

Five Questions Concerning the I-5 Mega-Bridge Proposal and Its Proponents

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The answers ought to be disturbing to all who care about the future of our metropolitan area and state:

- 1) Did they exhaustively look at all the viable solutions and combination of solutions before concluding the 10-12 lane freeway bridge is the only one that satisfies all the needs for the crossing? Have they really been open to other ideas besides a highway-oriented solution?

ANSWER: NO, they did not exhaustively study all viable solutions. They tout that they "considered" 37 options, but fail to mention that they often looked at the options in isolation (i.e. did not attempt to bundle various solutions so as to address all their objectives). The record is full of examples of the CRC Task Force staff summarily rejecting perfectly viable proposals, either because the proposed solution component didn't solve all the problems or for blantly specious reasons. As an examples, consider the interchanges between CRC staff and AORTA (Assn. of Oregon Ral & Transit Advocates) concerning the latter's 11/8/06 proposal that would have retained the existing bridges for the freeway, improved interchanges and addressed navigational safety and conflicts or the clear request of the Metro Council on 2/22/07 to carry forward an alternative that had many similar features as the AORTA alternative. See <http://www.smarterbridge.org/?q=node/25>

- 2) Have they properly addressed the issues of increased travel and sprawl induced by the significant extra capacity they propose for this 5-mile stretch of I-5?

ANSWER: NO. The DEIS does not really address those issues and other staff responses minimizing those potential impacts defy decades of empirical evidence that increased road capacity encourages more and longer auto trips and increases sprawl.

- 3) Are they providing the public and decision-makers the kind of information and sufficient amount of time to make an informed decision about how to address the problems at and near the Columbia crossing?

ANSWER: NO. Proponents falsely claim that decision-makers must choose only between the five options currently proposed and are implying that a decision has to be made by August 2008 or the region will miss out on a 6-year federal funding cycle. The truth is that decision-makers are allowed by federal law to combine any of the elements of the alternatives presented in the DEIS. The August 2008 deadline is for application for federal funds for the transit component only and that cycle is yearly. We will NOT lose out for six years, if we take our time to make a good decision.

- 4) Do their proposals meet adopted policies in both Oregon and Washington to massively reduce Vehicle-miles Traveled (VMT) and Greenhouse Gas production?

ANSWER: NO. By the use of tolling and high capacity transit, their models show a smaller increase in VMT than the No Build option. However, the policies call for drastic overall REDUCTION in VMT, not merely slowing the growth of VMT.

- 5) Does their forecast of future demand properly take into account recent trends of rapidly rising fuel prices, notable decreases in driving and significant increases in transit and alternative transportation use?

ANSWER: NO. Their modeling did not make allowances for this, because such considerations were not included in the assumptions used in doing the modeling. The result: the capacity needs were significantly over-estimated and thus, the solutions heavily tilted toward freeway expansion.

Despite the tens of millions already spent on planning this project, the work has been biased toward a big bridge solution from the start and thus is neither complete nor has it resulted in a credible, transparent decision process. No one denies that the current Columbia crossing suffers from major mobility and safety problems that affect all the modes, which need to be addressed. However, the problems aren't just a matter of improving freeway throughput. The problems stem primarily from a combination of inadequate parallel local traffic facilities, too much peak commuter traffic, lack of competitive transit options and dangerous misalignment of bridge openings between the I-5 bridges and the nearby railroad bridge.

There is no viable alternative among those developed for the DEIS that meets this region and state's fiscal, growth management, social justice and environmental objectives. The package of alternatives needs to be sent back to committee for it to include an option that meets all those objectives.