



## Washington State Senate

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January 31, 2013

The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor  
State of Washington  
P.O. Box 40929  
Olympia, WA 98504-0929

Dear Governor Inslee:

I am writing to make you aware of several concerns regarding the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project and a proposal for a new plan for this critical project.

We need to build a bridge over the Columbia River that has the ability to accommodate the freight traffic and passenger traffic on I-5 and Columbia River for the next 80 years. As much as we talk about I-5 being a freight corridor, the Columbia River is just as much a freight corridor. The current CRC plan is not a plan for the future. We must ensure that a new bridge will allow clearance which not only meets the requirements of current users, but also the requirements of users for years to come. If we fail to do so, we will limit the growth of new or existing companies and industries that need or want to use the Columbia River for movement of their products for the next 80 years. That limitation will consequently limit much needed commerce, jobs and taxes.

I am calling for a new direction for the current CRC project, including the use of bus rapid transit in lieu of light rail. Plainly stated, the unworkable current Record of Decision should be rescinded and replaced with a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement process. It is vitally important for the people of Southwest Washington and for the future of commerce on the West Coast, that a bridge sufficient to meet the economic, social, and budgetary needs of the future be built.

Following is my five-point plan to support the need for a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement:

- 1. We need a bridge with a clearance height that will meet the needs of at least 98-99% of the current and future users of the Columbia River water way.**

According to the CRC Project office, a clearance under the bridge of 125 feet will meet the needs of 98-99% of the current river users. But, the question remains as to how to meet the needs of the other 1-2% as well as the river users of the future. To allow for those existing companies that need more clearance and to accommodate future needs, we

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must have a bridge design which incorporates a lift. With the added clearance height, the lift will only need to be used a minimal number of times a month and those times can be coordinated with I-5 traffic to cause minimal disruption.

In addition, eliminating the current two-tier design will allow for a redesign that will accommodate a higher clearance but also address other issues regarding the overall height of the bridge. The CRC project office tells us that over 190 feet in overall height will negatively impact the flight patterns for Pearson airfield. But, what has not been mentioned is that the existing bridge (which has been there for over 100 years) has columns that are 245 feet high. These 245-foot high columns have not affected flights in and out of Pearson. If there have been accommodations for the 245-foot columns, then there should be accommodations for a new bridge with an overall height in the same range.

Considering a lift will also eliminate the need to pay for mitigation costs for current users that are estimated to range between \$150 million to \$300 million. Paying that kind of money for mitigation costs for current users clearly sends a message that we are not planning for today, nor are we planning for the future. Why not take the money proposed to pay for mitigation costs and pay for a lift that will accommodate any number of users now and into the future?

**2. We need a project that will increase the flow of traffic and commerce over a vital interstate highway.**

According to the CRC Project office, the current plan calls for just a 60 second improvement in commute time for a southbound (morning) commuter once the project is completed. Why would we consider spending \$3.5 billion in capital costs to save a typical commuter one minute? A 60-second improvement in southbound travel also does nothing to positively impact the flow of commerce. However, the current proposed design should improve the safety component on the bridge.

In exchange for a one minute savings in commute time, we are asking the users of this vital interstate corridor to suffer interminable gridlock during a seven year construction period. Additionally, this seven year construction impact has the ability to negatively impact commuters, jobs, the downtown core of Vancouver, and to commerce along Interstate 5 and the West Coast. However, the proposal presented in point #5, will have an even greater positive impact on travel times and safety.

It is clear that without major improvements to the Rose Quarter area of Interstate 5 in Portland, Oregon we are committing to the expenditure of billions of dollars without a real return on our investment. Clark County residents working in Oregon currently pay a 9 to 10 percent income tax and there is no plan by Oregon to modernize I-5 north of downtown because it would benefit Washingtonians, not Oregonians.

However, we still need a bridge that will plan for the future and increase overall traffic flow with the belief that at some point Oregon will improve that stretch of I-5. Any major project that moves forward along this corridor must include a plan to significantly increase the flow of traffic and commerce along the corridor, both North and South.

### **3. We need to eliminate costly and inflexible light rail.**

It is clear that one of the primary reasons for the current bridge design is to accommodate light rail. Light rail should not be part of the new bridge design. First, light rail is costly to implement and to maintain. We only need to look to both Tri-Met in Portland and Sound Transit in Seattle to see that these systems are failing both in terms of ridership and in terms of costs to the taxpayers.

Second, light rail is a very inflexible system. Once the tracks are laid the routes are set. Over the 80-year life of the bridge the needs of the citizens of Vancouver and Clark County are undoubtedly going to change.

