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Columbia River Crossing

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Comments on the Columbia River Crossing DEIS

Summary:

- 1) We are strongly in favor of the bicycle facilities in the current plan: 26' wide on the west side of the transit bridge, 12' wide on the east side of the northbound bridge. These facilities should not be compromised under any circumstances.
- 2) We would like to see world-class bicycle and pedestrian connections from the bridge into the cities of Portland and Vancouver – specifically to extend the bicycle facilities south to Victory Blvd and north to the outer edge of the Vancouver downtown core.
- 3) The intersection design at I-5 and N. Marine Drive should be changed to allow easy travel by bicyclists on Marine Drive.
- 4) We would like to see bike/ped improvements made to the study area in several years in advance of bridge construction.
- 5) We would like to see stronger TDM measures implemented to encourage alternative modes of transportation.
- 6) We would like to see safety improvements made to to the existing bridge in advance of bridge construction.
- 7) We are concerned about the large number of motorized vehicle lanes on the bridge—this will add to the cost to the region and encourage car-based development in Clark County.
- 8) Consider extending Light Rail on Fourth Plain to the Vancouver Mall.

We are regular bicyclists and pedestrians who would like to see better connections from Vancouver to Portland. We believe that our community has much to gain by encouraging bicycle use, and the Interstate Bridge and North Portland have long been barriers to nonmotorized travel in the area.

We are concerned about increased car traffic, increased noise pollution, water pollution, air pollution, fossil fuel consumption, and loss of community, etc. from increased car traffic on I-5. We are also dissatisfied with the suburban sprawl in Clark County and would like to see more options made for travelers, such as bicycling, walking, or taking transit.

The CRC project s outlined in the DEIS required some additional consideration before it will meet our needs and the needs of Washington and Oregon--it is largely a road-based solution, with inadequate measures to promote densification in Clark County, encourage people to carpool, or enable people to have a terrific time riding ones' bike from Vancouver to Portland.

Our comments:

1) Wide Bike Route needed

Current (June 26, 2008) plans show a 26' wide bike/ped route on the west side of the transit bridge, and a 12' walking route on the east side of the Northbound bridge. We *strongly* support these two options, and encourage the design team to give them a high priority when possible project modifications are considered. Our predictions of the future demand for bicycle and pedestrian travel over the bridge suggest that these will be very well utilized, and the now-generous width will eventually be a very busy travel corridor.

2) Bike Route needs to extend through entire project area

The project study area stretches from Victory Blvd in Portland to 39th St. in Vancouver. The bicycle facilities, however, only go from N. Marine in Portland to 6th St. in Vancouver.

We appreciate the plans to create a world-class bike/ped facility on the bridge itself, but this needs to be matched by facilities of similar quality to actually connect Portland to Vancouver. As it is, there are no bicycle facilities between N. Marine Dr. and Victory Blvd in Portland, and the facilities are inadequate from N. Marine to Argyle St. in Portland and in the downtown core of Vancouver. When bicycling across the current I-5 bridge, many of the substandard facilities that make the route slow, dangerous and unappealing are in the connections from the core city grid to the bridge. The DEIS should ensure that a commuter-grade bicycle corridor is built through the entire length of the study area.

