

BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING) RESOLUTION NO. 07- 3782
METRO COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS)
CONCERNING THE RANGE OF) Introduced by Councilor Rex Burkholder
ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A)
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT)
STATEMENT FOR THE COLUMBIA RIVER)
CROSSING PROJECT)

WHEREAS, the Interstate 5 freeway (I-5) is the only continuous north/south interstate freeway on the West Coast, providing a critical national and international transportation link for motor vehicles and truck-hauled freight in the western-most United States, between the Canadian and Mexican borders; and,

WHEREAS, in 1917 a bridge across the Columbia River was completed and in 1958 a second bridge was built adjacent to the first bridge, the two becoming today's I-5 north and south bound bridges. These bridges have had no significant modifications since their completion; and,

WHEREAS, for the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan region, I-5 is one of two major freeways that connect the two states and their shared metropolitan economy; and,

WHEREAS, the estimated cost of truck delay by the year 2020 is an increase of 140 percent to nearly \$34 million dollars; and,

WHEREAS, the I-5 bridge crossing the Columbia River and adjacent bridge influence area segments, known as the Columbia River Crossing (CRC), has extended peak-hour travel demand that exceeds current capacity; and,

WHEREAS, the Interstate 205 Bridge is also reaching its peak-hour period carrying capacity; and,

WHEREAS, current transit service in the I-5 corridor between Portland and Vancouver is also constrained by the limited capacity and congestion in the bridge influence area, greatly limiting transit reliability and operations; and,

WHEREAS, there are significant safety issues relating to the existing bridges with the bridge crossing area and its approach sections experiencing crash rates more than two times higher than statewide averages for comparable urban highways in Washington and Oregon. This is largely due to congestion and outdated designs including interchanges too closely spaced, weave and merge sections which are too short causing sideswiping accidents, vertical grade changes in the bridge span which restrict sight distance, and very narrow shoulders that prevent avoidance maneuvers or safe temporary storage of disabled vehicles; and,

WHEREAS, the I-5 bridges across the Columbia River do not meet current seismic standards, leaving travelers in the I-5 corridor vulnerable to bridge failure in the event of an earthquake; and,

WHEREAS, the configuration of the existing I-5 bridges relative to the downstream Burlington

Northern-Santa Fe rail bridge contributes to hazardous navigation conditions for commercial and recreational boat traffic; and,

WHEREAS, bicycle and pedestrian facilities for crossing the Columbia River along I-5 do not meet current standards; and,

WHEREAS, in 2002, the Metro Council approved Resolution 02-3237A, For the Purpose of Endorsing the I-5 Transportation and Trade Study Recommendations, including recommendations for light rail transit connecting the Portland area with southwest Washington and adding a new supplemental or replacement bridge; and,

WHEREAS, the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan endorsed by the Metro Council in 2002 included light rail transit as the recommended transit mode and a maximum of ten lanes as the roadway improvement; and

WHEREAS, the Metro Council approved the Interstate MAX line to Expo center as the locally preferred alternative for high capacity transit in the I-5 north corridor; and,

WHEREAS, Interstate MAX light rail transit was built to Expo Center and has been in operation since May 2004; and,

WHEREAS, in February 2005, the Task Force began its study of the CRC problems and possible solutions; and,

WHEREAS, the Task Force adopted in October 2005 a CRC Project *Vision and Values Statement*; and

WHEREAS, after holding public open houses to gather public comment, in November 2005, the CRC Task Force adopted a CRC Project *Problem Definition*; and

WHEREAS, the Task Force approved a Purpose and Need statement in January 2006, which defined a discrete set of objectives; and,

WHEREAS, in February 2006, the Task Force approved project evaluation criteria against which alternatives would be evaluated; and

WHEREAS, thirty-seven transportation modes or design options were identified, analyzed and combined into alternative project packages; and,

WHEREAS, twelve alternative project packages, consisting of a No Build and eleven other transportation packages that included auto, truck freight, transit, bicycle and pedestrian investments in the CRC Project area were developed in summer 2006; and

