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Section: Draft Environmental Impact Statement
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Comment or Question:

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June 30, 2008

Mayor Royce Pollard
Vancouver City Council
City of Vancouver Representatives
Columbia River Crossing Staff

AIA Vancouver, the local component of the American Institute of Architects, represents the views of our member Architects and designers living and working in the community. We recognize the importance of the Columbia River Crossing Project (CRC) to the future economic vitality and transportation needs of the region. As designers of the built environment, we clearly understand the necessity to balance functionality, form, and budget, but we are also concerned with issues of livability, sustainability, and quality of design in our community. This project is far too significant to have a purely

“engineering” solution. The design guidelines which have been developed as part of the CRC process can help craft the appropriate solution, if they are used as intended.

AIA Vancouver supports the Draft EIS with the preferred Alternative No. 3, replacement bridge(s) with light rail, and we ask for your support as decision makers in the process to include the following additional considerations in the Final Report to ensure that the Crossing provides the greatest benefit to the communities it will serve and to future generations.

1. Community Economic Impact Study: we recommend that the Final Environmental Impact Statement include an economic analysis of the impact of the bridge on the City of Vancouver. That is, a study that answers key economic questions: Does the capacity of the bridge ensure the flow of commerce? Or does it encourage jobs and businesses to move to Portland? Does it ease congestion, or does it facilitate longer commuter trips and sprawl? The cost for the bridge will be split between Vancouver and Portland, but the split will be unequal. Vancouver has more miles of freeway improvements. Vancouver has four interchanges that require improvement; Portland has two. All four alternatives require three to five new transit stations in Vancouver. The crossing will directly and immediately affect Vancouver’s redeveloping downtown. And the majority of the tolling will come from Vancouver commuters. The City of Vancouver may have much to lose from more people commuting into Portland, to shop, work, and pay income tax. A study needs to be included to determine if the capacity of the Crossing is appropriate to ensure real economic benefit.

2. Sustainability: The Portland metropolitan area is known for being one of the “greenest” places in the country. The materials from the existing bridge must be recycled and re-used in a manner that serves to honor and educate. The opportunity to generate power should be included. What a shame it would be to have a Crossing that wastes the wind from the Gorge and the power of the Columbia River waters. What better way to symbolize the region than to have the vital link across the region be a showpiece of sustainability, perhaps a bridge that powers itself? The increased carbon emissions from additional trips should be offset by trees and landscaping planted along the Crossing and its interchanges. The water that runs off the bridge should be treated and returned to the river. We urge that these concepts of sustainability be included in the chosen alternative and be given a high priority that is not “value engineered” out of the final construction. We owe it to future generations.

3. Community Connection: the replacement bridge will be higher and significantly wider than the existing bridge. We need to ensure that the East and West sides of downtown Vancouver and Jantzen Beach/Hayden Island are not further divided by the Interstate. We need a

final design that pays special attention to the urban design of the areas under the bridge and ensures that connections over and under it are safe, pedestrian and bike friendly, and help to bind communities together rather than separate them. We request that the guidelines set forth by the Urban Design Advisory Groups and the CRCA be adopted.

4. Trip Reduction: we ask that the final design of the chosen alternative give at least equal importance to the goal of trip reduction as to the goal of increased capacity. The draft study includes bus or light rail and tolling to pay for the bridge. This may discourage single-occupancy vehicle use, but the Final Statement needs to study the effects of other options such as reduced tolls for car pools, express lanes, etc. We need to explore options that will not just provide, but actually encourage mass transit and set a goal for trip reduction.

5. Preferred Transit Terminus: AIA Vancouver supports the connection of mass transit into downtown Vancouver, but we are concerned about the scale of both options as they make their way through historic and very tiny neighborhoods. We are also concerned about the economic disruption to the fragile, still redeveloping downtown. We support the Kiggins Bowl terminus option that makes use of the existing I-5 right-of-way and generally routes through larger streets. We also ask that as the final design will likely be built in phases for budget considerations, that flexibility be left in the design for connection to a possible future streetcar system which is more appropriate in scale to the downtown neighborhoods. And very important to downtown Vancouver, we ask that the final design allow for Main Street to one day reconnect all the way to the river.

6. Design: The final design needs to make a statement about crossing such an important body of water and connecting communities in two different states. It needs to be designed as a whole system that recognizes that there are several different crossings, each with its own design criteria and identity. And each transportation experience, be it vehicular crossing, transit crossing, pedestrian overpass, bicycle underpass, needs to be carefully designed. The Urban Design Advisory Groups and the CRCA have been working on design guidelines to ensure that the new Crossing is more than just a freeway over the river. These guidelines need to be adopted into the Final EIS.

We thank the project committees for all their work on the draft EIS and again voice our support. We now ask that the above considerations be added to the Final Statement to ensure that the Columbia River Crossing reaches its full potential and achieves our highest goals for the future.

Sincerely,
Kalina J Kunert, President

AIA Vancouver