

# Terry Parker for Metro

to make a difference

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## Subject: Comments to the Columbia River Crossing October 12, 2011

P-027-001

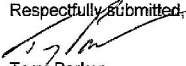
While I can support the decision already made to construct a new I-5 Columbia River Crossing between Portland and Vancouver, I do however believe there is a less expensive option that "should" have been fully explored. Such an option would have included a new, safer I-5 bridge for through traffic coupled with an earthquake retrofit and repurposing the existing historical bridges for local traffic, transit alternatives, bicycles and pedestrians. With a Locally Preferred Alternative already chosen, I view a lower cost option of this type as a fallback plan B if the dollars for the LPA don't materialize. Since LPA will remove the existing bridges at a cost of well over a million dollars; at the very least, the existing bridge spans - currently in good shape - should be saved and reused someplace where a bridge or bridge replacement is needed.

**What I can NOT support is the current CRC funding plan.** All the dollars for the entire project - including nearly \$900 million for light rail - directly or indirectly are coming from highway user paid taxes and fees. New Starts funds, for example, are siphoned off from the Federal Highway Trust fund that is supported by the federal taxes on motor fuels. The additional projected \$400 million in federal dollars that could possibly come from a Highway Projects of National and Regional Significance program are likewise from the Federal Highway Trust Fund. The latter dollars however appear to cover little more than the potential projected cost of the bicycle infrastructure. The \$450 million each the states of Oregon and Washington are expected to kick in will also come from taxes on motor fuels and other highway user paid fees. That leaves nearly \$1.3 billion to be extracted through another mechanism which is tolling.

I-5 is the primary West Coast interstate commerce corridor between Canada and Mexico. Where are the federal dollars for the highway component of the CRC? Being the principal stakeholders, where is the representation or even a CRC working advisory group for the motorists? Commuters driving from the Washington side of the river have been contributing \$150 million each year into the Oregon treasury, plus much more into the Oregon economy. That could even increase with expansion of the Silicon Forest in Washington County. The CRC is a multi-mode project with three basic legs; highway, light rail and bike/ped. Yet 100% of the existing funding scheme to pay for the entire project is coming from only one leg. Tolling only the highway users, especially hammering the working class commute time highway users with congestion priced tolling, amounts to a prejudiced redistribution of wealth. The "big hole" in the bridge plan is the lack equity and fairness. Charging the highway users high and excessive tolls will only have a negative impact on jobs and the local economy, especially for small businesses and small service companies that have accounts on both sides of the river. Since the benefits of a new crossing will be shared, then so must the sacrifices.

A cultural shift needs to take place that equitably balances the user fees by justly distributing the costs for a new CRC to the users of all vehicle modes including tolls for bicycles and a surcharge on transit fares while minimizing the highway tolls. Additionally, broadening the funding base is a step in the right direction for alternative transport infrastructure to become more financially self-sustainable while also providing a steady revenue stream less impacted and interrupted by oil prices, commuting trends or traffic projections. The reality check is that some tolling must occur for this project to be built. Taxpayer equity requires that all bridge users contribute and pay a proportional share of this needed economic generator and transportation project.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Terry Parker

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Many different options for addressing the project's Purpose and Need were evaluated in a screening process prior to the development and evaluation of the alternatives in the DEIS. Options eliminated through the screening process included a new corridor crossing over the Columbia River (in addition to I-5 and I-205), an arterial crossing between Hayden Island and downtown Vancouver, a tunnel under the Columbia River, and various modes of transit other than light rail and bus rapid transit. Section 2.5 of the DEIS explains why a third corridor, arterial crossing of the Columbia River, and several transit modes evaluated in screening were dropped from further consideration because they did not meet the Purpose and Need. For a general description of the screening process see Chapter 2 (Section 2.7) of the FEIS. It should be noted that every proposal received from the public was considered, and many of the proposals that were dropped from further consideration included elements that helped shape the alternatives in the DEIS. The issue of adverse impacts to businesses, resulting from tolling, was addressed as part of the economics analysis and is described in detail in the Economics Technical Report. This report, and Chapter 3 (Section 3.4) of the DEIS, note that the increased costs incurred because of tolls would generally be offset by the improved travel options and travel times. Under existing and No-Build Alternative conditions, congestion delays and high crash rates have significant costs for local businesses and travelers; improving these conditions is one of the purposes of the project. Tolling could discourage home-based shopping trips from Clark County to points in northern Oregon, such as Hayden Island and Airport Way. However, the variable-rate toll structure that was evaluated in the DEIS allows for different rates to be charged by time of day. Therefore, discretionary trips, such as those between Oregon and Washington for retail purposes, could be taken in off-peak hours when toll rates are at their lowest, reducing the effect of the tolls on these types of trips. Also, CRC would provide improved transit connections between Clark County and Oregon, offering travelers a toll-free alternative for reaching

destinations across the river. Details of the tolling system are still being refined as the project development enters the final design stage. It is currently not anticipated that transit users, bicyclists, or pedestrians will pay a toll. Additionally, certain toll discounts or waivers for other groups have been and will continue to be considered. The ultimate decision on any tolling options will be made by both the Washington and Oregon Transportation Commissions.