WHEREAS, the twelve alternative project packages were screened using the approved evaluation criteria; those that met the evaluation criteria were recommended to advance; and those that did not meet the evaluation criteria were recommended to not advance; and,

WHEREAS CRC staff have recommended, consistent with the evaluation criteria, that the No Build and a Replacement Bridge and either light rail transit or bus rapid transit be advanced to a draft environmental impact statement; and

WHEREAS, any of the build alternatives would require a change to the Regional Transportation Plan and this would require Metro Council approval; and,

WHEREAS, any transportation investment decision about the Columbia River Crossing Project will have a substantial impact on the economy and livability of the Metro region; and,

WHEREAS, the CRC Project is guided, in part, by the recommendations of a 39 member Task Force, of which the Metro Council has one representative; and,

WHEREAS, the Metro Council has had CRC Project briefings or discussions on October 3 and 17, and December 5, 2006; and,

WHEREAS, the Metro Council has, through both existing policy and through public discussion by the Council, established policy concerns and objectives that should be advanced with regard to the CRC Project; and,

WHEREAS, the Metro Council desires to establish policy guidance for its representative on the Task Force concerning those alternatives to be advanced for study in a draft environmental impact statement; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED,

that the Metro Council recommends the following policy guidance to its CRC Task Force representative:

1. The Metro Council supports the following CRC staff recommendations for alternatives to be advanced to a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS): a) a No Build option, b) a Replacement Bridge with Light Rail Transit (LRT) and express bus option and c) a Replacement Bridge with Bus Rapid Transit and express bus option.
2. In addition to the CRC staff recommended alternatives, the Metro Council supports including in the DEIS for additional analysis an alternative that includes a low rise with lift span supplemental bridge built to current seismic standards to carry cars, trucks, high capacity transit, bicycles and pedestrians. This alternative retains the existing I-5 bridges for freeway travel with incremental improvements to those bridges and the key access ramps, to improve flow and increase safety on I-5. Additionally, this alternative would include replacing the swing span of the downstream railroad bridge with a movable span located in a mid-river location on the railroad bridge, thereby aligning with the current lift span of the I-5 bridges.
3. The Metro Council recognizes that a range of transit alternatives between the Expo Center and Vancouver, Washington in the I-5 corridor must be considered in the Columbia River Crossing DEIS and that substantial data and analysis about ridership, costs, etc. have yet to be completed. However, based on

A) investments already made in this corridor by both the Metro region and the Federal Transit Administration to construct Interstate MAX; and, B) existing data that has been developed during the Alternatives Analysis over the past two years, the Metro Council notes that light rail transit has shown to date to have more promise to cost-effectively meet the transit demand in the corridor.

4. The alternatives advanced to the DEIS must be responsive to financial considerations. Tolling or another user pay financing source should be considered with all of the alternatives advanced to the DEIS.

5. Given the impact of the existing transportation facility and the potential impact of any future facility, the following should be part of any DEIS analysis: a) mitigation programs that address existing and potential future health impacts caused by motor vehicle emissions; b) creating motor vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian links across I-5 to the two halves of Hayden Island; and c) investigation of capping I-5 in downtown Vancouver as a mitigation measure that re-connects historic elements in the City of Vancouver, d) transportation demand management (TDM)/ transportation system management (TSM) policies augmenting build options, and e) other issues related to environmental justice.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this day of , 2007.

David Bragdon, Council President

Approved as to Form:

Daniel B. Cooper, Metro Attorney

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 07-3782, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING METRO COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING PROJECT

Date: February 14, 2007

Prepared by: Richard Brandman
Mark Turpel

BACKGROUND

The Interstate 5 Freeway (I-5) is the only continuous north/south interstate freeway on the West Coast, providing the primary corridor from Mexico to Canada for motor vehicles, including truck-hauled freight. The crossing of the Columbia River by I-5 near Hayden Island and Vancouver, Washington includes two bridges, one built in 1917 and the other in 1958. The extended peak hour demand at the I-5 Columbia River Crossing (CRC) exceeds current capacity and by the year 2020, demand is expected to grow significantly. For example, the cost of truck delay is expected to increase 140 percent by 2020.

