

## **Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on the Columbia River Crossing**

**March 16, 2012**

**Metro Regional Center, Portland Oregon**

**Members Present: Rep. Cliff Bentz, Rep. Tobias Read, Sen Lee Beyer, Co-Chairs; Sen. Ginny Burdick, Sen. Frank Morse, Sen. Chuck Thomsen, Rep. Eyre Brewer, Rep. Margaret Doherty, Rep. Nancy Nathanson, Rep. Matt Wand.**

**Members Visiting: Rep. Patrick Sheehan**

The Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on the Columbia River Crossing held its fourth meeting of the 2011-12 Interim on Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup> from 9AM – 1PM at the Metro Regional Center in Portland.

### **The Columbia River Crossing – Alternative Perspectives**

Representative Lew Frederick, House District 43, testified to the need for improved infrastructure but asserted that the Columbia River Crossing (**CRC**), as currently designed, is not the right approach. He suggested that planning for the project should be grounded in four principles: 1) address neighborhood pollution related to Interstate 5 (I-5) and Interstate 84, particularly that which affects minority communities; 2) facilitate freight movement; 3) moving people into and out of the region; and 4) giving the lowest priority to commuter traffic, which should not be dependent on use of the freeways.

Commissioner Tom Meilke of Clark County (WA) noted that the I-5 corridor was deemed to be at or near capacity in 1998, a problem that the CRC will not solve. He discussed the impact of congestion on the trucking industry, recalling his experience as a former owner of a trucking company. He also asserted that the project has been directed from the very top of state government since Washington Governor Gary Locke and Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber began steering the project in 2002. The Supreme Court's recent decision, he asserted, emphasizes that the real intent of the CRC is to extend light rail into Vancouver. Finally, he mentioned that the project's haste has led to overlooking the U.S. Coast Guard's concerns about the height of the bridge design.

George Crandall of Crandall Arambula gave a [PowerPoint presentation](#) emphasizing the advantages of a multi-bridge solution over the current CRC design. In doing so he referenced the abandoned concept of the Mount Hood Freeway, which was replaced by the first pieces of TriMet's light rail system. Instead, he advanced what he referred to as the "Common Sense Alternative" (**CSA**), which includes the following components: 1) a retrofit of the existing I-5 bridge; 2) a new local bridge to Hayden Island; 3) a third bridge immediately downriver from the existing rail bridge that incorporates heavy commuter rail; 4) replace the swing on the existing rail bridge with a lift. The quoted cost for the CSA proposal is \$1.8 billion, half that of the CRC. Mr. Crandall also highlighted management problems with the CRC that are likely to result in litigation that will delay moving forward.

Will Macht, Professor of Urban Planning at Portland State University, offered a [slide presentation](#) outlining the reasons why he believes a single new replacement to the existing I-5

Bridge will not adequately address congestion in the Portland/Vancouver region. The planned toll on the CRC creates an “interstate tariff.” He asserted that replacing the existing bridge requires a “Goldilocks” solution that is high enough to accommodate river traffic, yet low enough so as not to interfere with air traffic, resulting in \$145 million spent so far on a project that is essentially unbuildable. He instead expressed preference for the CSA proposal and recommended immediately ceasing funding for the CRC and acquisition of property and suggested undertaking a comprehensive, impartial study of all reasonable alternatives.

Joe Cortright of Impresa Consulting provided a [series of handouts](#) and outlined his views regarding the perceived need for the project and the assumptions upon which the project’s financing plan is based. He outlined data that has been gathered since 2005 that demonstrates that the CRC’s estimates of average daily trips across the Columbia River on I-5 are currently lower than what the project estimated in 2005 and that estimates are continuing to trend downward. He cautioned that this discrepancy raises questions not only about the need for the project but also for the predicted tolling revenues should the new bridge be constructed and tolled, particularly in light of data from changing traffic patterns on the State Route 520 floating bridge in Washington, where tolls were recently instituted. He dismissed the project’s rationale for the reduced traffic numbers and asserted the need for an “investment grade forecast” to replace the CRC’s existing projections.

Mr. Cortright then turned to the subject of the likelihood of receiving federal funding for the CRC at levels expected by the project team. The transition away from federal earmarks and toward formula funding will mean less federal funding to Oregon and Washington than in the past, and will mean that the CRC will be competing for money with other transportation projects in both states. In terms of federal transit funding, he suggested that the estimated 90 percent federal match is unreasonably optimistic. Finally, Mr. Cortright stated that mega transportation projects tend to run over budget, offering Pioneer Mountain on Highway 20, the Grand Avenue Viaduct in Portland, and the Newberg-Dundee Bypass as examples. He concluded by warning that the final cost to Oregon for the CRC could end up being as high as \$3 billion.

Chris Girard, CEO of Plaid Pantry, submitted [several handouts](#) on the subject of the proposed phasing plan for the CRC. He remarked that the proposed plan spends 70 percent of the project cost with almost none of the benefits, and added that the staging process would take four years, with Hayden Island under construction during an additional four years. He cautioned that if the money to complete the project runs out, the parts that do get built will not provide any tangible benefit. He added that there are no contingencies if federal funding does not come through or if tolling or other revenues are lower than expected.

Bob Stacey, candidate for Metro Council, submitted [testimony](#) urging the committee to consider simplifying the CRC design in order to reduce the overall cost of the project and to ensure that the project meets its primary objectives: moving freight, moving people more efficiently, and improving safety in the project area. He suggested charging higher peak hour tolls to raise additional funds. He also cited three problems with the current design: 1) the interchanges are too close together; 2) the current bridge spans, which are tall enough to accommodate ships, should not be removed; and 3) the proposed span increases peak hour automobile capacity, encouraging more traffic.

