

IN MY OPINION:

THE COLUMBIA RIVER CROSSING

A bridge, yes, but only the right bridge

Oregonian, The (Portland, OR) - Wednesday, July 9, 2008

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Interstate 5 stretches 1,382 miles from Mexico to Canada with just one drawbridge, antiquated and unsafe, along its route. That drawbridge is the span you cross today over the Columbia River.

We need a replacement. But it must be the right kind of new bridge. It must be a bridge Portland can be proud of in terms of design, construction, funding and operations. It must:

- * Reduce automobile reliance. The new crossing must permanently reduce vehicle miles traveled, which is Oregon's primary source of greenhouse gas emissions. We need congestion-priced electronic tolling on both the new I-5 and existing I-205 bridges paired with new options such as light rail. Tolls should be collected in perpetuity, in part to help fund needed improvements south of the bridge on I-5 and I-205.
- * Produce new federal transportation funding. This project is designated one of six national "Corridors of the Future." That means new federal funding for the region that will not compete against our other local transportation funding requests. Given Portland's \$431 million transportation maintenance and safety backlog, this assurance is essential.
- * Inspire a green, "postcard-worthy" design. This should be the world's most environmentally friendly bridge in design, construction and operation. Any bridge is an icon, and this one must aesthetically enhance the world-class grandeur of the Columbia River and Mount Hood. And it must be sensitive to its neighbors by helping knit together the two halves of Hayden Island and downtown Vancouver.
- * Be built with local hands. This will be the largest public works project in the region, ever. Portland is the nation's leading incubator of sustainable design and technologies, making local firms well prepared to meet project expectations. Local companies, including emerging small businesses, minority- and women-owned firms, should earn as much work as possible.

The Portland City Council's vote today is not the ultimate or final "yes" to begin building the new bridge. Approval today will only move the bridge project proposal from one phase of evaluation to the next. It will simply establish the assumption for the next phase of study that the existing bridge will be replaced with no more travel lanes than exist today and that it must include an expansion of light rail.

I thank the governors of Oregon and Washington, each state's congressional delegation and local stakeholders for being responsive so far to Portland's concerns and goals for this project. I appreciate the assurance these decision-makers have provided us that Portland's concerns for planning the remainder of the project details will be addressed to our satisfaction.

But to avoid any surprises in the future, let me be crystal clear at this milestone: I will strongly oppose a final Columbia River Crossing project proposal that fails to address Portland's goals. I would rather miss this round of federal funding and live with the challenges and vulnerabilities of the current bridge for the next 10 or 20 years than build a bad bridge that would punish Portland for perhaps another 100 years.