

# Robert Liberty

METRO COUNCIL DISTRICT 6 NEWS



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



## **Troubled bridge over muddied waters**

In a recent conversation I had with a newspaper reporter, he expressed surprise that there was

anything to debate regarding the so-called Columbia River Crossing project.

The Columbia River Crossing is a joint project of the Washington and Oregon Departments of Transportation, examining ways to improve mobility, reliability and accessibility for trips across the Columbia River, in the vicinity of the current Interstate 5 bridge. The project is advised by a 39-member task force.

After all (so goes the conventional thinking), the I-5 bridge is jammed for much of the day; obviously we need a broad, brand-spanking-new bridge over the Columbia River. What's to debate or study? Let's build the sucker!

Actually, the Metro Council found a great deal to discuss when they were briefed on the project last month. In fact, it required a four-page letter to the Columbia River Crossing Task Force, signed by every member of the Metro Council, to summarize our common concerns.

My own concerns (some of which are shared by my colleagues) and questions include the following:

**Costs, benefits and trade-offs.** The proposals for a new, wider, freeway bridge will cost a fortune — \$1 to \$2 billion is the rough guesstimate. The bridge could be so expensive that we wouldn't have the

money to make other, potentially more valuable, transportation investments around the region. (Right now we have a list of \$10 billion worth of transportation investments in the region and \$4.5 billion worth of projected revenues.)

What if we could show that we could reduce more congestion in the region with other projects that cost \$300 million — would a new freeway bridge over the Columbia look like a good return on investment then? What if we knew that other transportation projects would do much more to build vibrant downtowns and town centers around the region? How can we make a decision about whether to build the new bridge without considering these trade-offs with other projects?

## **Will a new, wider freeway bridge reduce congestion or just move it around?**

Imagine a new 10-lane freeway bridge is built. What will happen when those ten lanes converge into four lanes north of downtown Portland? Is this just the beginning of an effort to widen I-5 all the way from Vancouver to Wilsonville? Can we afford that? What will happen to the neighborhoods along the route?

**Purposes, priorities and cost.** Many reasons are given for considering renovating, replacing or supplementing the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River: Commuter congestion, interstate truck traffic delay, problems with barge traffic under the bridge, driver safety and seismic safety. But do all of these have the same solution — a new freeway bridge? Are all of them of equal importance? If not, we might find that different objectives can be met by different approaches that are cheaper and better for the community than a big new bridge.

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## Bridge over muddied waters

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**Geography and alternatives.** In this region, auto and freight traffic crosses the Columbia on three bridges: the I-5 bridge, the Glenn Jackson (I-205) Bridge and the railroad bridge. The traffic on these bridges has strong interactions. But the Task Force is excluding the other two bridges from consideration when it is developing alternatives, which means some other, better solutions might not be found.

**Slighting or ignoring more creative potential solutions.** Other, nonstructural ways to control congestion — such as changing the land use patterns that give rise to extra commuting (and shopping trips to sales tax-free Oregon) or reducing delays caused by accidents — have not been treated seriously by the Task Force staff to date.

**Public participation.** The Task Force is proposing to narrow the alternatives to be considered in further study without a public hearing. An “open house” is not an adequate substitute for a hearing because it does not provide the opportunity for citizens to hear and learn from each other or for the press to learn what those concerns might be.

Clearly, a host of unanswered questions needs to be addressed. While congestion on I-5 is a real problem on both sides of the river, we owe it to the taxpayers — and future generations — to use our limited resources wisely and consider less expensive ways to better manage the flow of traffic across the Columbia River that do not ultimately cause more congestion or threaten our neighborhoods. I will continue to urge the Columbia River Crossing Task Force — and I hope you will add your suggestions as well — to weigh all options before moving forward.

For more information, see [www.columbiarivercrossing.org](http://www.columbiarivercrossing.org). You can submit comments, sign up for monthly updates and get notification about open houses in January 2007.

— Robert Liberty

## Neighborhood transportation improvements

What trails, bike paths, sidewalks, transit and road improvements would you like to see in your neighborhood?

Most money for transportation can only be used for a narrow range of improvements, such as a new highway or light rail line. But the money that makes up the Transportation Priorities part of the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) that Metro administers is far more flexible. Every two years the region allocates approximately \$60 million for a wide range of transportation improvements. This year, Metro is considering 63 projects for funding.

Metro and its local government partners encourage you to attend one of four listening posts to express your opinions. The Portland listening post is 5 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14 at Metro, 600 NE Grand Ave. For other listening posts and the project list, visit [www.metro-region.org](http://www.metro-region.org) and click on Transportation Priorities.

## Metro offers second round of Nature in Neighborhoods grants

Metro is offering up to \$370,000 in its second round of Nature in Neighborhoods grants focused on watershed restoration and community building through hands-on restoration, education and outreach. Individuals, groups or organizations may apply, and pre-applications are due by January 18.

For complete grant guidelines and the list of first-round grants, visit [www.metro-region.org/nature](http://www.metro-region.org/nature), or contact Janelle Geddes at [geddesj@metro.dst.or.us](mailto:geddesj@metro.dst.or.us) or (503) 797-1550.

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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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