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June 30, 2008

Columbia River Crossing
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Comments on Draft Columbia River Crossing EIS

For me it all started in 1997 when ODOT and WSDOT announced that the northbound span of the I-5 Bridge would be closing for up to three weeks in order to repair the lift mechanism. The DOTs pulled out all the stops to reduce trips across the bridge. The success of this transportation demand management (TDM) effort was breath taking... there was no traffic congestion across the bridge despite a reduced number of lanes.

At the time I was the Transportation Coordinator at Boise Cascade Paper R&D on Swan Island. Over a third of our folks came from Clark county, so I got to work to get them alternatives to driving alone. C-Tran offered free vans for groups of 10 or more...we had one; also we partnered with other Swan Island businesses and got a free C-Tran bus as well; Swan Island had several. HOV lanes were stripped on both I-5 and I-205 in both directions; even commuter rail was set up between the Vancouver Amtrak station and Union Station in Portland.

The '97 I-5 bridge closure was a dramatic demonstration of what TDM can do when we really try. Sadly, since then almost every agency action by both Clark county and Metro has gone the other way. A valuable lesson appears to have been lost.

In January 1998 the Swan Island Transportation Committee was formed by a group of employees from several Swan Island businesses, including Freightliner. Our first project was to get direct C-Tran bus service to Swan Island. We worked out a deal with the agency with financial help from major Island businesses. C-Tran gave us bus passes for resale and leased us the buses...two AM trips and three PM trips. By October 2002 over 60 Clark county commuters were happily riding the C-Tran 191 across the I-5 bridge. The service was discontinued in 2003; C-Tran did not pick up the cost in the wake of the 2001-2 recession.

I was appointed to the Governors' I-5 Task Force in late 1999. About half way thru that process, the consultants reported that 1/3 of the trips across the I-5 bridges were local trips. I suggested that what we needed was a "Broadway Bridge." Later in April 2002,

the I-5 TF came within one vote (9-10 with Metro voting "No") of recommending an arterial bridge option for the DEIS; I was personally promised that such an alternative would be included. The CRC process has failed to keep this promise.

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The Task Force took the name “Trade Partnership” but generated neither data nor analysis of actual freight movement and economic impacts of various options. Even the approval of the Delta/Lombard project, widening I-5 southbound over the Columbia Slough, failed to note that this resulted in the removal of a virtual “Freight Only” add-lane off Columbia Blvd., the central artery of the Columbia Corridor industrial district.

Meanwhile, I was on the Interstate MAX Citizens Advisory Committee and helped push for a transfer friendly station design at the Delta Park/Vanport MAX station, where three bus bays were constructed within a stone’s throw of the MAX platform. These bus bays sat empty for three years after the opening of the Yellow Line, 2004-7, until finally C-Tran began some Limited and frequent service to Delta/Vanport. It still offers nothing down the I-5 corridor from either the 99th P&R or Salmon Creek to the MAX Line.

And then there were vanpools. After the ’97 bridge closure, ODOT kept the northbound HOV lanes on I-5 from Going Street to Marine Drive; this remains a powerful incentive for ridesharing and speeds transit at very low cost. But all other HOV lanes were removed, including a new lane constructed in Clark county between Main Street and 99th that was opened with an HOV lane. Clark county leadership demanded that WSDOT remove HOV designation in 2006, just as I was organizing five vanpools from Clark county to Swan Island. The removal cost our Battle Ground vanpool ten minutes on the southbound trip. Then, just as I got five vanpools going from Camas/Washougal, Orchards, Mill Plain, Battle Ground and Hazel Dell, the program was shifted from TriMet to Metro and subsidies were reduced. Only two vanpools are still running.

Over and over again, the TDM approach has been abandoned and/or undermined...C-Tran cut transit service to Swan Island and failed to link to MAX, HOV lanes were removed even where new capacity was provided in Clark county..., road capacity has been funded at the expense of freight movement, and data driven lower cost options to a massive new freeway bridge has been repeatedly pushed off the table.

Meanwhile on Swan Island, the Swan Island TMA working with area businesses keeps freight moving (2 SOVS=1Semi) by creating and promoting transportation options for Swan Island employees... increasing transit service, organizing vanpools and carpools, and improving bike access. And it works! Why isn’t this a model for solving our regional transportation challenges? And what is the saddest part of this record of failure? The CRC’s Big Bridge will undo in a day what we have been able to accomplish in 10 years on Swan Island.

Lenny Anderson,
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