

**Testimony of Andy Cotugno, Senior Policy Advisor
In Support of Senate Bill 131
Senate Committee on Business and Transportation
February 18, 2015**



Chair Beyer and members of the Committee:

I am Andy Cotugno from Metro, the regional government for the Portland metropolitan area. For the record, I am a Senior Policy Advisor in the Office of the Chief Operating Officer and Metro Council at 600 NE Grand Avenue, Portland, Oregon. I am here on behalf of the Metro Council to support passage of Senate Bill 131 to establish a Task Force to address the repair, reopening and operation of the Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks.

This Legislature had a financial stake in helping a private company construct the Locks that opened in 1873 and again in 1915 by providing a financial contribution for the purchase by the Corps of Engineers. For nearly the next century, the free operation of the Locks by the Corps of Engineers provided a navigational advantage facilitating the flow of commerce from Eugene through Oregon City and Portland to the Pacific Ocean at Astoria. Today, the Locks at Willamette Falls not only have the potential to move commerce like it has in years past but also provide a great public asset for recreation, historic interpretation and cultural support to Native Americans. If only it were open to the public.

The Metro Council, along with other government and non-government organizations, is on record in support of the Army Corps of Engineers expediting the rehabilitation and reopening of the Locks. I have provided you with a Resolution adopted by the Metro Council expressing that support and explicitly expressing support for legislative action to establish the Task Force proposed in Senate Bill 131.

Over the years, the tonnage of commerce moving through the Locks has declined and, consistent with laws and regulations controlling the budget for the Army Corps of Engineers, funding for the maintenance and operation of the Locks has declined in favor of the much higher tonnage on the Columbia/Snake River system. As such, this Task Force will be important in evaluating alternative models for operating and financing the Locks. The Corps has expressed a preference for transferring the Locks to a third party but also have a requirement that such a transfer can only occur if the Locks are in good condition.

The Corps has taken a positive first step in agreeing to evaluate the continued negative effect from the closure on the historic value of this property listed on the National Register of Historic Places. So far, they have agreed that such an evaluation is required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and have initiated a consultation process with stakeholders, the State Historic Preservation Officer and the National Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Further, they have published their finding that the continued closure does, in fact, have a negative effect on this historic property and are now at the step of determining how to mitigate the negative effect. We, the stakeholders participating in this process, have strongly recommended that the best and preferred way to mitigate the negative effect of closure is to rehabilitate and reopen the Locks and provide for its continued operation and maintenance. To do this, the Corps will require partners and the Task Force called for by Senate Bill 131 is an essential step in defining those partners.

Thank you for your support.