
From: info@crcfacts.info
Sent: Friday, March 01, 2013 7:47 PM
To: website@crcfacts.info
Subject: [FWD: Re: Columbia River Crossing]

From: **Charles Stephens** <cmstephens@spiritone.com>
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 11:10 PM
Subject: Columbia River Crossing
To: Sen.DianeRosenbaum@state.or.us

Senator Rosenbaum,

I'm writing to express my deep concern about the financial and economic future of Oregon in the face of our continuing economic doldrums. Shortly you'll vote on a bill to grease the financial skids under a most unfortunate transportation project - Columbia River Crossing, as the project is currently configured.

I've been a public policy analyst and advocate for more than 20 years, dominantly in energy and energy efficiency after spending 17 years at the Oregon Department of Energy. I have a formal education in transportation and structural engineering, and am a past member of Metro's Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC). My neighborhood group is a partner with Tri-Met on a million dollar project to grow a forest around and through our new light rail station. One member of our group is the current chair of Clackamas County's Transportation System Plan Advisory Committee. I work with Senator Dingfelder's staff on energy efficiency and standards legislation, and have for a number of years.

I tell you all this to let you know that a growing number of us in our community are heavily invested and heavily engaged in how our region's transportation dollars are being spent. The combination of our energy circumstances, the instability in the financial system, and a growing inability of government to fully maintain the infrastructure it already has, is leading to a future that looks a lot different than the past.

The Columbia River Crossing project is a dinosaur - built on late 20th century transportation paradigms, proposed to be funded with the fairytale financing so typical of the late, great real estate asset value inflation bubble, with its scope, scale and demands based on turn-of-the-century data. Consequently, it will solve few of our 21st century transportation problems while impoverishing us. As a result, you're being asked to vote on something that has the following characteristics:

- 1) Misleading costs - approximately \$3.5 billion. These are almost assuredly and absurdly low. ODOT's track record on bringing big projects in on budget is dismal. Figure the real cost at \$5-7 billion. This means that the people of Oregon will be saddled with enough debt to pretty much absorb all of or more than our total debt capacity, at the very least for transportation. In our current economic environment, Oregon's credit rating could be put at risk.
- 2) The transportation demand models are using old data and old assumptions - assembled before 2005. Annual VMT has been declining the Pacific Northwest pretty steadily, pretty much since the turn of the century. So the drivers behind the scale and modes of the bridge are highly outmoded, as it were.

3) Even if the crossing improves traffic flow southward, the snarl simply shifts to downtown Portland, where there is no affordable amount of real estate available to increase the capacity of the I-5 / I-405 / I-84 system.

4) Which may not be necessary, because fuel prices are going nowhere but up (like they are just now), even in a down economy. This is a trend - a more or less permanent one, albeit with some episodic excursions. This will definitely dampen car commuting somewhat, rather offsetting any forecast increases due to population growth.

5) The environmental impacts of this project, were the traffic projections that could in any way support this project materialize, would fall most harshly on the people who live within a half-mile either side of the I-5 gas pipe of a freeway (in this stretch). At least during rush hour. When there are other options for travel available that impose a far lower burden on the planet, especially along the right-of-way, then those options should be looked at seriously.

6) Which brings us to the most preposterous observation of all - there is a far less expensive option that would provide far greater benefits where we desperately need them (like heavy rail - both freight and passenger). Some very competent, thoughtful people have provided a far more affordable alternative. It would provide just as many good jobs, but in a far better way - the phased project would keep people employed steadily over a longer period of time, at an appropriate and affordable pace of investment.

Joe Cortright did a masterful job of laying out details in the Sunday Oregonian, in case you missed it. And the people with the far more intelligent and affordable alternative have done a masterful job of presenting, as well (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPB1jtmHVkk>).

If you haven't watched this, please take a look and then think about the details of what you're being asked to vote for - a blank check and pedal to the metal for a monumentally bad transportation proposal, in every respect. You have an opportunity to give the more intelligent solutions the visibility and support they should have.

Some of us are highly engaged in this space, supporting large numbers of leading edge transportation projects. If the current CRC project gets funded, I would wager almost none of these will continue to happen.

Please consider voting NO for the currently proposed debacle and please support the consideration of more appropriate alternatives. Thanks for listening.

I will likely be there in Salem to testify on SB 692 soon. If you like, I would be happy to explore this in more detail if schedules allow. Charlie

Charlie Stephens

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Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. - Albert Einstein