Tom Buchele, Clinical Professor at Lewis and Clark Law School, provided [handouts](#) criticizing the environmental impact compliance process followed by the CRC. He recalled asking project team members about the requirement for hard numbers on traffic data and says he was told that the application process for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (**NEPA**) does not require hard numbers, an opinion which he disputes. Professor Buchele asserted that the project proponents have overstated both the need for and benefit of the CRC. He spoke critically about the lack of detail in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (**DEIS**) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (**FEIS**), adding that the draft had more detail than the final version but lacked sufficient time for public input.

David Sweet, representing the Northwest Coalition of Neighborhoods, submitted [written testimony](#) that outlined his three primary objections to the current design for the Columbia River Crossing. First, the proposal will actually make congestion worse, not better, by putting more vehicles onto the I-5 corridor and shifting congestion from the bridge to neighborhoods north and south of the bridge. Second, this spread of congestion will result in an overall increase of air pollution. Finally, the high cost of the project will result in lost opportunities to improve the transportation system elsewhere.

Floyd Smith of the Smarter Bridge Committee presented [slides](#) that outlined cheaper alternatives to the CRC. He asserted that the CRC as currently envisioned will cause significant disruption of local businesses, with greatest impact on Hayden Island, while related construction will cause much greater disruption. He echoed earlier comments by others about the shift of congestion north and south of the bridge and added that the job creation estimates from project proponents are overly optimistic by a power of ten.

Herman Kachold of the Hayden Island Livability Project submitted [written testimony](#) about his concerns regarding the impact of the CRC on quality of life on Hayden Island. He indicated that a livability group was disbanded by the CRC project team and that the project team has failed to adequately address livability concerns among low-income mobile home park residents in the project area. He also remarked that the project will result in the displacement of the one local grocery store on Hayden Island and said that other alternatives should be considered.

Ron Buel, former founding editor of Willamette Week, distributed [testimony](#) that was to be presented by John Charles of the Cascade Policy Institute, who was scheduled to speak but unable to attend. He summarized the testimony by saying that the cost of the light rail portion of the project is not justified by the likely ridership, adding that the commute time for light rail riders from Vancouver into Oregon will be more than twice as long as traveling by bus.

Mr. Buel then presented his [testimony](#) regarding the CRC in the form of a resolution request to the Oregon Transportation Commission, the Governor and legislative leaders: 1) no more Oregon money spent on planning for the current CRC project; 2) no acquisition of property or easements, and; 3) a call for a bi-state study of affordable alternatives by a new entity, to be completed by February 1, 2013. He noted that the \$140 million spent so far has been without legislative approval. He finished by outlining the principles that most of those testifying today agree upon: 1) doing nothing is not an option, as traffic congestion and freight mobility are real

problems that demand action; 2) the CRC as currently envisioned will not solve those problems; 3) the existing I-5 bridges have 50-100 years of useful life left; 4) aligning the lifts in the rail bridge will negate the need for most bridge lifts; 5) building an additional road-rail bridge would free up freight capacity on the rail bridge; and 6) no tolls should be enacted.

Gerald Fox provided [slides](#) to demonstrate that the CRC would not eliminate or reduce traffic congestion, but instead would only move it southward, while the smarter and cheaper alternative CSA proposal will solve the problems. He also commented on the increasing rail traffic, which the CRC will not address but which the CSA would address. The CSA would allow trucks to avoid Hayden Island altogether. He also recalled work on the Mt. Hood Freeway, which was abandoned as unworkable only after property had been bought and sold.

Brad Perkins of Perkins Realty submitted [testimony](#) asserting that policymakers have had the current CRC design forced upon them and have not taken the time or interest to look at lower cost alternatives. The CSA's developed alternative Cascadia Multimodal Bridge can be engineered to meet the U.S. Coast Guard's mandatory height requirement and would not result in the same level of disruption as would the CRC. He commented on the benefits of placing a commuter rail line between Vancouver and Union Station in Portland, which would involve a rail tunnel.

Sharon Nassett of Third Bridge Now presented a [packet of information](#) on the third bridge concept. She provided detail on the rail, bicycle, and pedestrian features to the third bridge concept, which would be just downriver of the existing rail bridge. She emphasized the benefits to freight and hazardous materials movement and impact to the St. John's Bridge and discussed potential funding sources. She concluded by recommending that no additional funding be spent on the current CRC design until all reasonable alternatives are fully studied.

Jeff Geisler, representing the Hayden Island Neighborhood Network, discussed the impacts of the CRC to Hayden Island. He provided [slides](#) of conceptual drawings of what the current CRC will look like over Hayden Island, as well as similar conceptual drawings for previous incarnations of the CRC design. He commented on the impact of 10 years of construction on Hayden Island.

Larry Epstein of Diversified Marine, Incorporated, submitted [written testimony](#) providing a glimpse of the detrimental impact that construction of the CRC would have on his business, which is situated immediately downriver from the current I-5 bridge on the Oregon side. He also acknowledged the need to address traffic issues but questioned whether the CRC meets those needs and criticized the governance of the project. He stressed the need to consider the impact on existing businesses.

Walter Valenta of the CRC Community Oversight and Review Group indicated that his group is generally supportive of the CRC and wants to be involved in shaping the project as it goes forward. He offered three recommendations: 1) reduce the project budget by finding ways to reduce the number of lanes on Hayden Island, 2) bring in professional consultants to work on the bridge design, and 3) encourage the CRC project team to listen to other experts.