In 1999, the Bi-State Transportation Committee recommended that the Portland/Vancouver region initiate a public process to develop a plan for the I-5 Corridor based on four principles:

- Doing nothing in the I-5 Corridor is unacceptable;
- There must be a multi-modal solution in the I-5 Corridor - there is no silver bullet;
- Transportation funds are limited. Paying for improvements in the I-5 Corridor will require new funds; and,
- The region must consider measures that promote transportation-efficient development.

Accordingly, the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership was constituted by Governors Locke and Kitzhaber, including a Metro Council representative. In June 2002, the Partnership completed a Strategic Plan and on November 14, 2002, the Metro Council, through Resolution No. 02-3237A, For the Purpose of Endorsing the I-5 Transportation and Trade Study Recommendations, endorsed the Strategic Plan recommendations including:

- Three through lanes in each direction on I-5, one of which an HOV lane, as feasible;
- Phased light rail loop in Clark County in the vicinity of the I-5, SR500/4th Plan and I-205 corridors;
- An additional or replacement bridge for the I-5 crossing of the Columbia River, with up to two additional lanes for merging plus 2 light rail tracks;
- Interchange improvements and additional auxiliary and/or arterial lanes where needed between SR 500 in Vancouver and Columbia Boulevard in Portland, including a full interchange at Columbia Boulevard;
- Capacity improvements for freight rail;
- Bi-state coordination of land use and management of the transportation system to reduce demand on the freeway and protect corridor improvement;
- Involving communities along the corridor to ensure final project outcomes are equitable and committing to establish a fund for community enhancement;
- Developing additional transportation demand and system strategies to encourage more efficient use of the transportation system.

Several of the recommendations from the Strategic Plan have been completed. For example, planning and environmental assessment of the I-5 Delta Park Project has been completed. Design engineering and financing are being completed currently with construction slated for initiation in the next few years to address capacity issues on I-5 between Delta Park and Lombard.

The I-5 bridge element began in February 2005 with the formation of a 39 member Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Task Force. This Task Force, which includes a Metro Council representative, developed a vision statement, purpose and need statement, screening criteria and reviewed 37 transportation modes/design options, narrowing these to 12.

Issues identified concerning alternatives in the CRC technical analysis included the following:

- Safety - the bridge crossing area and approach sections have crash rates more than two times higher than statewide averages for comparable urban highways. Contributing factors are interchanges too closely spaced, weave and merge sections too short contributing to sideswiping accidents, vertical grade changes that restrict sight distance and very narrow shoulders that prevent avoidance maneuvers or safe temporary storage of disabled vehicles.
- Seismic - neither I-5 bridges meet seismic standards, leaving the I-5 corridor vulnerable in the event of a large earthquake;
- Bridge Alignment - the alignment of the I-5 bridges with the downstream railroad bridge contributes to hazardous barge movements;
- Cost - rehabilitation of the existing bridges, bringing them to current standards would be more costly, both in money and some environmental impacts, such as water habitat conditions, than a replacement bridge;
- Traffic Impact - an arterial bridge would bring unacceptable traffic congestion to downtown Vancouver, Washington.

In October 2007, the Metro Council, after hearing CRC staff presentations and discussing the project, approved a letter to the CRC Task Force citing seven principles including:

- Recognize the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan;
- Use desired outcomes as a guide;
- Determine project priorities;
- Recognize financial limitations;
- Coordinate with the railroad bridge;
- Provide alternatives in the DEIS that demonstrate the fundamental choices before us;
- Provide thorough public vetting before closing options.

