The last sentence in the fifth paragraph is also incorrect. We are not proposing the creation of "a new intersection just west of the interchange".

These obvious errors are a clear indication that the CRC staff failed to review our latest version with any diligence. Their review of our initial proposal was equally perfunctory.

Staff also failed to mention or, we suspect, analyze our proposed addition of a "truck only" bypass lane from Marine Drive and MLK Blvd. to I-5 north. We recommended that, unlike the general traffic lane, this lane should not be metered. This can be achieved by adding a ninth travel lane to the Portland Harbor Bridge by reassigning the lane currently used for bicycles and pedestrians. Bike and foot traffic would be relocated to the new bridge.

In addition, we recommended adding another lane to the SB off-ramp to Marine Drive and increasing the capacity of the Marine Drive Signal with additional turn lanes.

Our proposal **does** meet the project's Purpose and Needs.

It will significantly reduce vehicle travel demand and congestion. A new ten to twelve lane mega-bridge will do neither because it will induce more traffic, creating serious additional downstream congestion.

Our proposal extends light rail to Vancouver. It also replaces five congestion-causing ramps with two more efficient ones that will increase through capacity to match the rest of the

freeway. The light rail has far more capacity for commuters than I-5. What must occur to take advantage of this capacity is the development of an effective multi-destinational feeder bus system in Clark County and Portland's metro area. This type of feeder service has never been proposed or analyzed by any regional planning organization. An analysis of this option would have shown a significant difference in the outcome of the travel forecasting for this project. This type of system provides reduced travel time between many dispersed destinations, making public transit a more viable alternative for many more commuters.

Over time, the deployment of a truly multi-destinational transit system would also encourage the development of more compact and sustainable communities.

Travel forecasts are not always correct. The 1973 I-80 N Environmental Study for the proposed Mt. Hood Freeway stated that it would be carrying over 130,000 vehicles a day by 1990. The freeway was never built and, in 1982, TriMet established a grid bus system on the eastside that provided the essential feeder connections to the MAX Line when it opened in 1986, making it an instant success. Now, MAX carries more peak hour passengers than could be accommodated on an additional lane on I-84 and has the latent capacity of at least three more lanes in each direction.

Forecasting mistakes continue to be made, even with more sophisticated software and computers, because of similar wrong assumptions. If we have the wisdom to provide an effective bi-state transit system, the existing interstate bridges will never have to carry the currently projected 180,000 vehicles a day by 2020, just as the Mt. Hood Freeway never carried the 130,000 vehicles a day that were projected for 1990.

It will improve freight movement on I-5 by attracting commuter traffic to an effective public transit system. This leaves more space for trucks. In addition, the proposed ramp improvements mentioned above and in the original proposal improve truck access to and from I-5.

It will address many of the known safety issues associated with the river crossing and adjacent interchanges by removing the five substandard ramps and replacing them with two new ones. The staff memo states "...the proposed configuration of the freeway ramps on Hayden Island would exacerbate the congestion and safety problems for both the northbound and southbound weaving areas between Hayden Island and Marine Drive when compared with the existing ramp configuration." We strongly disagree with this statement and challenge staff to provide the engineering analysis of this configuration they used to arrive at this conclusion and submit it for an independent professional review. Furthermore, the staff should provide their analysis of the effect on safety and capacity of reducing the posted speed to 45 mph.

It will address the seismic vulnerability of the river crossing by providing new earthquake-resistant multi-modal bridges across the Columbia River and the Portland Harbor. The freeway bridges would not be changed or seismically upgraded but, in the event of a large earthquake, the local bridge with light rail would be a more effective river

crossing alternative. The freeway system in general would probably become dysfunctional because of its many vulnerable overpasses and bridges.

Furthermore, our proposal would replace the ancient, extremely vulnerable, railroad swing span with a new seismically stable lift span. Keeping the railroads in operation during a disaster is arguably more important to commerce than the freeway.

Although the memo did not mention bridge lifts, the prevailing assumption is that another bridge, with an opening span, as we have proposed, would be unacceptable because it would interfere with light rail operation.

Replacing the railroad bridge swing span with a lift span, aligned with the "hump" of the existing freeway bridges and the "hump" of a new multi-modal bridge, eliminates the need to open these bridges for all barge traffic at any time. The only time they would have to be opened is for the occasional high-mast sailboat or construction crane. Openings could be scheduled when light rail is not operating.

In addition, the visual impact of a high bridge over the railroad embankment in downtown Vancouver would be extreme. Views upriver to Mt. Hood would probably be blocked from the buildings in the redeveloping heart of Vancouver around Ester Short Park.

We posit that the Columbia River Crossing Task Force has a fiduciary responsibility to include, in the environmental impact phase of this project, an alternative with lower impacts and costs than replacement bridge alternatives alone. In addition, we question if having only two variants of the same new, high I-5 bridge proposal as the only build alternatives in the EIS will satisfy NEPA requirements. Whether the high capacity transit in the corridor is Light Rail or Bus Rapid Transit is a pretty minor issue, if both are built in the context of a parallel \$1-2 billion freeway bridge.

The maxim "we can't build our way out of congestion" is becoming an accepted principle, at least among planners and decisionmakers in this region. Yet the only proposal on the table at the moment is an attempt to address congestion by building increased freeway capacity, in direct contradiction to this principle. The Multi-modal Bridge provides a viable alternative more in keeping with this principle and should be carried forward in the EIS.

Attachments:

- 11-27-06 Memo to: Columbia River Crossing Task Force From: Doug Ficco and John Osborn
- 11-29-06 Memo To: Columbia river Crossing Task Force From: Jim Howell
- Multi-modal Bridge Option Site Plan. Jim Howell, 11-08-06