From: Jim Howell

To: Draft EIS Feedback;

CC:

Subject: comments for the record

Date: Tuesday, July 01, 2008 9:33:31 PM

Attachments: Testimony to Planning Commission.doc
Testimony by Jim Howell before the Metro Council June 5[1].doc
Testimony on the CRC by Jim Howell 5.doc
Testimony to Portland City Council.doc

Please include the attached.

Draft Testimony to the Planning Commission (4-28-08)

The primary purpose of this Columbia River Crossing project as proposed by WDOT and ODOT is to expand a five mile long section of the I-5 freeway to accommodate a huge projected traffic demand that will greatly increase oil dependence, greenhouse gas pollution and urban sprawl.

It is not just a new 8 to 12 lane bridge across the Columbia River. It also includes additional freeway lanes and rebuilding six interchanges to accommodate a projected 40% increase in traffic demand over the next 30 years while ignoring recent laws passed in Oregon and Washington requiring vehicle miles travel per capita to be reduced by 35% during the same time period.

During the duration of the CRC Study, several low-cost non-freeway solutions to the river crossing problems were presented and rejected, primarily because they could not accommodate the projected traffic growth on the freeway.

Now the CRC staff is claiming that traffic demand can be greatly reduced to meet the requirements of the new laws by providing light rail, bike facilities and tolls on the new bridge.

Does it then not seem prudent to re-examine these rejected low-cost non-freeway solutions in light of these new laws? Do they address the other objectives of the project such as safety, freight, ramp congestion, local access, and lifts and seismic strength of the existing bridges?

If they do, whey would anyone approve the expenditure of $4 billion on this massive freeway project?

Jim Howell
3325 NE 45th Avenue
Portland, OR 97213 jimhowell89@hotmail.com

Testimony by Jim Howell before the Metro Council June 5, 2008
On the Columbia River Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Statement

If you are required to make a choice among the five alternatives, the only responsible choice is the “No Build”.

The foundation of this massive freeway project is the alleged need to accommodate projected future traffic demand. This foundation is crumbling as we speak.

Staff’s projections of a 70% increase in motor freight demand and a 40% increase in commuter demand by 2030 is totally unrealistic, given the government’s commitment to reduce greenhouse emissions and the escalating cost of oil. It is quite possible that in 2030 the freeway will have fewer vehicles than today.

Voting “No Build” does not mean that nothing should be done. There are many ways to accommodate future demand without throwing in excess of four billion dollars at a project to rebuild five miles of freeway and seven interchanges, to construct a 12 lane megastructure over the Columbia River and Hayden Island, and to spend over $150 million to demolish three structurally sound bridges.

Expanding public transportation service on both sides of the river is a no-brainer, as is extending the MAX Yellow line to Vancouver. Providing non-freeway local vehicle access and first class bike and pedestrian connections to Hayden Island from both sides of the river is also a no-brainer.

Over the past three years, proposals have been made for simple low cost modifications to some of the freeway ramps. These proposals would have freed up the outer lanes on the existing bridges to function as through lanes, but were rejected by staff because they would not accommodate their inflated demand projections. These options should be reevaluated in light of reduced demand.

An I-5 Rail Capacity Study, completed In 2003 as part of the Portland / Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership, recommended about a dozen rail projects, estimated to cost about $300 million, that would be required to relieve severe freight congestion in this corridor. The study states “Train delay ratios in this corridor already approach levels experienced in much larger, denser corridors such as those within the Chicago area”. Unfortunately the study did not seriously address commuter rail options.

Unfortunately, proposals for rail improvements were put on the back burner. About three years ago the multi-modal Trade Partnership was taken over, some would say “hijacked”, by the Washington and Oregon DOTs. They ignored the “elephant in the room”, the Burlington Northern / Santa Fe Railroad, and turned what was a multi-modal effort into a huge freeway project.

The rail bridge, built in 1908, serves the only rail corridor on the west coast between Mexico and Canada. It is a more critical link than I-5 in the event of a major earthquake. Another freeway bridge (I-205) is just five miles east, but the next rail crossing is a single track bridge 90 miles upriver east of The Dalles.