In November 2007, CRC staff, after further consideration of technical analyses and using the approved screening criteria and project purpose and need, recommended three alternatives be advanced to a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). These included:

- Alternative 1) No Action;
- Alternative 2) A Replacement Bridge and Bus Rapid Transit with Complementary Express Bus Service; and
- Alternative 3) A Replacement Bridge and Light Rail Transit with Complementary Express Bus Service.

The Task Force accepted the three alternatives for purposes of taking public comment. Open houses were held and the Task Force is scheduled to make a decision about what to recommend to advance to a DEIS on February 29, 2007.

In addition to Resolution No. 07-3782, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING METRO COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING PROJECT, there is Resolution No. 07-3787, FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING METRO COUNCIL GUIDANCE TO ITS REPRESENTATIVE ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING TASK FORCE CONCERNING THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT. Resolution No. 07-3787 includes resolves that the three CRC recommended alternatives will not provide an adequate basis for the Metro Council to support an amendment of the RTP, that to obtain a proper basis for making choices the following should also be considered: a non-capital intensive alternative, land use alternative, supplemental bridge (as included in Resolution No. 07-3782), analysis of improvements to the railroad bridge, an alternative emphasizing transit investments. Further, Resolution 07-3787 includes resolves concerning a complete analysis of the full range of costs and benefits and that the ultimate recommended solution could be a blend of alternatives.

ANALYSIS/INFORMATION

1. Known Opposition

Concerns with the CRC staff recommendations include: 1) interest in finding a lower cost option(s); 2) concerns that either bus rapid transit or light rail transit will not provide appropriate transit service; 3) air quality, noise, environmental justice equity and other impacts to those living along the I-5 alignment; 4) increased demands on southern portions of the Portland metropolitan freeway system such as Interstate 84, I-5 through the Rose Quarter and points south; 5) concern that the CRC project could use up most or all of the transportation funds needed for projects throughout the region; 6) concern that the CRC staff recommendation was not consistent with the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan, including maximum number of lanes and transit mode.

2. Legal Antecedents

Federal

- National Environmental Policy Act
- Clean Air Act
- SAFETEA-LU

State

- State Planning Goals
- State Transportation Planning Rule
- Oregon Transportation Plan
- Oregon Highway Plan
- Oregon Public Transportation Plan
- Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Metro

- Resolution No. 02-3237A, For the Purpose of Endorsing the I-5 Transportation and Trade Study Recommendations.
- Ordinance No. 04-1045A, For the Purpose of Amending the 2000 Regional Transportation Plan ("RTP") for Consistency with the 2004 Interim Federal RTP and Statewide Planning Goals.

The 2004 Regional Transportation Plan as adopted by the Metro Council includes the following in the RTP Project List: 1) Project 1002 Vancouver Light Rail Loop, Expo Center to Vancouver, 2) Projects 4002 and 4003, I-5 Interstate Bridge and I-5 widening, \$251 million for acquiring right-of-way and

"improving I-5/Columbia River bridge (local share of joint project) based on recommendations in I-5 Trade Corridor Study" and, 3) Project 4000, Vancouver Rail Bridge Replacements, to "replace rail bridge swing span based on recommendations from I-5 Trade Corridor EIS study". These projects are not presently part of the financially constrained system of the RTP.

3. Anticipated Effects

The passage of this resolution would give policy guidance to the Metro Council representative serving on the Task Force. The Task Force vote of its 39 members will be taken under advisement by the Oregon Department of Transportation, Washington State Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. Any action to advance alternatives to a DEIS would still require a decision about a preferred alternative and amendment of the Regional Transportation Plan - which would require a separate Metro Council approval.

4. Budget Impacts

This action would not have a direct impact to the Metro budget. However, Metro Council policies about the funding of the Regional Transportation Plan could influence choices about alternatives.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Recommend adoption of Resolution 07-3782.