Specifically,

- i) Ensure that the bikeway crossed N. Marine in a tunnel or on a bridge. N. Marine has heavy truck traffic, requires long delays at crossing signals, and is terrible place to wait for a crossing signal.
- ii) Create a wide, off-street bike facility from N. Marine to Victory Blvd, with a direct connection (both northbound and southbound) to Victory Blvd. If this is not possible, ensure that good bike lanes are built on Expo Blvd, wide enough for two bikes side by side to allow families to travel together and fast bikes to pass slow ones.
- iii) Create a second wide, off street bike facility from N. Marine to Delta Park.
- iv) Improve bike lanes on Interstate Ave from Victory Blvd to Argyle St. These should have been improved as part of the Delta Park I-5 improvements, but were not. They are treacherous, rough, narrow. The Schmeer Rd. intersection should be reconfigured to a standard T shape.
- v) Improve the SR 99E route (MLK Jr. Blvd). Widen bike lanes by reducing excess width in outside vehicle lanes (currently 17' -- should be reduced to 12'). Reconfigure the intersections along the route--remove the Gertz Rd. turnouts and connect create a separate bikeway alongside MLK from N. Union Ct. (Delta Park) to Vancouver Ave, thus creating a high quality, contiguous bike route from the Vancouver-Williams couplet in Portland through to the Marine Way interchange.
- vi) Connect the bike route on the bridge to the outer edge of downtown. Commuters driving on the freeway don't need to go through downtown to get on the bridge, and commuters riding bike shouldn't either. The easiest way would probably to make a direct flyover connection to E. 5th St. or Evergreen Blvd east of I-5, allowing suburban commuters to come in on Fort Vancouver Way or Evergreen Blvd and make a direct connection onto the bridge. This would save about 5 minutes of travel time and help make bicycle commuting more competitive.
- vii) Ensure improvements are made to downtown Vancouver to enable smooth, direct access from the bridge onto high quality, direct bike routes. If Northbound bicyclists must divert a block to the east or west at 6th St., ensure that road geometry is done for a 25 mph design speed.

viii) Good quality, commuter-grade bike routes should be extended from downtown Vancouver to the north end of the study area at 39th St. They should be wide enough for 2 bikes to travel side by side, travel at 25 mph, and be on streets without heavy car traffic.

3) Marine Drive/I-5 interchange

The diagrams show a "Single Point Urban Interchange" design. These can be treacherous for bicyclists and pedestrians. We would suggest that to mitigate this problem, the turnout design speeds be kept low-i.e. 20 mph, so that bicyclists and motorized vehicles can negotiate the "scissors area" or "throat area" at comparable speeds. Right turning traffic should be diverted into a right-turn lane in advance of the turnout, crossing a colored bike lane segment, rather than leave the roadway in a freeway-style exit. Traffic exiting the freeway and making a right hand turn must have a stop sign where it meets Marine Dr. (For a good example of this, see the eastbound ramp from SR 500 to southbound Andresen Rd. in Vancouver).

Due to the heavy truck traffic on Marine Dr., we suggest that the bike lanes through the study area be 8 - 10' wide to provide a wide margin of error for cyclists.

This is consistent with Portland's bicycle-friendly street policies.

4) Bike/Ped improvements prior to and during bridge construction

Improving bike/ped connections *before* construction begins will help mitigate highway congestion in two ways

- a) develop a stronger tradition of Vancouver-Portland bicycling, and
- b) mitigate the disincentives caused by diversions/delays on the bridge during construction.

The Vancouver-Portland bicycling or walking experience is substandard in many ways. The bridge itself is only a small component of the problem, which includes:

- substandard bikeway/sidewalk design
- obstacles placed in bikeway
- poor maintenance of bikeway surface
- limited directional signage
- lack of coordination between jurisdictions for overall maintenance and improvements.

Construction of a new bridge and rebuilding the I-5 corridor should be preceded by mitigation that will *enhance* the walking and bicycling experience.

a) develop a stronger tradition of Vancouver-Portland bicycling

We would encourage the following improvements be made *well in advance* of bridge construction.

While this list is long, the entire project cost would only be (at most) a couple million dollars, and, if successful, divert several hundred bridge trips from car to bike (based on the experience of approach improvements to the Willamette bridges in downtown Portland).

- i) Widen the sidewalk approaches at the Vancouver end of the interstate bridge, improve the geometry of the path/street interchanges.
- ii) Replace all of the sidewalks in the Hayden Island interchange, make them standard widths with a 25 mph design speed, superelevation, and appropriate signage.
- iii) Install a bicycle signal at the N. Hayden Is. Dr. to allow bicyclists direct access across the interchange.
- iv) Widen and otherwise improve the crossing at N. Tomahawk Island Dr.
- v) Widen the path where it goes under the Marine Dr. to NB I-5 onramp to allow for safer 2-way travel through the S curve.