Third, the CRC Project office is as yet unable to provide us solid information as to the costs of the light rail portion of the project. We have been told that light rail along the five-mile corridor will cost \$850 million, will be paid for 100% by federal dollars, and will provide \$105 million in contribution of capital to the actual structure of the bridge. We have also been told that all of that money will be used within the five-mile CRC project corridor. The more questions that are asked, the more we find out the truth behind the numbers. For example, recent reports indicate that: \$50 million will be used at Ruby Junction, a facility that currently houses Tri-Met's current light rail cars and is 10 miles away, \$300,000 will go to renovate the Steel Bridge, and \$12 million will be used to consolidate Tri-Met control centers for light rail. As if these questionable expenditures were not enough, the latest report in committee now tells us the actual cost of light rail is \$925 million which means that the light rail portion of the project is \$75 million short. The money has to come from somewhere - likely from toll revenue. This will mean that less funding would remain for highway portions of the project to be paid for by federal dollars, or that tolls will have to be used for light rail overruns. Washington hasn't had to do that on any other project and we should not start now.

As if questions regarding the expenses and funding available for the light rail component of the project were not enough, serious questions remain about how a light rail system would be administered on the bridge. The proposed use of light rail is also a very complicated system between two states and two transit systems since the cars will be owned by Tri-Met but C-Tran will be accountable for maintenance of the system in Washington. Will the employees be working for C-Tran or for Tri-Met? Who controls the cars and how they are used? There are numerous basic questions that will complicate the use of light rail that should have been answered for policy makers at this stage of the project.

### **4. We need to ensure that fiscally prudent transit options are available on the bridge.**

Both express bus and bus rapid transit would accommodate the needs of commuters. The buses would be owned by C-Tran. The operation of the service will be provided by C-Tran and C-Tran only. The employees will all be C-Tran employees. In other words, we have total control of that transit system. It should be noted that express bus service currently has a 70% fare box recovery - something you will never get with light rail.

If light rail is determined to be viable in the future, then a bridge should be constructed for light rail only and built in such a way as to complement our new proposed design.



It is also important to note that the project can move forward with New Starts funding applications because bus rapid transit projects are eligible for the same dollars as light rail projects.

**5. We need to ensure that we build a sufficient number of traffic lanes on the bridge.**

The current CRC plan calls for the same number of traffic lanes both northbound and southbound as the current bridge has today. This is not a plan for the future of commerce and traffic flow over an important interstate corridor. We need to make our one-tier bridge ten lanes. This new ten-lane bridge (similar to the current I-205 bridge) should have a dedicated lane each way for our buses and 2 plus (HOV) cars. A ten-lane bridge will increase overall capacity for every one using the bridge.

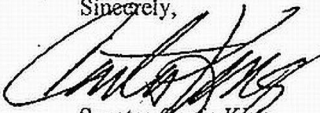
Pushing through the CRC project as currently conceived merely because a certain amount of money has been spent or a certain amount of time has passed would be foolish; especially in the face of the multitude of concerns attributed to this project. There is no need to throw good money after a bad idea. A more reasonable approach to the CRC project would be to consider a new bridge design and allow for a fiscally prudent and effective mode of transit, like bus rapid transit in a dedicated lane. Some say we will lose the \$850 million from the Feds. But, there are NO guarantees that we will get all or part of that money. Bus rapid transit is eligible for those same funds. And, for those who are intent on riding light rail, buses can still go to Hayden Island and catch light rail there. This is a much more flexible system and a much more responsive way of operation for the state of Washington and citizens of Clark County.

We are taking a corridor approach to this issue and the supporters of this project in its current form are taking a light rail focused approach. We want improvements in travel times for Clark County residents to get to downtown Portland. Our approach includes expanding capacity of the bridge, plus implementing bus rapid transit and making interchange improvements in Oregon and Washington. This approach will assure improved travel time for the citizens of Clark County.

Our corridor approach also includes the Columbia River and its major influence as a freight corridor. By increasing the clearance under the bridge and adding a lift, we are accommodating not only the current needs but also the needs of the future.

We must take into account the information and public comment, as well as common sense, to redesign a bridge that considers both current and future users of our highway and waterway system. By building upon the work and ideas others not wedded to a particular concept of the bridge will help to minimize the length of time to get all of these changes accomplished. I don't believe we can consider funding \$450 million for the current CRC project until the above mentioned changes have been made, which will result in a lower burden for both toll payers and tax payers.

Sincerely,



Senator Curtis King