BEFORE THE METRO COUNCIL

FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING)	RESOLUTION NO. 07- 3787
METRO COUNCIL GUIDANCE ON THE)	
COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING TASK)	
FORCE CONCERNING THE RANGE OF)	
ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A)	
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT)	Introduced by Councilor Robert Liberty
STATEMENT)	
)	

WHEREAS, the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Washington State Department of Transportation have initiated an analysis of the I-5 bridges crossing the Columbia River and I-5 between State Route 500 on the north and Columbia Boulevard on the south and nearby lands, known as the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Project; and,

WHEREAS, as part of the CRC project, thirty-seven transportation modes or design options were identified, analyzed, variously eliminated and combined into twelve alternative project packages studied up until now; and,

WHEREAS, CRC staff have recommended to the CRC Task Force, that only three alternatives go forward for study in the draft environmental impact statement; (1) “no action”; (2) the construction of a new 10 to 12 lane freeway bridge with bus rapid transit, and demolition of the existing bridges; and (3) the construction of a new 10 to 12 lane freeway bridge with light rail, and demolition of the existing bridges, and

WHEREAS, the recommended alternatives provide a choice only between no action and two very similar alternative projects that could each cost between \$2 billion and \$6 billion; and

WHEREAS, the Oregon part of the Portland metropolitan region has already identified a shortfall of about \$6 billion for new capital projects in the current Regional Transportation Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Metro Council has endorsed goals to achieve Smart Government and Great Places which place an emphasis on prudent stewardship of the public's tax dollars and creating livable communities with a balance of transportation modes and to use these goals to shape Metro plans; and,

WHEREAS, careful consideration of the financial implications, or fiscal constraints, upon all transportation projects is a guiding principle of the current update to the Regional Transportation Plan; and,

WHEREAS, in its October 19, 2006 letter to the Columbia River Crossing, the Metro Council stated that “...we believe that transportation solutions must take into consideration cost,

feasibility, and the place any one project may have in the overall transportation improvement picture. .. The Metro Council will be fiscally responsible when considering all public investments. Project cost and a comparison with the other projects proposed within the same horizon will need to be considered;” and

WHEREAS, the financing of either of the new freeway bridge alternatives could oblige the Council, and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation to eliminate, delay or scale-back other important regional transportation investments; and

WHEREAS, it is inappropriate to eliminate, or fail to study alternatives, before determining and comparing the fiscal, economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of those alternatives; and

WHEREAS, the project Purpose and Need Statement and project area were defined so narrowly that many other potentially good alternatives were never studied because they did not conform to the Purpose and Need statement or were outside the study area; and

WHEREAS, the Metro Council in its letter to the CRC Task Force dated October 19, 2006 stated “We believe a wider range of alternatives must be studied in order to find the solutions that deliver the best results at the lowest costs,” and

WHEREAS in the same letter the Metro Council stated that “... in the absence of compelling information to the contrary, alternatives included in the environmental impact statement should include: 1) an alternative that reuses the present bridges” and no such alternative is recommended for further study; and

WHEREAS in the same letter the Metro Council stated: “We.. .believe that options that involve even greater coordination, including possible improvements to the railroad bridge, should be further explored,” and no alternatives involving improvements to the railroad bridge were analyzed; and

WHEREAS in the same letter the Metro Council stated: “we believe that alternatives should be considered in the draft environmental impact statement that include both capital intensive and alternative approaches – unless it is clearly demonstrated during the current phase of analysis that such approaches are not viable” and all of the alternatives studied were capital intensive; and

WHEREAS, in the same letter the Metro Council urged the CRC Task Force, consistently with one of the five principles adopted in the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan, to “explore how land use changes could help address the problem,,” and also recommended “that all transportation alternatives be evaluated for their land use implications’ but no land use alternative was considered and no study of differential land use impacts were used to evaluate the alternatives proposed for elimination for further study; and

WHEREAS, in the same letter the Council urged the CRC Task Force to develop alternatives that achieved more outcomes than just congestion relief, including maintaining and

improving air quality in the corridor and creating a “dazzling waterfront and gateway for both sides of the River.... Including actions that the Metro area could take to support the City of Vancouver’s efforts to preserve and enhance [its] downtown,” but that neither set of outcomes was used to develop an alternatives or to evaluate among the alternatives that were analyzed; and

