



February 5, 2009

David Bragdon
President, Metro Council
600 N.E. Grand Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232

President Bragdon and Council Members,

Re: Westside Businesses And Communities Recommend 12-Lane
Replacement Bridge For The I-5 Columbia River Crossing

Members of Westside Economic Alliance---representing both public and private sector interests---are unified in our support for the replacement of the Interstate 5 crossing of the Columbia River as one of the top transportation priorities for our region. The importance of this project becomes more critical every day, as the growing volume of freight and the increasing population of our region, far exceeds the design capacity and safety limits of the existing structures.

Westside Economic Alliance serves 150 employers, real estate developers and commercial property managers, as well as the local communities and public agencies on the Westside of the Portland metro region. While most of our members are geographically-detached from the bridge influence area, we have identified 105 companies in Washington County that regularly ship containerized freight through the Ports of Portland and Vancouver. In addition, WorkSource Oregon---the state employment department---estimates 15,000 private sector employees commute between homes and jobs in Clark County, Washington and Washington County, Oregon.

The existing Interstate 5 bridges, constructed in 1917 and 1957, are simply inadequate to handle the growing volumes of traffic imposed by a modern transportation system. The traffic lanes on the twin bridges and their approaches are too narrow, and there are no safety shoulders on the actual bridge structures. The daily congestion that occurs on these hazardous crossings seriously impairs freight mobility, reduces road capacity, limits commuter access, discourages modal choice, and jeopardizes public safety for several miles on both sides of the river—and these problems are only getting worse.

The existing spans are further hampered by their age and vulnerability to seismic events or collisions with commercial river traffic that is forced to navigate a dangerous, serpentine course beneath the Interstate 5 bridges, and the nearby railroad span owned and operated by Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad.

Retaining the existing spans, for whatever purposes, will seriously compromise the safety and efficiency of a new span, create unnecessary safety risks, and impose significant maintenance expenses on state and county governments---without appreciable benefits in terms of people and freight access across the river.

Last Monday morning, when your Council held a joint work session with members of the Portland City Council, we learned an estimated 135,000 vehicles are crossing the Interstate 5 bridges every day between Portland and Vancouver. Transportation planners have forecast that figure will rise to as many as 180,000 vehicles daily within 25 years.

If nothing is done to address these daily challenges, congestion on the I-5 bridge and its approaches is expected to increase from 4-6 hours each day, to as many as 16 hours each day. The resulting impact to our regional and national economy cannot be overstated. But the lost earnings, reduced productivity, restricted opportunities and livability for workers and their families on both side of the river, are a daily tragedy that can no longer be ignored.

Westside Economic Alliance believes a new Interstate 5 bridge will improve access between Oregon and Washington, and facilitate trade between our international ports, industrial areas and employments centers, urban amenities, affordable neighborhoods, attractive schools, retail centers and recreational opportunities for residents of both states. A new bridge is needed to restore predictable travel times and allow safer trips on Interstate 5, and its tributary system of state highways, trucking corridors and commuter arterials.

Just as the original I-5 bridges created new opportunities for residents on both sides of the river, members of Westside Economic Alliance believe a 12-lane replacement span will also stimulate redevelopment opportunities in north Portland neighborhoods, on Hayden Island, and in downtown Vancouver. As residents and customers are able to access businesses, schools, recreational facilities and historic attractions throughout the bridge influence area, we expect the new span will stimulate needed investment and development opportunities that will help create vibrant communities on both sides of the river.

Conversely, during your joint work session last week, and in the testimony presented here today, there has been considerable discussion about how to control the "induced demand" some people fear will result from a new bridge across the Columbia River. WEA would like to offer a different perspective on this issue, by suggesting that our greater concern in this region should be to guard against "reduced opportunity" by unfairly restricting access across the Columbia.

Oregon's unemployment rate has lead the national average for 150 consecutive months, and now impacts at least one of every 11 workers in our state. With an estimated 175,000 Oregonians scrambling to return to our state's workforce and contribute to the economic recovery of our state, we cannot afford to limit anyone's access to new job opportunities, education and training programs, health care facilities or social services in this region.

Westside Economic Alliance urges the Metro Council to work with us to restore economic health to our communities and improve the quality of life for all Oregonians. If we are to be successful, we must provide access to the opportunities and amenities that make this a special place to live and work. This requires that we improve freight mobility, increase road

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capacity, enable commuter access, encourage modal choice, and protect public safety. This requires a new interstate crossing over the Columbia River, and the support of your Council.

The Columbia Crossing Project should be seen as an exciting opportunity, and a necessary investment, in the growth and prosperity of the West Coast, Pacific Northwest, and Portland / Vancouver metropolitan region. It is crucial to sustaining the global competitiveness of our region, and it offers a welcome investment in the quality of life and opportunities for more than 2 million people now living within a 20-mile radius of the Columbia River Crossing.

The Metro Council has a remarkable opportunity today to work cooperatively with communities and public agencies in Washington State and Washington D.C. by addressing the transportation needs of residents and businesses well beyond this tri-county region. We hope you will seize this opportunity by recommending a 12-lane replacement bridge that will efficiently serve our region for generations to come.

In turn, members of Westside Economic Alliance pledge our continued support and assistance in working with the Metro Council---and your constituents---to create innovative solutions to the traffic congestion and safety problems which plague I-5 on both sides of the river, and restore mobility and access to our region.

Timing is crucial. So we ask for your approval and support, so that we can get started in fixing an obvious problem and building a brighter future for us all.

Sincerely,

Matt Felton
President, Felton Properties Inc.

Jonathan Schlueter
Executive Director

President and Chairman,
Westside Economic Alliance

