



# PORTLAND BUSINESS ALLIANCE

*Leading the way*

June 3, 2008

President David Bragdon  
Metro Council  
600 NE Grand Avenue  
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear President Bragdon:

The Portland Business Alliance, which represents 1,400 small, medium and large businesses throughout the region, has named the Columbia River Crossing it's top transportation priority and strongly urges Metro Council to support the replacement bridge with light rail as the locally preferred alternative.

The importance of moving forward with this project now cannot be overstated. Due to federal funding cycles, and the advantageous positions held by members of the Oregon and Washington congressional delegations, we have a unique opportunity to move this project forward. Should the project not move forward, significant time would pass before we have another similar opportunity – driving the cost of the project even higher, and the decision required at this stage is simply to narrow to one the alternative that will receive continued analysis. We recognize there are a number of thoughtful questions being raised and understand those questions will be addressed during the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Until a locally preferred alternative is identified, however, a more thorough evaluation and vetting cannot occur.

We believe the analysis shows a replacement bridge with light rail, among the five alternatives that must be decided upon, provides the greatest benefits. From an economic competitiveness standpoint, this alternative will slow congestion growth, which has a profound impact on businesses and jobs. As the Cost of Congestion study revealed, growing congestion could cost the regional economy close to \$1 billion and 6,500 jobs by 2025. This should be an unacceptable outcome for the region; it's economy and quality of life.

Further, an improved crossing is critical from a regional, state and national perspective. Vancouver and Clark County are a significant and growing part of our region; we share the same labor pool and consumer and supplier base. In addition, Vancouver is expected to become the second largest employment center in the region. An efficient and reliable connection, including light rail, will better integrate the region and more effectively link it's two major employment centers.

The project is also critical for freight and goods movement. Interstate 5 is designated as a Corridor of the Future by the U.S. Department of Transportation; it is ranked in priority second only to I-95, which runs north/south along the east coast. I-5 is the only west coast trade corridor that stretches from British Columbia to Baja and it plays a critical role in international trade, which is a significant part of the region and state's economy. According to a 2005 report by Cambridge Systematics, congestion, a lack of highway capacity and other problems in the I-5 Bridge Influence Area causes an estimated 644,000 hours of delay for trucks each year, imposing significant additional costs on businesses, and ranking the Interstate Bridge as one of the worst impediments to freight mobility in the United States. While the project sits between Portland and Vancouver, the scope of the impacts reaches far beyond those jurisdictional boundaries.

The replacement bridge with light rail also provides the most environmental benefits, reducing vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions compared to a no-build alternative. Achieving these benefits is only possible through a combination of tolls, improving throughput and thereby reducing engine idling, and improved travel options including light rail and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. It is the package of improvements that makes these results achievable; no one piece of it – either tolls or light rail alone – will have the same benefits.

This alternative also performs the best from a safety standpoint. The existing bridges were not designed to accommodate the kind of traffic now crossing them. When first constructed, the original bridge had a posted speed limit of 15 miles per hour and was designed to accommodate some cars, but also horse and buggies. The second bridge was designed to match the first. The close proximity of interchanges, the bridge lift and lack of safety lanes all contribute to the unsafe conditions. More accidents happen within this five-mile stretch than any other section of I-5. Crash rates are 2 to 4 times higher than on similar facilities. Again, this should be an unacceptable result for the region and it's citizens.

We recognize this project comes at a significant price, but there is a significant cost to doing nothing. We must move forward to designate a locally preferred alternative from among the five alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. New suggestions at this point will thwart the progress of this critical project. Placing tolls on the existing bridges is both illegal and infeasible. After three years of studying a multitude of options, significant public involvement and working in partnership with our counterparts in Washington, it is time to make a decision. We urge you to support the replacement option with light rail.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Sandra McDonough  
President & CEO

cc: Councilor Rex Burkholder  
Councilor Carlotta Collette  
Councilor Kathryn Harrington  
Councilor Carl Hosticka  
Councilor Robert Liberty  
Councilor Rod Park