WHEREAS, in the same letter the Council stated: “We recommend that you consider each problem element and related goal and determine how important it is compared with the others,” but in eliminating many of the alternatives the goals were given equal and decisive weight; and

WHEREAS, members of the Clark County Commission have declined to endorse the CRC staff recommendation; and

WHEREAS, the Metro Council, through the Regional Transportation Plan, is charged with planning the region's transportation system, including the I-5 freeway through the region to the Washington State line and of which the CRC project is a portion and will, along with other units of government, be required to act on the final recommendation of the CRC Task Force; and,

WHEREAS, there remains as much as \$60 million left for future study of CRC alternatives; and

WHEREAS, given the regional significance of the decision to be made by the CRC Task Force, the Metro Council believes it has a responsibility to provide clear guidance to the CRC Task Force prior to its action on the staff recommendation, (currently scheduled for February 27, 2007); now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED,

1. A draft environmental impact study analyzing only the three alternatives in the CRC staff recommendation will not provide an adequate basis for the Metro Council to support an amendment to the Regional Transportation Plan endorsing any of those alternatives; and
2. In order for the Metro Council to have a proper basis for making choices regarding the best investment of limited transportation funds for a thoughtful and integrated approach to increased mobility, accessibility, economic opportunity, and quality of life, the Council respectfully requests that the CRC Task Force, working in conjunction with those members of the Task Force, Metro and other interested units of government, to develop and explore additional, lower priced alternatives for analysis in the draft environmental impact statement, including:
 - (a) A non-capital intensive alternative, or a major element of an alternative, that emphasizes investments in and system management for I-5 and I-205, to increase flow and capacity on both bridges, including special arrangements for long-distance freight movement; and

- (b) A land use alternative, or a major land use element for an alternative, that reduces the amount of peak-hour commuting across the Columbia River sufficiently to reduce the overall project cost; and
- (c) A supplemental bridge built to current seismic standards to carry cars, trucks, light rail, bicycle and pedestrians, that is part of an alternative that retains the existing I-5 bridges for freeway travel, with incremental improvements to the existing I-5 bridges and the key access ramps, to improve flow and increase safety on I-5; and
- (d) An analysis of what kinds of improvements to the downstream railroad bridge could be part of a lower cost alternative, including, moving the swing span from the northern side of the bridge to a location that better aligns with the existing I-5 shipping channel spans, or building a parallel bridge, and accepts the existence of lift spans on all bridges; and
- (e) An alternative emphasizing transit investments, including analysis of light rail using the I-205 bridge and a more comprehensive investment in transit in Vancouver, North Portland and Northeast Portland, sufficient to provide cost effect congestion relief on I-5.

3. Furthermore, that these alternatives be designed and examined in such a way that;

- (a) The ultimate recommended solution may reflect a blend derived from several alternatives that is cost-effective, multi-faceted and incremental; and
- (b) Each of these alternatives, and the alternatives recommended for further study by CRC staff, can be easily compared with each other, and with other projects in the region, across a full range of costs and benefits (including land use costs and benefits), and

4. The Metro Council would welcome the opportunity to work with the CRC Task Force to develop a method for developing, analyzing and reviewing these alternatives within the current budget and timeline for the project, including ways which build the level of confidence in the complete and objective nature of the analysis which is needed to assure a high level of agreement about, and support, for one of the region’s most important transportation decisions.

ADOPTED by the Metro Council this _____ day of _____, 2007.

David Bragdon, Council President

Approved as to Form:

Daniel B. Cooper, Metro Attorney

STAFF REPORT

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 07-3787, FOR THE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING METRO COUNCIL GUIDANCE TO THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING TASK FORCE CONCERNING THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Date: February 14, 2007

Prepared by: Richard Brandman
Mark Turpel

BACKGROUND

The Interstate 5 Freeway (I-5) is the only continuous north/south interstate freeway on the West Coast, providing the primary corridor from Mexico to Canada for motor vehicles, including truck-hauled freight. The crossing of the Columbia River by I-5 near Hayden Island and Vancouver, Washington includes two bridges, one built in 1917 and the other in 1958. The extended peak hour demand at the I-5 Columbia River Crossing (CRC) exceeds current capacity and by the year 2020, demand is expected to grow significantly. For example, the cost of truck delay is expected to increase 140 percent by 2020.

