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Administration Annex • 207 North 4th Ave • Kelso, WA 98626-4195 Columbia River Crossing
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June 26, 2008

Columbia River Crossing Project
700 Washington Street, Suite 300
Vancouver, WA 98660



Re: Draft EIS Response

The Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, a regional planning agency comprised of 29 general and special purpose governments and non-profit agencies in the two county region, submits the following comments, as drafted at its June 26, 2008 board meeting:

The I-5 corridor is critical to the present and future economic base of the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum region. Thousands of tons of raw to finished goods are shipped daily from area industries and ports, to and from all points on the globe, with a significant amount hauled up and down I-5 to and through the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. Our pulp, paper and other wood products industries, for example, rely heavily on the ability to truck raw and finished materials to points south in Oregon and California and east up the Columbia River Gorge and over Highway 26.

It's imperative that the Columbia River crossings be constructed with maximum forethought as to its ability to handle the current and future freight and goods moving up and down the West Coast, from Vancouver, B.C., to San Diego, CA. and points east. Increased delays caused by bridge congestion coupled with high fuel prices will have a detrimental affect on freight mobility and the fiscal bottom line for business, industries and shippers along the West Coast. It is with good reason that the I-5 corridor has been designated one of the nation's top high priority corridors out of many in the National Highway System and one of six "Corridors of the Future", as recently proclaimed by the USDOT.

Maximum effort should target reducing or at least minimizing the negative impacts of single occupant vehicles (SOV) using the Columbia River Crossing corridor. Growth projections in southwest Washington and the Portland metropolitan area point to increased travel across the Columbia River by workers, goods and services. Recently introduced proposals to reduce lanes on a new crossing facility, citing higher fuel prices and efforts needed to reduce greenhouse gases, will only lead to maintaining and perhaps worsening the congestion that exists now. Fast, efficient and effective transit options that move a maximum number of commuters are essential components of the final decision, be it bus rapid transit lanes or light rail. Minimizing growth in SOV use translates into maintaining freight and goods capacity so vital to all interests in not only the crossing corridor area but up and down the West Coast.

Columbia River Crossing Project - Draft EIS Response

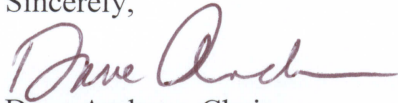
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We understand that paying for a new facility will involve user tolls. We support a tolling plan that takes into consideration the regional needs of the Portland-Vancouver area, one that is not limited solely to the bridge facility. Long term tolling should be a component of an overall strategy that supports enhanced transit options, higher density residential development along transit corridors, and encourages mixed use development throughout the metropolitan region.

The link between Cowlitz County and the greater Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area is more important than ever. The distance is shrinking with changes in logistics, commuter travel patterns and increased interest in transit options for Cowlitz County commuters. In conclusion, we cannot over emphasize the importance of maintaining freight capacity for any selected options for a river crossing.

Sincerely,



Dave Andrew, Chair

SHH:nh

cc: CWCOG Board
Dick Ford, Chair, Washington State Transportation Commission
Paula Hammond, Secretary, Washington State Department of Transportation

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