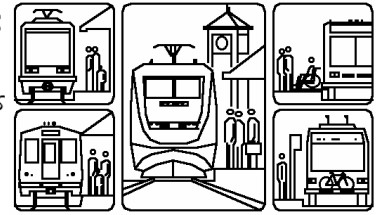


# Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Testimony by Fred Nussbaum on Behalf of AORTA  
at the Columbia River Taskforce 6/24/08

**This is your last chance to turn around a runaway project; the last chance to leave a legacy of a real, leading edge, “green” transportation solution that can actually be implemented.**

As currently conceived, **this project will fail**: under its own financial weight. And there is a high risk of successful legal challenge.

**Your staff has not been subtle about their aim to build a big freeway bridge.** Besides veiled threats to withdraw their agencies’ support, if a no big bridge alternative was chosen (e.g. 3/15/07 Strickler Memo re: A+ Alternative), **they have misled you into a faulty process, which has resulted in a severely flawed DEIS.**

The fact that you are only getting **conditional support** for the Supplemental Bridge with light rail option from respected bodies **should be a red flag**. Metro, Planning Commission, Sustainable Development Commission, and the City of Portland all raise concerns that need to be addressed and can not be addressed, except by more study **before the LPA is chosen**.

**Stop this headlong rush into this untenable solution from the past.** We need to take a breath and **develop a Supplemental DEIS** that provides one or more **affordable options that do not include a 12-lane freeway bridge and are truly “green.”**

Consider some of the **ways you’ve been misled** to arrive at this point:

- **The mid-August deadline:** Staff’s implication that missing the mid-August 2008 deadline will set the region back six years for obtaining federal funding is patently false. The August deadline is merely an annual deadline for application for FTA New Starts funding. The region would only “lose” at most one year for funding the transit component of the CRC. No evidence has been provided that the Milwaukie Light Rail project (which plans to file by this year’s deadline) will suffer if light rail across the Columbia is funded later. As to this region missing the 6-year federal Transportation Reauthorization cycle – that is pure fabrication. Congress has yet to begin in earnest on that bill, which won’t be finalized until well into 2009. **You are being unnecessarily rushed into a premature decision.**
- **The projected need:** it has repeatedly been pointed out the 40% projected increase in traffic in the next 20 years is an inflated number that flies in the face of both:
  - 1) Recent trends (decreases in driving due to a likely lasting, steep fuel price rise) and
  - 2) Adopted public policies to drastically reduce VMT to combat climate change and reduce sprawl.**This inflated traffic target seems to have been chosen to try to ensure that only alternatives that increase freeway capacity make the grade.**
- **Ability to toll existing facilities:** originally, CRC staff insisted that federal law prohibited tolling of existing interstate highway facilities. Later they admitted that this was an

erroneous assertion. **However, many people who heard the erroneous statement still believe that it is true.**

- **Not meeting requirements for full range of alternatives:** until the Task Force demanded a “Fourth Alternative,” staff maintained that the two flavors of the big bridge alternative (besides the required No Build) were sufficient to satisfy NEPA requirements. Since the Supplemental Bridge (product of the “Fourth Alternative” process) ended up effectively being a *half-size* big bridge, **this narrow range of alternatives is still at risk of a NEPA challenge for insufficient breadth.**
- **Improperly narrow definition of “I-5 Corridor”:** staff has summarily and wrongly dismissed a number of viable, proposed solution components parallel to I-5 as being “outside the I-5 Corridor.” For example, ***CRC Draft Components Step A Screening Report* p. 82– 5.3.4.6 RC-19 Arterial Crossing without I-5 Improvements**) faulted a new arterial crossing adjacent to the existing I-5 bridges for being “outside of the I-5 corridor” and therefore not providing added corridor capacity. This totally ignores the fact that such a parallel bridge could have diverted some, if not all, of the 28% of the I-5 bridge traffic their studies show as purely within BIA traffic – traffic that is a major contributor to congestion and causes most of the turbulence in the BIA.

**Please be a force of reason. Put the brakes on this project and ask for a Supplemental DEIS that:**

- 1. Addresses the issues raised by Metro, Planning Commission, Sustainable Development Commission, and the City of Portland.**
- 2. Provides one or more affordable options that do not include a 12-lane freeway bridge and are truly “green.”**

*Postscript:* The problem you have been confronting is very similar to that faced by sewer agencies. Their congestion is that they have regular overflow situations, where sewage improperly ends up in waterways. To combat the situation, they could just vastly increase their treatment facility capacity at tremendous cost. Instead, most correctly identify that they have two major input streams: black water and surface runoff. Black water is their priority stream and has to be fully treated; surface runoff needs less treatment and can also be reduced by a variety of methods. What forward looking cities, like Portland have done is to separate one stream from the other and have avoided major increases in treatment capacity.

Your priority stream is long distance commerce. Your surface runoff is the 25-32% local traffic clogging the freeway. Moving that local traffic off I-5 onto a parallel facility will reduce the capacity deficit to level that HCT, improved transit, TDM and tolling can easily address. This solution does not preclude interchange changes, seismic upgrades, etc. that will still involve considerable highway costs and thus the involvement of the state DOTs.

Your current options all are like blindly only adding high cost sewage treatment capacity.