In 1999, the Bi-State Transportation Committee recommended that the Portland/Vancouver region initiate a public process to develop a plan for the I-5 Corridor based on four principles:

- Doing nothing in the I-5 Corridor is unacceptable;
- There must be a multi-modal solution in the I-5 Corridor - there is no silver bullet;
- Transportation funds are limited. Paying for improvements in the I-5 Corridor will require new funds; and,
- The region must consider measures that promote transportation-efficient development.

Accordingly, the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership was constituted by Governors Locke and Kitzhaber, including a Metro Council representative. In June 2002, the Partnership completed a Strategic Plan and on November 14, 2002, the Metro Council, through Resolution No. 02-3237A, For the Purpose of Endorsing the I-5 Transportation and Trade Study Recommendations, endorsed the Strategic Plan recommendations including:

- Three through lanes in each direction on I-5, one of which an HOV lane, as feasible;
- Phased light rail loop in Clark County in the vicinity of the I-5, SR500/4th Plan and I-205 corridors;
- An additional or replacement bridge for the I-5 crossing of the Columbia River, with up to two additional lanes for merging plus 2 light rail tracks;
- Interchange improvements and additional auxiliary and/or arterial lanes where needed between SR 500 in Vancouver and Columbia Boulevard in Portland, including a full interchange at Columbia Boulevard;
- Capacity improvements for freight rail;
- Bi-state coordination of land use and management of the transportation system to reduce demand on the freeway and protect corridor improvement;
- Involving communities along the corridor to ensure final project outcomes are equitable and committing to establish a fund for community enhancement;
- Developing additional transportation demand and system strategies to encourage more efficient use of the transportation system.

Several of the recommendations from the Strategic Plan have been completed. For example, planning and environmental assessment of the I-5 Delta Park Project has been completed. Design engineering and financing are being completed currently with construction slated for initiation in the next few years to address capacity issues on I-5 between Delta Park and Lombard.

The I-5 bridge element began in February 2005 with the formation of a 39 member Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Task Force. This Task Force, which includes a Metro Council representative, developed a vision statement, purpose and need statement, screening criteria and reviewed 37 transportation modes/design options, narrowing these to 12.

In October 2007, the Metro Council, after hearing CRC staff presentations and discussing the project, approved a letter to the CRC Task Force citing seven principles including:

- Recognize the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan;
- Use desired outcomes as a guide;
- Determine project priorities;
- Recognize financial limitations;
- Coordinate with the railroad bridge;
- Provide alternatives in the DEIS that demonstrate the fundamental choices before us;
- Provide thorough public vetting before closing options.

In November 2007, CRC staff, after further consideration of technical analyses and using the approved screening criteria and project purpose and need, recommended three alternatives be advanced to a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). These included:

- Alternative 1) No Action;
- Alternative 2) A Replacement Bridge and Bus Rapid Transit with Complementary Express Bus Service; and
- Alternative 3) A Replacement Bridge and Light Rail Transit with Complementary Express Bus Service.

The Task Force accepted the three alternatives for purposes of taking public comment. Open houses were held and the Task Force is scheduled to make a decision about what to recommend to advance to a DEIS on February 29, 2007.

Resolution No. 07-3787 expresses concerns that the CRC staff recommendations leave a limited choice, that cost has not been given enough consideration, that seismic standards, while very important, have not been applied consistently, the interactions between the railroad bridge and existing or new bridges has not been analyzed for possible synergistic opportunities for finding solutions, bridge heights may be excessive at the northern end, land use alternatives have been dismissed without sufficient consideration and that tolling or different tax structures could help address the problem and have not been given adequate consideration.