- vi) Install wider-radius turns in the various bicycle-bicycle intersections in the Marine Dr. interchange.
- vii) Improve the crossing of the NB I-5 exit onto N. Marine Way to convey to motorists that bicyclists have the right of way and allow bicyclists to traverse the intersection at 15 mph.
- viii) Resurface the roadway through Delta Park.
- ix) Add appropriate channelization for a formal bicycle intersection at Delta Park Rd. and Victory Road. Stripe hashes through the intersection to allow bicyclists to enter and exit Delta Park when cars are queued up waiting to go north on I-5.
- x) Restripe Interstate Blvd and MLK Blvd with a wider bike lane (8' minimum) and reduce width of outside vehicle lane (currently 16' - 17').
- xi) Make modifications to MLK Blvd as outlined in section 2.
- xii) Install uniform, distinctive signage throughout the project area. Place kiosks with maps at key junction points on the route to ensure that users will not get lost for more than one segment of their journey.
- xiii) Facilitate coordination between the various entities that control different portions of the corridor to work together on improvements, including the City of Vancouver, Portland DoT, Portland Parks, Tri-Met, and ODoT.
- xiv) Identify and relocate unnecessary obstructions along the route, such as sign posts, bridge gates, and widen the bike lane into the driving lane where it is pinched off by concrete curbs or guardrails.

b) mitigate the disincentives caused by diversions/delays on the bridge during construction.

- i) We *strongly* urge you to leave both paths open on the bridge. For as many months as possible, or as many hours of every day as possible. Putting all foot and bike traffic onto the east sidewalk would make the journey much worse.
- ii) Run a shuttle for bikes and peds during construction, preferably from downtown Vancouver to the Delta Park MAX station. Run it all day on 15 minute headways.
- iii) Promote bicycling and walking as an attractive alternative to the congested freeway.

5) Stronger TDM measures before, during and after construction.

The TDM measures proposed in the DEIS (page S-28) are not very ambitious. Other jurisdictions, such as Salt Lake City in the 1990s, successfully reduced traffic by nearly 50% during reconstruction of I-15. More aggressive measures could eliminate much of the congestion we experience now, and have long-term improvements to the I-5 corridor. Possible ideas include:

- i) Express buses from Vancouver to the Delta Park MAX station.
- ii) Buses-only shoulders throughout the project area. Nearly all of the delay at the interstate bridge is incurred while *approaching* the bridge rather than on the bridge itself. Allowing buses to use shoulders, where feasible, would make transit much faster and more predictable. (This is widespread and extremely successful in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area).
- iii) We like the "provide bicycles" for low-income commuters suggestion buried on page 3-179.
- iv) Aggressive promotion of carpooling.
- v) Improved bike access to Delta Park MAX.
- vi) Advertising for transit, walking and bicycling throughout Clark County.
- vii) Many other measures are available in the TDM literature.

6) Corridor improvements prior to bridge construction.

In summary pages 3-4 - 3-6, the DEIS makes compelling arguments that the existing freeway is substandard and dangerous. While a new bridge would resolve these issues, we are concerned about our safety and with congestion at present, and urge implementation of some immediate mitigation to

improve the route.

* "More people are driving than can be accommodated on the bridges" This is true, and TDM measures as identified in the DEIS and elsewhere can reduce congestion. If implemented immediately, aggressive TDM measures could prevent congestion from worsening over the next decade.

* "Freight Movement" -- It should be noted that I-5 through Portland is *not* part of the continuous highway from Canada to Mexico -- I-205 serves that role through the Portland area (as is evidenced by existing signage where I-5 traffic is directed to use I-205 where the routes diverge in North Vancouver and Tualatin). I-5 is an important regional freeway, but its significance given to it in the DEIS is not warranted. Not only is it substandard at the Columbia River, but the route features obsolete, dangerous conditions throughout the entire Portland area. I-5 has slow speed limits, limited sight distances, limited shoulders, poor quality roadway surfaces, substandard intersection geometry, inadequate traffic capacity and inadequate intersection spacing throughout the corridor from Tualatin to Vancouver. I-205 is the true backbone of the region's north-south travel for freight and intercity travel.

* "Public Transit Operability" see 5) ii) in the above paragraph--bus-only shoulders can solve much of this problem, and should be implemented well in advance of bridge construction (Many of us Clark County residents would like to take transit, believe it or not!).

