

David Sweet
4520 NE 19th Ave
Portland, OR 97211

Phone:(503) 493-9434

david@sabingreen.net

To the Joint Committee on the Interstate-5 Bridge Replacement Project
February 18, 2013

My name is David Sweet and I represent the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, a 501c3 non-profit. We are a coalition of twelve neighborhoods in inner north and northeast Portland, and are dedicated to the livability of those neighborhoods. Among those twelve are six neighborhoods which include portions of Interstate 5 or receive overflow traffic from I-5 congestion. Our neighborhoods are heavily impacted by I-5, and would be further impacted by the proposed CRC highway mega-project.

NECN has held two community forums on the CRC to present the project to our neighbors and receive their feedback. A total of more than 200 attendees overwhelmingly opposed the CRC highway mega-project.

What we hear from our neighbors is three major objections to this highway expansion:

- It will not ease congestion, but will actually make it worse—both on I-5 near our homes and on our neighborhood streets.
- It will increase the already high levels of air pollution in our neighborhoods.
- The cost of the project and the unprecedented financial risk it represents, will prevent us from meeting future critical infrastructure needs.

Traffic congestion:

The residents of our community would certainly like to see less congestion on I-5, but the CRC does not offer that. I-5 congestion results in more traffic on our local streets. During the morning and evening our neighborhood streets are jammed with commuters avoiding the freeway. While temporarily relieving some I-5 congestion near the Columbia, and most especially in Vancouver, the CRC mega-project will funnel more traffic into the existing congestion to the south, in the neighborhoods we represent.

Interestingly, the worst congestion on I-5 is not in the CRC Project Area, but south of there, through North Portland to the Rose Quarter. To avoid this tangle, many southbound commuters exit the freeway as soon as they have crossed the Columbia, and complete their trip on local streets. Northbound, they enter the freeway at the last minute, just before Jantzen Beach. The CRC does not address this problem, but funnels more traffic to us. Thus we will see more I-5 congestion in our community and more commuters speeding through our neighborhoods if it is built.

Last year two dozen citizens from our community met with City staff for 11 months trying to devise a way to make N Williams Avenue safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. The biggest problem is rush hour commuters speeding through our neighborhoods to avoid the nearby clog on I-5. Much of this traffic is overflow from NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard which is already overburdened with Freeway-avoiding commuters. Both these streets are

rendered unsafe by this added commuter traffic. The CRC mega-project will make our neighborhood streets even less safe.

Air pollution:

More local traffic and more freeway congestion will also increase the high levels of air pollution in our neighborhoods, and adversely affect the health of community members. The airshed around I-5 has some of the worst air quality in the state. A carcinogenic cloud hangs over our neighborhoods including concentrations of benzene, formaldehyde, and diesel particulate. Due to that poor air quality, these areas already experience an unacceptably high level of asthma—twice the national average. This area also houses one quarter of the state's African-American population. To knowingly bring more pollution and congestion to these racially diverse neighborhoods would add insult to the many historical injustices visited on the residents of our community.

Cost:

The CRC highway mega-project would be the most expensive public works project ever in our region, even if it could be built on budget, which highway mega-projects never are, and ODOT's record in this area is not good. Also, tolling revenue is likely to fall short of what will be needed. Although we will not see an investment-grade analysis for some months, the firm contracted to perform it is the same one that botched traffic predictions for two Southern California toll roads, and the bonds backing those projects have been reduced to junk status. Whether cost overrun, revenue shortfall, or both, Oregon taxpayers would pick up the tab.

In 2011 ODOT reported that all of its state highway fund revenues are now essentially committed to debt service, the cost of running the agency and maintaining highways, leaving virtually no state funding for capital projects. If we dedicate billions to this project, it will mean even less money available for maintenance, and would likely preclude any other major transportation project in the State for a generation.

My neighbors are not willing to pay higher gas taxes and vehicle registration fees for a highway mega-project that is bloated, wasteful, and ineffective; that will make our neighborhoods more congested and less safe, that threatens our health with reduced air quality, that ensures the continued deterioration of our transportation infrastructure, that will not ease congestion, and will, at best, reduce commute times by less than a minute.