

# Robert Liberty

## METRO COUNCIL DISTRICT 6 NEWS



**METRO**

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



### **Columbia River Crossing: Now that everyone has finished singing Kumbaya, who is going to pick up the \$3.6 billion tab?**

On July 17, 2008, the Metro Council voted, by a majority of 5-to-2, to endorse demolishing the existing Interstate 5 bridges over the Columbia River, building a new bridge of up to 12 lanes in width, to toll users of the new bridge and to extend light rail to Vancouver. (I support a cheaper, greener, more comprehensive alternative so I voted against this proposal.)

Now that all six government agencies have endorsed the new mega-bridge proposal, attention will turn to figuring out how to pay for it.

The estimated cost of the selected Columbia River Crossing alternative is \$3.5 to \$3.7 billion. It is by far the most expensive infrastructure project ever proposed in the Portland region. Here is the finance plan:

Federal gas taxes to fund the highway improvements: \$400 to \$600 million

Federal gas taxes to fund the light rail extension: \$750 million

Federal credits for Washington ferry tolls: \$188 million

*Total Federal contribution: \$1.34 to \$1.54 billion*

Tolls on bridge users: \$1.07 to \$1.35 billion

Oregon and Washington taxpayers: \$823 million to \$1.45 billion

### **Excerpts from July 1, 2008 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency comments on the Columbia River Crossing Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

“Our Environmental Justice concerns with the Draft EIS are that: the direct and indirect environmental, human health, social and economic project impacts would likely affect the low income, minority, elderly, and disable populations disproportionately as compared to populations that reside outside the project area and throughout the region.”

### **Impacts of Land Use Changes and Reduced Travel Times**

“Neither the Land Use section nor the Cumulative Impacts Section discuss the potential impacts of growth on natural resources such as air and water quality. Replacement Crossing Alternatives propose to double the number of highway lanes from six to twelve. EPA is concerned that roadway expansion of this magnitude, even with tolls and transit, may stimulate travel demand for use of privately owned vehicles...and may contribute to pressures for dispersed development.”

### **Recommendations**

“Seriously consider selecting a preferred alternative that places less emphasis on the expansion of I-5 and more emphasis on the provision and use of public transit, bicycle and pedestrian modes, and on [Transportation Demand Management and Transportation System Management] strategies.”

Is this financial plan realistic? Consider the following:

- The estimated federal deficit is approaching one-half trillion dollars next year.
- The Federal Highway Trust Fund is going into the red for the first time.

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- Will the new president and Congress in 2009 want to increase gas taxes?
- The last time a gas tax increase was referred to Oregon voters, 88% voted against it.
- Oregon's gas tax would have to be increased by 2 cents per gallon, statewide, for more than ten years to pay for the Columbia River Crossing. (Each penny increase yields about \$29 million per year in additional tax revenue.)
- The chair of the Washington State House Transportation Committee was quoted in the Portland Business Journal (July 11, 2008) as saying; "Right now, the Columbia River Crossing is a totally unfunded package, and we've taken more than \$3 billion worth of hits [on gas taxes that the state applies toward such projects]... We need to keep our earlier promises [to fund replacement of the Evergreen Point floating bridge at \$2 billion and the Alaska Way Viaduct at up to \$4 billion]."

Once legislators start grappling with the high cost of the project and the tradeoffs it will force, we may see a revival of interest in other items on the menu that cost less and generate less (greenhouse) gas.

### Speaking of the bill we have to pay...

Metro recently completed a draft analysis comparing the cost of infrastructure (new water and sewer lines, roads, etc.) for different types of development, using seventeen case studies of development projects around the region, from Beaver Creek to the Brewery Blocks in the Pearl District. Twelve of the projects were built at the edge of the region, on land recently added to the urban growth boundary, and five were redevelopment in established downtown areas in Portland, Gresham, Milwaukie and Lake Oswego.

The comparisons were made by translating the new infrastructure costs into costs per new dwelling. Local and community infrastructure costs (e.g. arterial street or water line) were distinguished from regional infrastructure costs (e.g. new highway lane).

The weighted average cost of the new local

infrastructure was \$51,000 per dwelling for the redevelopment projects. It was \$75,000 per dwelling unit for new developments on undeveloped land at the suburban edge of the region. If the most expensive urban project and the most expensive suburban project were excluded, then the average weighted costs were \$31,000 for the urban redevelopment projects and \$72,000 for the suburban projects.

Regional infrastructure costs were dominated by transportation investments. The range in cost was \$5,000 per dwelling unit for new homes in urban areas near the center of the city and up to \$41,000 per dwelling for homes built at the suburban edge of the region.

The study did not determine the cost of building individual houses in urban neighborhoods (as opposed to building a development project), which is the form much of the growth in District 6 is taking.

The final study results will be important as Metro moves toward deciding how and where future growth should occur in a set of decisions in 2009 and 2010.

– Robert Liberty

### Improving the Oregon Zoo

As the oldest zoo west of the Mississippi, the Oregon Zoo is feeling its age. In May 2008, the Metro Council approved an initiative that places a \$125-million bond on the November ballot that will protect animal health and safety, make the Zoo more sustainable in its operations, and address conservation issues. Passage of Measure 2696 will allow the Zoo to update its inadequate infrastructure, and repair the outdated veterinary hospital and quarantine facility.

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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.

#### Your Metro representatives

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David Bragdon

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