

September 6, 2013

Governor John Kitzhaber  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street, Room 160  
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047

sent via email and mail

Dear Governor Kitzhaber:

When the Governors of Oregon and Washington declared the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) highway project dead only a short time ago, it opened up a significant opportunity to turn the corner and focus on our real needs, including the need to address issues in the I-5, in ways that are fiscally responsible, environmentally sustainable, and equitable. The next steps we take will determine whether we will achieve these outcomes.

A renewed effort to resurrect the project financed and supported only by Oregon raises the concerns we have long held, while adding significant risk to Oregon's finances, and particularly to Oregon's ability to meet the many transportation needs around the state. It also eliminates the partnership – financial and otherwise – with Washington that is fundamental to a bi-state project.

**If this effort to save the CRC is allowed, Oregon alone would foot the bill, bear all the financial risks, and experience the reduction in funding for other transportation projects.**

The current proposal would have the Oregon legislature re-commit Oregon's \$450 million, issue \$1.3 billion in bonds, and assume full liability for revenue shortfalls and cost overruns with no contribution from Washington. This is a fiscally, environmentally, and socially irresponsible proposal.

Projects around the state will be lost if money must be diverted to the CRC. The now-dead plan approved in House Bill 2800 would have required Oregon to take \$27 million from other transportation projects every year for the next 30 years to pay Oregon's share:

"If no new revenue is provided by the Legislature, in 2016 and beyond ODOT would cover debt service with federal highway formula funds that would otherwise be available for transportation projects in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/GOVREL/Pages/042213b.aspx>

Under this resuscitated proposal, the cost to Oregon's transportation budget could grow even larger. Oregon alone would be responsible for all construction, operation and maintenance costs of the CRC, including debt service, funding shortages, and cost over-runs. This kind of money can pay for a lot of potholes to be fixed, sidewalks to be repaired, interchanges to be improved, and safe bike facilities to be built.

Many recent studies have documented that driving has been decreasing for over a decade and is projected to continue doing so, making tolls unlikely to provide enough revenue to meet project costs. This would be devastating for Oregon's transportation needs statewide. Oregon would also be saddled with the full cost of paying compensation to river users in Washington state affected by the lower clearance of the new bridge, recently reported as totaling \$86 million for three manufacturers.

**The additional financial burden on Oregon could also mean service cuts for TriMet, the transit provider in the Portland metropolitan area.**

The Oregon-only CRC may end up requiring TriMet to run light rail into Washington State on its own. The transit would primarily serve Washington residents, yet C-Tran, the Clark County transit provider, is not committed to paying any of the cost of operating the light rail. We are one region, and TriMet should not be required to go it alone.

If TriMet has to pick up the tab, additional money spent on light rail into Clark County could mean additional bus service cutbacks for Oregon residents. In recent years, TriMet has cut bus routes and service frequency throughout the region. Everyone suffers from these cuts, but their impact has fallen particularly hard on transit-dependent residents – the elderly, low income, disabled, and children – as well as disproportionately on communities of color. It also further hinders Oregon's ability to meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

**We have an opportunity before us, but it is not to resurrect the CRC that has been rejected.**

Please do not support funding for the current CRC plan. The proposed CRC freeway expansion remains bad public policy for Oregon and the Portland-Vancouver region. The proposal is contrary to efforts to foster vibrant, sustainable, and walkable communities that help reduce green-house gas emissions, air and water pollution, farmland loss, and habitat destruction. The current CRC proposal would result in a net loss in efforts to address the public health, safety, and environmental quality impacts of our transportation system. Oregonians do not deserve contorted attempts to revive this dead project.

Let's not miss the real opportunity to find innovative ways to address safety, fix roads, cut climate pollution, provide bicycling and walking opportunities, create equal access to vibrant

communities, and support a strong local economy. Oregonians—today and in the future—deserve a serious effort to find these solutions.

Sincerely,

Jason Miner, Executive Director  
1000 Friends of Oregon

Jonathan Ostar, Executive Director  
OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

Bob Sallinger, Conservation Director  
Audubon Society of Portland

Rhett Lawrence, Conservation Director  
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Mel Rader, Executive Director  
Upstream Public Health

Mark Riskedahl, Executive Director  
Northwest Environmental Defense Center

Cc: Senate President Peter Courtney  
Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum  
Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli  
House Speaker Tina Kotek  
House Majority Leader Val Hoyle  
House Republican Leader Mike McLane  
Curtis Robinhold, Governor's Chief of Staff  
Karmen Fore, Governor's Transportation Advisor