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AORTA's Position on The Columbia River Crossing Project

AORTA's position is: **That to consider only one alternative for further analysis in a federally funded project of this magnitude is irresponsible and possibly illegal under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).**

The current proposal to build a $2 – $6 billion 10-lane freeway replacement bridge with a transit-way should be only one of several alternatives considered for further analysis.

Further analysis of alternatives that would not require the demolition of the existing bridges but would address the projects stated needs for safety, freight movement, congestion control, transit, bike/pedestrian access and river crossing vulnerability from a major earthquake, in a less costly and environmentally damaging ways should be pursued.

Solutions lie not in adding capacity to the freeway but in providing viable alternatives to it. Unfortunately, freeway planners and engineers are leading this study. A study that has already cost the taxpayers over $10 million and will cost $60 million more before it is finished.

The finished product will be a lone proposal for a massive freeway bridge with a maze of ramps, viaducts and overpasses towering over downtown Vancouver, Hayden Island and Marine Drive with minor appendages for transit, bikes and pedestrians.

A major bottleneck is Hayden Island. It has been a captive of the freeway ever since the freeway was built. It is obvious that it would become intolerably congested at this location since no other access has ever been provided to this growing Portland neighborhood.

Smaller scale bridges for light rail and local traffic connecting Hayden Island to Vancouver and the rest of Portland would greatly reduce demand for freeway access.

If these bridges had the same profile and were adjacent to the existing bridges they would be far less costly and have minimum adverse impact on existing development. The one over Columbia River could also provide separate lanes for southbound SR 14 traffic so it could merge onto I-5 south of the river, eliminating a major bottleneck at the north end of the existing bridges. Hayden Island ramps

could then be reconfigured to allow smoother less disruptive through traffic flow on the main stem of the freeway.

These bridges, built to modern seismic standards, would provide emergency local access and public transportation in the event of a major earthquake. An event that could interrupt all freeway traffic in the metropolitan area because of the numerous vulnerable structures on the freeway system. Other non-freeway projects could also provide transportation redundancy in the event of an earthquake and at the same time improve safety, increase reliability, and reduce congestion on the freeway.

For example, replacing the old vulnerable swing span on the railroad bridge with a structurally superior and longer lift span nearer the center of the river would allow tugs pulling barges to go safely under the high point or "hump" of the freeway bridges at all times. This would virtually eliminate disruptive freeway bridge lifts. Under 8% (less than one vessel a week) would require a highway bridge lift and this could be scheduled late at night when freeway traffic is low and light rail is not operating.

A more systemic approach for handling freight could reduce truck traffic on I-5 as well as provide better truck access to it.

A 2003 I-5 Rail Capacity Study concluded that a relatively small investment in rail improvements, compared to a new freeway bridge, could significantly reduce future truck congestion on the freeway. A proposal to consider building an additional vehicle bridge connecting Marine Drive, West Hayden Island and the Port of Vancouver as well as a proposal to improve truck access at the existing Marine Drive Interchange with an exclusive truck lane have been suggested but not fully vetted.

Until all of these alternatives are fully analyzed by impartial professionals in the fields of public transportation, railroads and maritime transportation, not biased toward highway only solutions, can the most cost effective, energy efficient and environmentally benign solution be developed. Only then can a truly informed decision by local, state and federal officials be made on what course of action to take.