Resolution No. 07-3787 includes resolves that the three CRC recommended alternatives will not provide an adequate basis for the Metro Council to support an amendment of the RTP, that to obtain a proper basis for making choices the following should also be considered: a non-capital intensive alternative, land use alternative, supplemental bridge (as included in Resolution No. 07-3782), analysis of improvements to the railroad bridge, an alternative emphasizing transit investments. Further, Resolution 07-3787 includes resolves concerning a complete analysis of the full range of costs and benefits and that the ultimate recommended solution could be a blend of alternatives.

In addition to Resolution 07-3787, there is Resolution No. 07-3782, FOR THE PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING METRO COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE RANGE OF ALTERNATIVES TO BE ADVANCED TO A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING PROJECT. Resolution No. 07-3782 recommends accepting the CRC staff recommendations with conditions. These conditions include: 1) a supplemental bridge option; 2) a notation that the Metro Council has a strong interest in light rail transit to Vancouver, Washington and for a maximum of ten lanes on I-5 crossing the Columbia River; 3) a caution about the ability to finance a large CRC project; 4) and the need for mitigation of air quality emissions, better transportation links to the two halves of Hayden Island, investigating capping I-5 in downtown Vancouver, pursuing transportation demand management and transportation system management policies and addressing environmental justice issues pertaining to the CRC project.

ANALYSIS/INFORMATION

1. Known Opposition

Concerns with the CRC staff recommendations include: 1) interest in finding a lower cost option(s); 2) concerns that either bus rapid transit or light rail transit will not provide appropriate transit service; 3) air quality, noise, environmental justice equity and other impacts to those living along the I-5 alignment; 4) increased demands on southern portions of the Portland metropolitan freeway system such as Interstate 84, I-5 through the Rose Quarter and points south; 5) concern that the CRC project could use up most or all of the transportation funds needed for projects throughout the region; 6) concern that the CRC staff recommendation was not consistent with the I-5 Transportation and Trade Partnership Strategic Plan, including maximum number of lanes and transit mode.

2. Legal Antecedents

Federal

- National Environmental Policy Act
- Clean Air Act
- SAFETEA-LU

State

- State Planning Goals
- State Transportation Planning Rule
- Oregon Transportation Plan
- Oregon Highway Plan
- Oregon Public Transportation Plan
- Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

Metro

- Resolution No. 02-3237A, For the Purpose of Endorsing the I-5 Transportation and Trade Study Recommendations.
- Ordinance No. 04-1045A, For the Purpose of Amending the 2000 Regional Transportation Plan ("RTP") for Consistency with the 2004 Interim Federal RTP and Statewide Planning Goals.

The 2004 Regional Transportation Plan as adopted by the Metro Council includes the following in the RTP Project List: 1) Project 1002 Vancouver Light Rail Loop, Expo Center to Vancouver, 2) Projects 4002 and 4003, I-5 Interstate Bridge and I-5 widening, \$251 million for acquiring right-of-way and "improving I-5/Columbia River bridge (local share of joint project) based on recommendations in I-5 Trade Corridor Study" and, 3) Project 4000, Vancouver Rail Bridge Replacements, to "replace rail bridge

swing span based on recommendations from I-5 Trade Corridor EIS study". These projects are not presently part of the financially constrained system of the RTP.

3. Anticipated Effects

The passage of this resolution would give policy guidance to the Metro Council representative serving on the Task Force. The Task Force vote of its 39 members will be taken under advisement by the Oregon Department of Transportation, Washington State Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration. Any action to advance alternatives to a DEIS would still require a decision about a preferred alternative and amendment of the Regional Transportation Plan - which would require a separate Metro Council approval.

4. Budget Impacts

This action would not have a direct impact to the Metro budget. However, Metro Council policies about the funding of the Regional Transportation Plan could influence choices about alternatives.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Consider both Resolution No. 07-3782 and Resolution No. 07-3787 and establish Metro Council policy guidance.