



SWACT

South West Area Commission on Transportation

307 Highway 42 East, Coquille, Oregon 97423 (541) 396-3707

January 13, 2014

Oregon Senate Business and Transportation Committee: Senator Lee Beyer, Chair;
Senator Bruce Starr, Vice-Chair; and Members of the Committee

Oregon House Transportation and Economic Development Committee: Representative Tobias Reed, Chair;
Representatives Cliff Bentz and Chris Gorsek, Co-Chairs; and Members of the Committee

Oregon State Capital
Salem, Oregon
(distributed via email)

Re: Columbia River Crossing – CRC: Critical Infrastructure to Support Oregon’s Economy

Dear Oregon Senate and House Members:

Our state’s long-term prosperity is driven by the strength and competitiveness of its traded sector economy – commodities produced by Oregon businesses and moved domestically and internationally via the region’s multi-modal transportation system, including the Interstate 5 corridor linking Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. While the I-5 corridor is the busiest trade route in western North America, it suffers from a significant bottleneck; the existing, but badly outdated, bridges across the Columbia River between Portland and Vancouver.

The traded-sector drives jobs and sustains communities in both urban and rural regions of the state. In fact one in five Oregon jobs are tied to domestic and international commerce – Oregon sourced products moving to market; basic agricultural commodities, high-quality food products such as cheese, beer and wine, lumber products and engineered wood/wood fiber components, chemicals, metals and minerals, high-tech electronics and computers, nursery stock, machine tools, aircraft components . . . the list is extensive and growing.

Now Governor John Kitzhaber is actively engaged with the Columbia River Crossing – CRC, and is aggressively leading an effort to replace the two outdated and deficient bridge structures. A new Columbia River bridge is long past-due, and simply waiting for a bi-state solution is not acceptable. The two existing structures were built in 1917 and 1958 respectively, and have long outlived their cost-effective, useful service life. Various solutions have been proposed, but it is clear there’s simply no financially feasible method of extending the existing bridges’ lifespan or capacity. Bridge components continue to fail and repairs take longer, cost more, and increase highway system congestion throughout the Portland/Vancouver area and the I-5 and I-205 corridors when any bridge portion is out of service. Add to that the fact that the bridges are seismically deficient and you have a disaster waiting to happen.

The CRC is not simply a northwest Oregon/southwest Washington issue. All regions can easily point to local transportation challenges, but all regions will benefit from an Oregon-led CRC crossing project, just as all regions are feeling the negative impacts of this growing system bottleneck. Oregon’s elected officials and business leaders across the state need to join in the effort to secure CRC funding in order to provide opportunities to grow the state’s economy now and in the future.



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The State Treasurer's office and the Oregon Department of Transportation are working to meet specific tasks set out by the Governor, and a legislative hearing is planned for mid-January to hopefully move this Oregon-led solution forward for consideration during the upcoming February 2014 legislative session. Federal funds are available for the project, but they cannot be accessed until the Oregon funds are secured. A recent economic analysis suggests proposed bridge tolling will be adequate to repay federal and state loans. Additionally, the Governor must continue to work with the State of Washington to secure their funding participation in the Columbia River Crossing project.

Now is the time for all of us to engage in the process of moving the Columbia River Crossing forward to strengthen this vital link in Oregon's transportation system, so that it can continue to serve as a driver for Oregon prosperity through expanded trade opportunities.

The membership of the South West Area Commission on Transportation (SWACT) urges the Oregon Legislature to move forward with efforts to fund Oregon's share of the CRC project, which can leverage more than \$1.7 billion in federal funds. However, the membership also requests that the project proponents do their utmost to confirm that the proposed bridge tolling scenario meets the debt service needs of both the state and federal funding components, and that State Treasurer Ted Wheeler fully endorses the financial feasibility of the Oregon-led Columbia River Crossing project.

Respectfully

Martin Callery, Chair
On behalf of the membership of the
South West Area Commission on Transportation

Cc: Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber
Karmen Fore, Transportation Policy Advisor; Governor's Staff
Oregon Transportation Commission / Oregon Department of Transportation
Membership of the South West Area Commission on Transportation