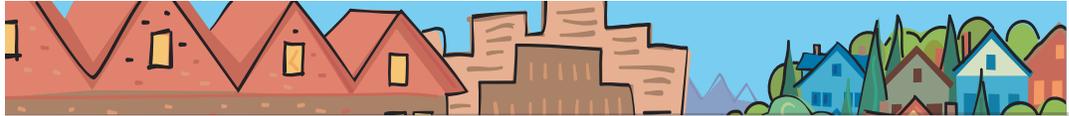


Robert Liberty

METRO COUNCIL DISTRICT 6 NEWS



METRO

PEOPLE PLACES
OPEN SPACES

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



The Controversial \$4 Billion 12-Lane Columbia River Bridge

On Thursday June 5, the Metro Council will take a position on the Columbia River Crossing. The Columbia River Crossing (“CRC”) Task Force has been studying how to address rush-hour congestion caused by commuting on Interstate 5 between Portland and Vancouver. The Task Force will make recommendations to the eight government units that must agree before any project can go forward.

In a preliminary straw poll earlier this year, most CRC Task Force members indicated they would recommend demolishing the two existing I-5 bridges, replacing them with a new 12-lane freeway toll bridge coupled with an extension of light rail from Portland to downtown Vancouver.

For more than two years I have been expressing very serious reservations regarding the study’s objectives, geographic scope, assumptions and methods, which are fundamental flaws in the CRC Task Force’s work. These include the failure to consider land use causes and solutions, assumptions about fuel prices, and about how increasing the number of lanes affects drivers’ behavior. (Some of those concerns were shared by my colleagues and were set out in a letter sent to the Task Force in October 2006.)

Another defect in the study was unavoidable: The study began before the 2007 Oregon Legislature’s adoption of a target to reduce greenhouse gases by 10% over 1990 levels by 2020, and by 75% over 1990 levels by 2050. Auto and truck emissions are a primary source of greenhouse gases.

Another part of the controversy is the cost of the project: \$3.1 billion to \$4.2 billion. The proposed 12-lane bridge project is easily the most expensive transportation investment ever proposed for our region. As both project proponents and opponents agree, this huge cost will require tolling the bridges.

Replacing the bridges accounts for about a third of the project cost, or more than \$1 billion. I believe we can save hundreds of millions of dollars by upgrading the existing bridges instead of replacing them. The Oregon Department of Transportation’s 2007 Bridge Inspection Report rated the structural integrity of the two existing bridges as “fair,” a rating that it shares with many other highway bridges around the region. (The ODOT bridge inspection report can be found on-line by clicking on “2007 Bridge Condition Report” found at <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/BRIDGE/>.)

For these and other reasons, I joined with two of my Council colleagues in preparing Resolution 08-3948, which calls for a phased solution that will reduce congestion, increase safety, save money and respect our region’s environmental values. (It can be found online as part of the June 5 Metro Council agenda packet, at <http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=21730>)

continued

The first phase would be to both reduce rush-hour congestion and fund needed safety improvements by adopting a toll on the I-5 bridges. The toll revenues would be used to make the bridges stronger in the event of an earthquake and rebuild ramps (especially on Hayden Island and the SR 14 Interchange) that contribute to accidents and congestion and delay freight movement.

The next step would be to build a local bridge from Hayden Island to Portland for cars and light trucks, so that residents don't have to use I-5 during rush hour. The bridge also could carry light rail to Jantzen Beach, where buses from Vancouver could provide transit connections.

Building another bridge across the Columbia to carry light rail, bikes and pedestrians with the option for additional lanes for cars and trucks could be carried out later as needed.

There are many different perspectives on this controversial project that will be subject to lively testimony from the public and thoughtful discussion by Metro Councilors.

This project raises broader questions that go to the heart of how we make decisions about how or whether to spend billions of the taxpayers' dollars.

- Shouldn't we consider how much money we have to spend regionally before we propose expensive new projects? Shouldn't we require new projects to fit within a realistic regional transportation budget that must also fund preserving the roads we already have?
- Shouldn't we be considering using cost benefit ratios to compare the alternatives proposed in any one project? Should we be using cost benefit ratios to guide us in choosing between projects? (We would need to consider a broad range of both costs and benefits.)
- Shouldn't we be putting decisions about individual projects covering small parts of the transportation system into a broader regional strategy that considers what's best for the region as a whole?
- Shouldn't we be integrating transportation and land use decisions instead of treating them as separate subjects?

For better and for worse we are going to make some decisions about the CRC proposal before we, as a region, have answered those broader questions. But sooner or later we will have to address those questions.

You've read my thoughts. I hope to hear yours, at Metro's hearing on June 5 or by letter, telephone or e-mail.

Upcoming CRC Hearings

June 5 Metro Council

June 10 C-Tran Board

June 10 Portland Planning Commission

June 25 TriMet Board

June 30 Vancouver City Council Hearing

– Robert Liberty

Metro's New Website Address



Metro's new online address, www.oregonmetro.gov, went into effect on May 1st. The change from the old ".org" address to the new ".gov" address is a key step in ensuring Metro's recognition as a governmental body. In addition, the website has been updated with a friendlier look and feel.

The updates aim to increase usability, promote public participation, and make the most popular information easier to find. They were also designed to make the site accessible to Internet users of all skill levels; from novice to professional programmers.

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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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