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MAY 30 2008

Columbia River Crossing

May 15, 2008

Columbia River Crossing
c/o Heather Gundersen
700 Washington St, Suite 300
Vancouver, WA 98660

Ms. Gundersen:

On behalf of Kaiser Permanente Northwest, we would like to comment on the pending decision regarding the I-5 bridge alternatives for the Columbia River Crossing. As you consider the options before you, we ask that you consider not only the least environmentally harmful alternatives, but also the options with the potential to improve the health and quality of life of the residents of both Oregon and Washington.

Since 2003, Kaiser Permanente has had a Community Health Initiative as a component of our Community Benefit Program. As an organization, we work to increase awareness, improve the built environment, and advocate for policies that support healthy, livable communities. It is within this context that we wish to speak.

From our perspective, the bridge alternatives have the potential to impact the health of the community in five ways:

Air Quality – the association between transportation-related projects and health outcomes is well documented. Several air pollutants generated by automobiles and trucks within the I-5 corridor currently exceed EPS acceptable cancer risk standards. These pollutants are associated with increased risk of cancers and stroke. In addition, children living close to busy roadways are more likely to experience respiratory problems such as asthma. Accommodating increased levels of vehicle trips and congestion will only exacerbate these risks.

Physical Activity and obesity – Approximately 75% of adults and 35% of children in the greater Portland Metro area including Southwest Washington are either overweight or obese. While the consumption of unhealthy foods certainly contributes to this problem, physical inactivity and a sedentary lifestyle have been well documented as major causes of the epidemic of overweight and obesity. Private automobiles are now the exclusive mode of transportation for the majority of people, with a resulting decrease in walking and bicycling as healthy alternatives.

Noise – traffic is a major source of environmental noise and has been known to effect coronary artery disease and developmental processes in children.

Safety – increase volume and speed of automobiles are both factors associated with an increase in crashes and fatalities.

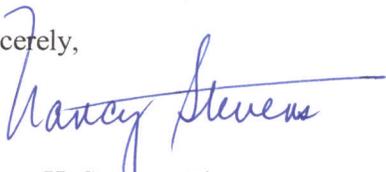
Columbia River Crossing
May 15, 2008
Page 2

Environmental Justice – each of the bridge alternatives (including leaving the bridge as is) will disproportionately harm the health of disadvantaged communities in Multnomah and Clark counties. Increased traffic flow through neighborhoods with higher than average proportion of communities of color and low income households cannot be averted at this time, but it's important to recognize that the burden for further development will fall on those who are already encountering environmental inequity.

We realize that sustaining economic growth is an important priority for our region, and this requires a transportation infrastructure that efficiently moves trucks and automobiles. On the other hand, enhancing the health of our people and protecting the environment in which they live are also paramount. These priorities are not mutually exclusive but do require careful analysis to avoid achieving one at the expense of the others. That is why Kaiser Permanente strongly supports the options that include both well planned mass transit and bike and pedestrian facilities. Evidence shows that people utilizing mass transit tend to walk and bike more than those dependant on private automobiles and this represents an improvement in health. In addition to opportunities for active transport, attractive bike and pedestrian facilities offer recreational opportunities that enhance the livability of our community.

We realize that the task before you is difficult, but we ask you to consider the impact your decision will have on the health of this region for decades to come. We are happy to support your task force in making the Columbia River Crossing a healthy addition to the NW landscape.

Sincerely,



Nancy H. Stevens, Ph.D.
Director, Community Benefit



Philip Wu, MD
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