* "Safety and vulnerability to accidents" We agree wholeheartedly that safety is an issue, but disagree that the only and most logical solution is to replace the bridge. Rather, given the compelling deficiencies noted in the DEIS, we suggest that the ODoT and WashDoT make necessary mitigations immediately to make the bridge safer. Speed limits should be reduced to reflect the tight operational geometry on the bridges and short merge distances. Warning lights should be installed for several miles each way from the bridge to warn oncoming traffic when the bridge is raised. Educational messages should encourage people to reduce speeds and drive defensively in the bridge area.

* "Substandard pedestrian facilities" Yes, and they can be improved well in advance of new construction with the measures suggested above in our comment #4.

7) Highway Bridge Width

We are concerned that too much money is being spent on the highway bridge, and that the added lanes will result in unnecessarily large numbers of Clark County residents commuting to Portland by car. This will give us more noise and air pollution in Clark County, and result in commuter traffic on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and Interstate Blvd. in Portland, our two primary bike routes. (Widening the interstate bridge would perpetuate, not resolve, this problem, identified in the DEIS on page S-4 "Spillover traffic from I-5 onto parallel arterials such as Martin Luther King Boulevard. and Interstate Avenue increases local congestion.")

Note that the term "auxiliary lanes" is only appropriate for one of the six lanes in each direction, not three. The lane that enters from downtown Vancouver and exits at Hayden Island is an auxiliary lane. The lanes that enter from SR 500 and SR 14 are freeway lanes at full capacity, and as there are no downstream exits of comparable capacity, they are simply dead-ending freeway lanes. This is significant because currently those lanes end in Clark County, and the bridge prevents all five lanes of freeway traffic from attempting to use the 2 (soon to be 3) lanes of I-5 and the 3 total lanes of Interstate and MLK Blvds. If all 5 upstream freeway lanes are brought into Portland, then two of them diverted onto surface streets, the result will be continued congestion on I-5, and increased congestion on surface streets.

We favor the highway width of the "supplemental bridge" option because it only has four lanes of highway traffic in each direction--three through lanes and one true auxiliary lane. We would also favor a revised study with two 5 lane highway bridges or a single 8 lane freeway bridge (multidirectional).

If the final bridge configuration is to be 5 or 6 lanes each way rather than 4, we suggest that one pair of lanes be HOV lanes. We're baffled as to why this option wasn't included--it's a very good idea, and could be implemented through the entire project area, and have been extremely successfully in combating congestion in many, many cities in the United States in the last decade. We bicyclists like to know that if we team up with other people we can beat the congestion in an HOV lane, especially if the HOV lane gives priority at bottlenecks.

8) Extend Light Rail to the Vancouver Mall

None of the LRT termini are particularly well suited for a major transit terminus. The study should consider the Vancouver Mall, which is only a 3.5-mile longer route than to the Kiggins Bowl terminus. This would create an attractive destination at the terminus, travel through Clark College, the Fourth Plain corridor, the office district near the mall and the mall itself, creating two-way ridership throughout Vancouver throughout the day. This would put much of the population of Vancouver within an easy 3 mile bike ride of the MAX line, enabling Vancouver to become more of a car-free city for the 21st century. Land acquisition for parking structures would be relatively inexpensive at the mall and have a low community impact, and the mall is well served by two freeways which could have express buses to serve outlying residents.

Even if funding makes extension to the Vancouver Mall unfeasible at present, a Clark College Terminus could be designed for future extension to the mall, and the extension could be funded through urban redevelopment funds for Fourth Plain Blvd.

Additionally, MAX should consider running express trains from Clark County into downtown Portland, stopping at only a few stops along the way. This could be done by installing crossovers every mile or two to allow for two-way travel on each line and educating riders to stand clear of the platforms and look both ways before crossing each track. This would shorten the commute time from Clark County and allow MAX to sell the same seats more often each day. Additionally, it would create a true "intercity rail service" between the two cities. Express LRT service is in the planning stages between Folsom, CA and Sacramento, CA.

Overall, we feel the project has merit, but the the DEIS is deficient in recognizing that bicycle facilities need to be better connected to the community, and mitigations made in advance of construction to favor bicycling. And we remain unconvinced that a 12 lane freeway across the Columbia serves the community's interests better than a 6, 8 or 10 lane freeway.

Thank you for your consideration,

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