

Robert Liberty

METRO COUNCIL DISTRICT 6 NEWS



METRO

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Robert Liberty
represents
District 6, which
includes portions of
Northeast, Southeast
and **Southwest**
Portland.



The road traveled too much

Last month the Metro Council considered the following draft statement of purpose for a

transportation study: "The purpose of the project is to address the problem of an inadequate state highway connection between I-5 and [Oregon Highway] 99W in the southwest quadrant of the Portland metropolitan area...."

Here is the same kind of "purpose statement" for a study of a "problem" I might have: "The purpose of this project is to address the problem caused by the absence of a swimming pool in my backyard."

There isn't much doubt what the solution will be to the "problem."

But when the "solution" will cost the taxpaying public \$520 million (the estimated cost of a highway connection between I-5 and 99W, a distance of four to six miles) it behooves your elected officials to ask some basic questions:

Who will benefit from spending this half-billion dollars?

We were informed that this new highway is needed to serve the travel needs of people who live outside our urban area but need to travel to and through it. Are these trips made by commuters living in Newberg and McMinnville who work in the metro area? Are these trips being made by metro residents making

weekend trips to the coast or the Grand Ronde casino?

Once we know the answers to those questions, a new set of questions follows:

If the highway is going to be built to serve commuters, do we know what the consequences will be for McMinnville and Newberg if we reduce the commute time to employment centers in the metro area?

Won't this accelerate their transformation into fast-growing bedroom communities?

Is that what those communities want?

Is it what we want in the metro area? Won't that just generate more traffic?

Are there ways to promote job creation in those cities, so that more of their residents can find jobs near where they live, ways that might cost less than \$520 million?

If the highway is primarily to serve recreational trips to the coast or the casino, are these objectives sufficient to justify spending \$520 million?

Will the new highway worsen congestion on I-5, and if so, will it result in a net gain or a net reduction in congestion for all drivers in our area?

Will this investment help us to realize our regional plan for growth that calls for development in the town centers of Sherwood, Tualatin and Wilsonville, and along transit corridors, or will the new highway stunt that growth?

Will the new highway make local transportation movements harder rather than easier (by cutting existing roads)? Will it be harder or easier for freight to

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Traveled too much

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move to or along local roads? What will be the effects on air and water quality near the highway, and who will bear the burden of those effects?

Are there other ways of addressing the admittedly real congestion problems, such as improvements to local arterials or better-organized land uses? (According to a story published by the Wilsonville Spokesman-Review on August 11: "... many [people] are not convinced that a new highway is needed. They feel that improvements to local roads, including widening Tualatin-Sherwood Road, would fix the problem of traffic congestion in the area.")

If we spend \$520 million on this project, what other transportation projects in the region will have to be sacrificed? (It is generally accepted that the cost of approved transportation projects in our region far exceeds the funds available to build them.)

How do those other projects perform compared to the proposed connector in terms of regional congestion relief, town center development, air and water quality, and other factors?

Unfortunately, these important questions will never be answered if we define the "problem" in such a way that only one solution will be given serious study and if we treat the issue as local instead of regional.

Sadly, there is nothing unique about this transportation study. Similar defects are found in many transportation studies (including some transit studies). This is a road we've traveled too much.

It is time to stop and admit that the way we define and study transportation problems in our region is broken. Fortunately, the update to our Regional Transportation Plan gives us the opportunity to adopt an approach that is better for commuters, taxpayers, neighborhoods, businesses and our environment.

— Robert Liberty

Metro and partners increase construction recycling

A year-end survey of contractors, architects and engineers indicates that a Metro program aimed at reducing waste from the construction and demolition industry is continuing to have a positive effect on the local industry's recycling operations.

The construction and demolition industry has one of the largest impacts on the region's landfills. Metro estimates that 20 percent of the region's 1.3 million tons of waste brought to regional landfills comes directly from building activity, and of that waste, as much as 60 percent could be recycled, reused or otherwise diverted from the landfills.

The program is a partnership with several organizations representing more than 2,000 area construction professionals. The centerpiece is Metro's "Construction Industry Recycling Toolkit," a comprehensive directory of more than 100 recycling and salvage facilities in the metro region.

The survey reveals that 67 percent of the members of the partner organizations have seen the Toolkit, up from 63 percent in 2005 and 60 percent in 2004. It also shows that overall awareness of sustainable construction techniques is increasing, and that recycling among partnership members is up. Wood, cardboard, metal and glass were all categories that saw increased recycling rates among those surveyed between 2005 and 2006.

The Toolkit is available as a printed guide, on-line at www.metro-region.org/toolkit, and also as a mini CD. In addition to the Toolkit, Metro offers a "Salvage Planning Guide" that helps architects and developers design and specify construction projects that generate less waste.

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About Metro

Clean air and clean water do not stop at city limits or county lines. Neither does the need for jobs, a thriving economy and good transportation choices for people and businesses in our region. Voters have asked Metro to help with the challenges that cross those lines and affect the 25 cities and three counties in the Portland metropolitan area.

A regional approach simply makes sense when it comes to protecting open space, caring for parks, planning for the best use of land, managing garbage disposal and increasing recycling. Metro oversees world-class facilities such as the Oregon Zoo, which contributes to conservation and education, and the Oregon Convention Center, which benefits the region's economy.

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