

Rep. Terry Beyer, Chair
House Committee on Transportation
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Cc: Members of the House Committee on Transportation

April 23, 2009

Re: Concerns with the Planning Process on the Columbia River Crossing and Health

Dear Chair Beyer and members of the House Committee on Transportation:

As a diverse group of public health and healthy community stakeholders, we are writing to weigh in on the Columbia River Crossing, an aspect of the Jobs and Transportation Act (HB2120) that will have a significant impact on the health of Oregonians. A key provision of HB 2120 is to provide \$30 million per biennium to continue planning for the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Project.

The CRC Project has the potential to negatively impact the public's health through increased reliance on cars, air toxics, noise, unsafe speeds, and failure to address environmental justice concerns. While some elements, including improved transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, may improve opportunities for good health, we have significant concerns that the negative health impacts have not been adequately addressed in the project plans.

In 2008, the Multnomah County Health Department and multiple stakeholders conducted a health impact assessment (HIA) of the CRC Project in response to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Health impact assessments are a set of tools used to objectively identify the positive and negative health impacts of policies and infrastructure projects. HIAs give decision makers a more comprehensive understanding of how the project will affect not only the economic and environmental bottom line, but also the ultimate bottom line of residents' ability to live in healthy communities and ensure their own well-being.

Multnomah County's HIA found that the cumulative effect of air toxics has the potential to affect a large proportion of the population, causing health problems for community members. It recommended that air pollution "should be a major criterion in the final selection of the bridge." The HIA stated that "[h]armful noise levels from traffic are associated with increases in chronic diseases and cognitive functioning," and noted that health impacts due to air pollution and excessive noise will be felt most acutely by populations of color, low income residents, and populations with disabilities. Other potential impacts include increased obesity due to increased incentives and capacity for single occupancy vehicle use.

Major recommendations brought up in the Multnomah County HIA include additional analysis of air quality, noise and environmental justice, and establishment of health-based standards. A copy of the HIA which took the form of a response to the Draft EIS is attached.

We strongly encourage the legislature to include language in HB 2120 that requires the project design to support public health. Here is some sample bill language about health:

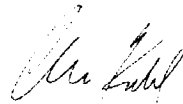
“The Department of Transportation shall assess the impacts on health and human safety regarding design and construction of the Columbia River Crossing Project, and shall maximize positive health benefits and minimize negative health outcomes in project design and construction.”

As the largest public works project Oregon will have ever undertaken, the Columbia River Crossing Project has the potential to affect the public health for generations to come. Please support the public’s health as you consider this project.

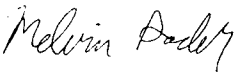
Sincerely,



Noelle Dobson,
Project Director,
Healthy Eating, Active Living
Community Health Partnership



Chris Kabel,
Program Officer,
Northwest Health Foundation



Mel Rader,
Project Director,
Upstream Public Health
Contact Phone Number:
503-449-1037



Phillip Wu, MD
Lead Physician for the Community
Health Initiative at Kaiser Permanente



Judy Cleave, MPH, RN
President
Oregon Public Health Association

Attached: Response letter to the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment on the Columbia River Crossing.