



COALITION FOR A LIVABLE FUTURE

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The Columbia River Crossing: Smart Next Steps

The Coalition for a Livable Future is a partnership of over 100 diverse organizations and thousands of individuals working together to create a more equitable and sustainable Portland metropolitan region.

CLF is opposed to the current plan for the CRC because it is fiscally irresponsible and harmful to people's health and the environment. These concerns stem primarily from the freeway expansion and miles of excessive interchanges, which constitute the majority of the project's cost.

We support improvements to the I-5 corridor. We also support several elements in the current project, including transit, variable tolling, and improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities, while having significant concerns around how some of these elements have been addressed. Yet inclusion of these elements does not justify a massive freeway widening, which decades of experience around the country has shown ultimately fails to reduce congestion.

We support a smaller, less expensive, more environmentally friendly approach to addressing the issues in the I-5 corridor.

The Current CRC Plan: Costly, Risky, Ineffective

The plan from Oregon and Washington's highway departments lacks a credible financing scheme, a plan to effectively move traffic, and a design consistent with Oregon's values.

Pushing forward the current plan will saddle generations of Oregonians with debt for a hugely expensive, ineffective highway expansion project. The current CRC plan:

- **Undermines funding for transportation projects across Oregon.** The project costs \$3.6 billion, plus billions more in interest from 30 years of nontraditional, backloaded debt (Financial Analysis of the Columbia River Crossing, Impresa Consulting, 2010).
- **Puts Oregon at significant financial risk.** Infrastructure mega-projects go over budget 90% of the time (Flyvbjerg 2009). The largest transportation projects in Oregon today will each cost more than twice their original budget.
 - o The seven-mile long rebuild of US 20 between Corvallis and Newport was projected to cost \$110 million. It has cost \$234 million to date and is still not complete (US DOT and FHWA, 2003, and AASHTO, 2010).

“The credibility of the cost basis for the project... is problematic.”

-CRC Independent Review Panel Report, 2010, p.168

- ODOT estimated the Newberg-Dundee bypass would cost \$222 million. It is now projected to cost between \$752 and \$880 million (FHWA and ODOT, 2010).
- **Fails to Pass Legal Muster.** The CRC violates the National Environmental Protection Act by not considering alternatives to a major freeway and interchange expansion rather than a wide range of reasonable alternatives (40 CFR §1502.14).
- **Fails to prevent traffic congestion.** Expanding highways does not reduce congestion (“The Fundamental Law of Congestion: Evidence from US Cities,” U. Toronto Dept. of Economics, 2009), and the project’s own modeling projects:
 - 40% more vehicles miles traveled on I-5 and I-205 (CRC Vehicle Trip Comparison, 2008).
 - Over 8 hours of congestion in the Rose Quarter (URS Report).
 - Only one minute of reduced commute time for southbound traffic (URS Report).
- **Is based on incorrect, outdated data that could lead to financial liability for Oregon.** The project bases its traffic estimates on \$1.10 per gallon gas (Higgins 2008). Traffic on the I-5 bridges is already 17% below the CRC’s projections and has been falling since 2005, years before the recession hit (CRC Draft EIS, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, 2010). Reduced traffic could result in shortages of toll revenue, leaving the state liable for paying off the debt.
- **Creates 32% more climate pollution than today’s levels** (CRC Draft EIS). Oregon’s legislatively adopted policy is to cut climate pollution by 80% by 2050.
- **Facilitates costly sprawl development.** Freeway expansions lead to inefficient development patterns, and Clark County estimates 72% of new residents will locate in exurbs and rural areas over the next 15 years. (Clark County 2007 Comprehensive Plan with 2008 and 2009 updates).
- **Adds air pollution to North Portland neighborhoods.** Asthma rates near I-5 are double the national average (Pobodnick, 2001), and fifteen air toxics in the North Portland area already exceed state and federal benchmarks (DEQ, 2011). Increasing traffic in the neighborhood will exacerbate these problems.

The CLF Solution: More Affordable, More Targeted, More Fair

The Coalition for a Livable Future recommends a less costly and more targeted solution to create jobs, move freight, and protect community health. Oregon should:

Take consensus steps immediately, and then phase implementation of multi-modal elements according to need and available funds. After seeing the results from affordable, targeted actions discussed below, we should model the results and determine next steps. Elements may include freight and carpool priority, high speed rail, and an additional road bridge to Vancouver.

Establish new project oversight and improve transparency. ODOT and WSDOT continue to ignore input from their own experts and advisors, including on the bridge design, reconsidering the five miles of interchanges, and restarting citizen advisory committees. The state should hire an independent, outside expert who is willing to think broadly about the challenges and create a strong plan the community can support.

Immediately implement strategies proven to reduce traffic. Transportation System and Demand Management strategies planned for after construction could be implemented now. These strategies, including increased ramp metering, incentives for carpool and vanpools, and public education, are projected to reduce 2030 vehicle traffic by 10% (Performance Measures Advisory Group Interim Report and Recommendation).

Create a local bridge to Hayden Island and eliminate the freeway interchange on the island, the source of much of the current congestion and safety concerns. This would be more affordable and sensible than the planned 500-foot wide, 18-lane cross-section at the island, projected to cost \$500 million.

Start using variable tolling on I-5 and I-205 before construction to maximize the efficiency of the current corridor and any future bridges. Unlike expanding freeway lanes, variable tolling (also known as congestion pricing) is an effective way to ensure traffic flows efficiently. We should implement pricing as soon as possible to more efficiently match our road capacity with demand and provide funding for additional improvements.

Improve transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities. CLF supports connecting transit to Vancouver and improving the current bike and pedestrian facilities. The current design needs improvement to ensure safety and create good connections to create quality choices for all.

Improve traffic flow by upgrading the downstream railroad bridge and increasing the speed of crash response. ODOT estimates 95% of all bridge lifts on I-5 could disappear if the downstream railroad bridge were retrofitted to allow river traffic to travel under the highest point of the existing bridges (CRC Draft EIS). In addition, roughly 25% of congestion comes from crashes and could be significantly reduced by improving incident response in the corridor.

Restore community enhancement funds. The oft-neglected neighborhoods adjacent to this project have Oregon's largest minority populations and some of the highest concentrations of air toxics and health problems. A Community Enhancement Fund based on 1% for the Arts model was recommended by ODOT and was a condition of Metro's and the CRC Task Force's support of the project. Highway departments stripped out the 1%; those funds must be restored.

Retain the current bridge spans. It is unnecessary and wasteful to tear down functioning infrastructure when solutions that include retaining the current bridges exist. Unlike 135 other bridges in Oregon, including 29 on the Interstate system, the existing bridges are not structurally deficient. (ODOT Bridge Condition Report, 2009).