



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

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January 23, 2009
In Reply Refer To:
HPP S001(250)

Paula J. Hammond, Secretary
Washington State Department of Transportation
310 Maple Park Avenue SE
PO Box 47300
Olympia WA 98504-7300

Matthew Garrett, Director
Oregon Department of Transportation
355 Capitol St. N.E., Rm 135
Salem, OR 97301-3871

RE: Interstate 5 Columbia River Crossing Project; 10 vs. 12 Lane Bridge

Dear Secretary Hammond and Director Garrett:

We are writing to express the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) support for a 12-lane Columbia River Bridge option. The locally preferred alternative endorsed by the six sponsoring agencies consists of a replacement crossing and an extension of the existing light rail transit to Clark College. One of the more critical design decisions that has to be made as we progress forward, is the number of lanes this new facility will carry.

As you know Interstate 5 serves as the only continuous north-south Interstate corridor on the West Coast. The efficient operation of this designated *Corridor of the Future* is critical to growing our local, regional, and national economies while providing the safe and efficient mobility travelers expect.

On May 2, 2008, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for this project was published, providing evaluation of reasonable alternatives for meeting the project's purpose and need. In this DEIS, six local sponsoring agencies and two Federal co-lead partners committed to the following objectives as reflected in the purpose and need statement:

- a) Improve travel safety and traffic operations on the Interstate 5 crossing's bridges and associated interchanges;
- b) Improve connectivity, reliability, travel times and operations of public transportation modal alternatives in the bridge influence area;

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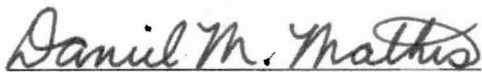


- c) Improve highway freight mobility and address Interstate travel and commerce needs in the bridge influence area; and
- d) Improve the Interstate 5 river crossing's structural integrity.

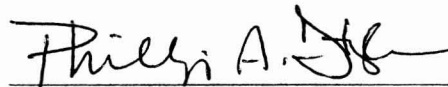
Currently, a healthy discussion is taking place between the communities and the Project Sponsors Council. To aid that discussion, the Columbia River Crossing Project team has provided data from a host of design studies conducted during the development of the DEIS. Replacement crossings studied included three through travel lanes (matches existing cross section) and three auxiliary lanes in each direction, for a total of 12 lanes on the crossing. Auxiliary lanes improve operational efficiency and safety by providing motorists greater distances for ramp merging and diverging movements. In fact, the data indicate that a 10-lane crossing (three through lanes and two auxiliary lanes in each direction) would increase predicted crashes by 20% when compared to a 12-lane crossing. Crashes on an eight-lane crossing (three through lanes and one auxiliary lane in each direction) are predicted to increase by 50% when compared to a 12-lane crossing.

Congestion is another critical factor to be considered. A 12-lane facility serves the travel demand substantially better than a 10-lane facility and lessens congestion by two hours per day. Throughput on the Interstate is dependent on these interchanges operating safely and efficiently.

We believe the 12-lane bridge best meets the safety, operations, connectivity, reliability, freight mobility, and commerce needs for this Interstate corridor. We do, however, acknowledge the practical constraints for a project of this magnitude and in this setting. We understand the sensitive nature of these discussions and appreciate the opportunity to provide a Federal perspective.



Daniel M. Mathis, P.E.
Division Administrator
Federal Highway Administration



Phillip A. Ditzler, P.E.
Division Administrator
Oregon Division

cc:

FTA (Rick Krochalis, Regional Administrator)
WSDOT (Doug Ficco)
(Don Wagner)
ODOT (Richard Brandman)