Incidentally, if the rail bridge were upgraded to withstand a major earthquake and the ancient swing span replaced with a lift span better aligned with the “hump” in the freeway bridge, most highway bridge openings would be eliminated. The 2003 Rail Capacity Study recommends that planners “Explore means to facilitate the operation of the BNSF Columbia River Bridge by seeking funding for the replacement of the existing swing span with a lift span located closer to the center of the river channel”.

As the cost of diesel fuel continues to rise, more freight will move from trucks to rail. Trains are far more energy-efficient than trucks and can be powered on electricity as well as diesel.

Unfortunately, in the course of studying freight rail capacity issues, no one thought to ask the BNSF Railroad what additional track improvements would be needed and what would be their cost to accommodate commuter rail service between Portland and Vancouver.

For example, two four-car commuter trains shuttling between Vancouver Station and Union Station during peak hours could carry over 2,400 commuters an hour, in seated comfort, the equivalent capacity of another freeway lane filled with sovs. The trip would be less than 15 minutes long, more reliable, more energy efficient and less costly to operate than express buses on the freeway.

In conclusion, a cost-benefit analysis of a mix of light rail to Vancouver, improved bus service, local access to Hayden Island, ramp modifications, and heavy rail improvements for freight and passengers should be conducted before this massive and expensive freeway expansion project is given the green light.

Jim Howell
3325 NE 45th Avenue
Portland, OR 97213
Jimhowell89@hotmail.com

.

Testimony on the CRC DEIS by Jim Howell 5-29-08

If one were required to make a choice among the five alternatives, the only responsible choice would be the “No Build”.

This does not mean that nothing should be done. Clearly, there is severe congestion on the freeway, especially southbound in the AM and northbound in the PM. The current proposal to build more lanes will not solve the problem because, in the long, it will only attract more traffic.

There are many ways to relieve this bottleneck without throwing over $4 billion dollars to rebuild five mile of freeway and 7 interchanges, construct a 12 lane mega structure over the Columbia River and Hayden Island and spend over $150 million to demolish three structurally sound bridges.

This project grew out of an earlier study by many jurisdictions called the Portland / Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership that recommended an inclusive multi-modal approach to solving the transportation problems in the corridor.

About three years ago this process was taken over, some would say “hijacked”, by the Washington and Oregon DOTs and turned into a huge freeway project with a condescending nod toward transit, bikes and pedestrians.

It seems that everyone has failed to acknowledge the “elephant in the room” located about one mile downstream. It is the BNSF Railroad. The rail bridge, built in 1908, serves the only rail corridor on the west coast between Mexico and Canada and is a more critical link in case of natural disaster than I-5. Another freeway bridge (I-205) is just 5 miles east but the next rail crossing is a single track bridge 90 miles up river east of The Dalles.

As the cost of diesel fuel continues to rise, more freight will move from trucks to rail. The 70% increase in truck traffic projected by CRC staff and used to justify this freeway project will not materialize. Trains are far more energy efficient than trucks and can be powered on electricity as well as diesel.

Capacity for freight and passengers on the railroads will have to be greatly increased to meet future demand and government will have to help pay for it.

An I-5 Rail Capacity Study was completed In 2003 that indicated that “Train delay ratios in this corridor already approach levels experienced in much larger, denser corridors such as those within the Chicago area”. The study recommended 10 projects costing about $170 million that should be done immediately that would greatly relieve some of this congestion. Very little has been done to date.

It also identified other improvements such as adding another main line across the river, replacing the antiquated swing span with a lift span, grade separating the North Portland junction and other improvements that would greatly facilitate freight and passenger service.

Incidentally, replacing the swing span with a lift span better aligned with the “hump” in the freeway bridge would eliminate most highway bridge openings.

The total cost of all of these rail improvements would be pocket change compared to the cost of the CRC project but could greatly relieve much of the freight and commuter traffic on the freeway.

Amtrak currently travels between Union Station and the Vancouver Station in 15 minutes, half the time it would take MAX, or buses on the freeway. Imagine what a couple of shuttle trains fed by C-Tran buses could do to relieve peak hour traffic on I-5.

