

April 21, 2009

Ron Anderson
Consultant Project Manager
Columbia River Crossing
700 Washington Street, Suite 300
Vancouver, WA 98660

Dear Mr. Anderson:

As you know, I have been a participant in the planning process for a new Columbia River Crossing for more than four years. As a member of the original 39-member task force, a member of the Project Sponsors Council, and a co-chair of the Urban Design Advisory Group, I understand the complexity of the project. As the Mayor of a city that will be profoundly affected by the new crossing, I am intensely motivated to create a bridge that the world looks to as a functional success and an aesthetic icon.

Last July, I offered--and the Portland City Council unanimously supported--a resolution approving the Locally Preferred Alternative for the project. That resolution was clear about the CRC's design: It stated that the new bridge must have a signature, iconic design, and it must include "world class" bicycle and pedestrian facilities. I take those commitments seriously.

The bridge design that is currently on the table does not, in my view, achieve these goals. While it may serve as an appropriate starting point, the "stacked" bridge design with a bicycle and pedestrian path located on the lower deck has generated concerns from the community about safety and security. These concerns need to be aired and considered. Additional options must be considered. We cannot achieve world class bicycling and walking facilities without actually considering all available alternatives. I will not accept an under-deck design simply because it is the easiest alternative.

Similarly, the current design does not do justice to the City of Portland's call for an iconic bridge. As you know, I have been respectful of the City of Vancouver's desire to protect Pearson Airfield with height constraints. I have supported the "cap" and park that marks the bridge's entry into Washington state. However, to date, there has been no response to my repeated requests for a "signature" design element over the North Portland Harbor. Again, we can not achieve a world-class design without considering alternatives.

It is my belief that what is most important about this bridge should be what is most visible. Accordingly, I would like to see the CRC staff develop several additional design options:

1. A stacked design where the light rail and bicycle/pedestrian path are located on the top level, with the highway located underneath. The extra space on top could be designed with plantings to achieve state-of-the-art stormwater management and could function as an active park connecting the cities of Portland and Vancouver. (The City of New York is in the process of transforming the unused High Line railway structure into an elevated park and trail; www.thehighline.org). Using Florence's famed Ponte Vecchio as inspiration (www.agriturismobelvedere.it/firenze%20inglese/Monumenti/ponte_vecchio.htm), we could even locate a light rail station with active uses in the middle of the bridge.
2. A design that has the northbound highway lanes on one level and the southbound lanes on the other level. Please include two configurations: one with the light rail next to the lower level lanes and the bicycle and pedestrian path on the top level with substantial separation from the highway lanes, and one with both the bike/ped and light rail on the top level, with the light rail line providing separation from the highway lanes.
3. A North Portland Harbor bridge element with height and visual interest. As outlined in our April 17 memo to the UDAG, this would not necessarily need to be on the main freeway leading up to the bridge: it could be located on the light rail bridge and/or the flyover ramp leading onto the main span. A beautifully-designed bicycle and pedestrian bridge leading up to the main span bridge (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humber_Bay_Arch_Bridge) could serve as a strong tourist draw, independent of and complementary to the bicycle facilities on the main bridge.

I will look forward to considering each of these concepts at an upcoming UDAG meeting. The Columbia River Crossing presents our region with an unprecedented opportunity to do something truly unique and innovative. We must not squander that opportunity.

Sincerely,

Sam Adams
Mayor, City of Portland

cc: CRC UDAG
CRCSponsors Council