

Robert Liberty

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



Columbia River Crossing: It's Time for a Plan E

A personal message from Councilor Liberty

The officially approved cost for the Columbia River Crossing project is \$3.6 billion. That amount is supposed to pay for demolishing the two existing, structurally sound bridges carrying I-5 over the Columbia River, and build a new 12-lane bridge, rebuild several I-5 interchanges, and extend light rail from the Expo Center to downtown Portland.

The Regional Transportation Plan approved by Metro assumes that tolls would pay for about a third of the project, and that Oregon and Washington taxpayers would pay another third. The federal government's contribution of the remaining third would be as follows: \$750 million for the light rail components and a \$400 to \$600 million contribution for the highway component.

Whatever is not paid for by the federal government or by tolls will have to be paid with taxes on Oregonians and Washingtonians.

But key members of Congress are calling into question the fundamental financing assumptions and even the thinking behind the bridge itself.

In an article published on April 7, 2009, in the *The Daily Columbian*, U.S. Congressman Brian Baird (who represents Clark County and Vancouver) was reported as saying "the federal government realistically might deliver \$200 million to \$300 million in federal highway dollars for the . . . project, far less than the \$400 million to \$600 million envisioned in preliminary financial plans. Those same plans call for bridge tolls to slowly pay off \$1.35 billion in construction debt. But Baird said he doesn't believe the envisioned tolls are high enough to generate that amount, adding that the project's 2008 draft environmental impact statement didn't provide much information to back up those calculations." Baird called for "a public discussion based on accurate cost projections and corresponding benefits . . ."

Two weeks later, Congressman Peter DeFazio weighed in on the bridge cost debate. DeFazio, from Eugene, is chair of the House Highways and Transit Subcommittee. In an interview published in *Willamette Week* on April 22, DeFazio was asked "What's your take on the Columbia River Crossing?" to which he replied: "I have said from Day One, they should think small. And they have been thinking really big and really expensive. And I am not sure how that project moves forward and how they will fund it. I have raised concerns throughout the process – keep the price down. You can't solve all of your problems with one project. That's what they seem to want to do."

Meanwhile, members of the Oregon legislature from the Portland area have questioned the cost and purposes of the project as well.

Clearly it is time for us to begin developing a less costly Plan B for managing congestion, assuring timely delivery of critical freight, and improving safety for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians, as they move across the Columbia River.



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continued

Or maybe we should call it “Plan E” for an approach that is more cost effective, more equitable to taxpayers and residents along the freeway, and far better for our environment.

– Robert Liberty

Metro considers fee changes for solid waste disposal

As part of the annual budgeting process, Metro is considering changes to solid waste disposal fees, including the per-ton price for waste disposal at Metro’s two transfer stations. Changes in disposal fees can affect what haulers charge for garbage collection.

Per Metro code, the rate-setting process to date has included public meetings of Metro’s Rate Review Committee (RRC), in which the committee forwarded recommendations to the Metro Council, who considered them during an April 14 public work session.

Metro has already taken steps to limit fee increases through programmatic reductions and operational changes included in the chief operating officer’s proposed budget for Metro Council consideration.

Metro report shows urban centers, corridors generally most affordable

The Metro Council released a report stating that town centers and transportation corridors are among the most affordable places to live in the region, and that additional investments in affordable housing will be needed as the region grows.

Metro’s analysis of the Portland region’s housing needs through the year 2030 builds on research completed by the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies at Portland State University. The study found that urban centers and transportation corridors have the greatest variety of housing and transportation options and often are the most affordable areas in the region.

Although urban centers and transportation corridors save money, the report says housing and transportation costs will still be a burden for 18 to 23 percent of households by 2030, depending on population growth rates. Today, that percentage is 17 percent. Metro considers people who spend more than 50 percent of their monthly budgets on rent and transportation cost burdened.

The report sets the stage for a discussion among the region’s leaders about new incentives for mixed-use and multifamily homes and about investments in transportation and other infrastructure to support efficient use of land inside the existing urban growth boundary.

In 1995, the Metro Council and local governments from across the region endorsed the 2040 Growth Concept, a blueprint for managing growth that seeks to direct new households and populations into town and regional centers and transportation corridors while protecting the character of single-family neighborhoods. Today’s Housing Needs Analysis indicates that to provide more affordable housing options in centers and corridors, additional public investments and policy changes will be needed.

The Housing Needs Analysis is a companion report to the Preliminary Residential Urban Growth Report, which is intended to inform discussions about choices of public policies and investments that can support a wide range of housing options as the region’s population continues to grow. The Metro Council welcomes public comment and feedback on this analysis.

In September, Metro will unveil a package of proposals aimed at integrating long-term regional land use policies with transportation investments. An updated Urban Growth Report, which will include an updated Housing Needs Analysis, will be part of that package, along with recommendations on urban and rural reserve designations and a 25-year Regional Transportation Plan, all of which will be adopted by the end of this year.

More information on the Housing Needs Analysis can be found online at www.oregonmetro.gov/urbangrowthreport

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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