Another low cost improvement would be a new bridge across the Portland Harbor to Hayden Island for local traffic, MAX, bikes and pedestrians. This would allow access to and from Hayden Island without getting on the freeway and would reduce congestion at the Denver Avenue and Harbor Drive interchanges.

The bike/ped. lane on the existing Harbor Bridge could be converted to another traffic lane allowing north-bound trucks to bypass general traffic queuing at the meter to get on the freeway.

If Vancouver would agree to a multi-modal bridge for local traffic, light rail, bikes, pedestrians and a southbound auxiliary lane for SR14 traffic, both on-ramps feeding traffic onto the existing bridges could be eliminated. This would allow these bridges to accommodate six actual through lanes of traffic like the rest of the freeway.

Jim Howell
3325 NE 45th Avenue
Portland, OR 97213
Jimhowell89@hotmail.com

.

DRAFT for 7-9-08 Hearing

June – 2008 Testimony to the Portland City Council by Jim Howell
On the Columbia River Crossing DEIS

I urge you to ask for a Supplemental DEIS on the Columbia River Crossing. Over the next 30 years, travel and shipping preferences will change because of escalating gas and diesel costs as a result of growing worldwide demand. This major shift in preference was not anticipated when the Purpose and Need for this project was written.

Commuters will shift from private cars to public transit, shippers will shift from trucks to rail and intercity travelers will shift from airplanes to trains. This nation's transportation system will begin to resemble the systems in the highly industrialized nations of Europe and Asia where oil consumption per capita is about one-half of what it is in the United States largely due to their superior rail and transit infrastructure.

Demand will require priorities to change in how to we spend public funds on our transportation infrastructure. Rail and transit will move to the top of the list. Roads will lose their dominant position at the public funding table that they have enjoyed for the past half-century.

As oil costs continue to rise, improved infrastructure for trains and public transit will become more critical in the Columbia Crossing influence area than I-5. The economical vitality of this region is at stake if the rail system cannot meet future shipping demand or if this vital north-south rail corridor is severed due to the loss of the Columbia River Bridge due to an earthquake or other natural or man caused disaster.

Although the original mandate for this project was to analyze all transportation modes, WDOT and ODOT focused primarily on the interstate freeway and ignored the railroad.

The railroads, while privately owned, will require massive amounts of public funding to expand their rail and bridge infrastructure to accommodate future freight and passenger demand. The notion that this is the responsibility of the private sector, not the public sector, is no longer valid.

The Washington and Oregon Departments of Transportation, as their name implies, are responsible for all modes of transportation, not just state and federal highways. In the past they have functioned primarily as highway departments with little funding, or interest, in other modes. This will have to change if both states are going to meet their greenhouse gas and VMT reduction goals.

An ideal place to start is this Columbia River Crossing project. If over four billion tax dollars are going to be spent, they should be spent in the most effective way possible. Unfortunately, in this project WDOT and ODOT failed to consider what rail improvements could do to reduce commuter and freight demand on the highway system. This should be required before any Locally Preferred Alternative is approved.

An I-5 Rail Capacity Study, completed In 2003 as part of the Portland / Vancouver I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership, recommended about a dozen rail projects, estimated to cost about $300 million, that would be required to relieve severe freight congestion in this corridor. The study states “Train delay ratios in this corridor already approach levels experienced in much larger, denser corridors such as those within the Chicago area”.

Unfortunately, in the course of studying freight rail capacity issues, no one thought to ask the BNSF Railroad what additional track improvements would be needed and what would be their cost to accommodate commuter rail service between Portland and Vancouver.

For example, two four-car commuter trains shuttling between Vancouver Station and Union Station during peak hours could carry over 2,400 commuters an hour, in seated comfort, the equivalent capacity of another freeway lane filled with sovs. The trip would be less than 15 minutes long, more reliable, more energy efficient and less costly to operate than express buses on the freeway.

If least cost planning is to play a significant roll in restoring this nation's infrastructure, voting for a $4.2 billion freeway expansion project is astep in the wrong direction.

Jim Howell
3325 NE 45th Avenue
Portland, OR 97213
503-284-7182
jimhowell89@hotmail.com