



700 WASHINGTON STREET
VANCOUVER, WA 98660
360-737-2726 | 503-256-2726

DRAFT
Public Involvement Update

Report to the CRC Task Force

April 20, 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

The Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project held open houses on April 12, 2006, and April 13, 2006, to inform the public about the current status of the project and to solicit public comments about river crossing and transit component alternatives.

The April 12, 2006, open house was held at Hudson's Bay High School from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm at 1206 E. Reserve Street in Vancouver, Washington. The April 13, 2006, open house was held at the Jantzen Beach Red Lion from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm at 909 N. Hayden Island Drive in Portland, Oregon. A total of 103 attendees signed-in at the Vancouver open house and 102 attendees signed-in at the Portland open house.

The open houses were advertised through:

- Advertisements in the Asian Reporter, the Columbian, El Hispanic News, the Oregonian, Portland Observer, the Skanner, and the Reflector newspapers
- Media coverage in the Portland Tribune, the Oregonian, the Columbian, and the Reflector newspapers
- Media coverage on KATU Channel 2, KGW Channel 8, KPTV Channel 12, KOIN Channel 6 television stations, and KEX radio
- Press releases to regional print and broadcast media
- Postcards sent to approximately 10,000 physical addresses
- E-mails sent to 5,000 addresses on the Columbia River Crossing e-mail list, the Neighborhood Association Coalition of Clark County, City of Vancouver neighborhood associations, and the City of Portland Office of Neighborhood Involvement
- An announcement on Portland City Commissioner Sam Adams' website

The comments received from the public during the open houses will be used to help identify the range of issues to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement. This update describes the outreach efforts made during the April 12 and April 13, 2006, open houses, and provides a summary of the issues identified from the public comments.

2. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 PUBLIC COMMENTS

The public comments summarized in Section 3 of this report came from two primary sources: 1) comment forms distributed at the two public open houses, and 2) other materials collected at the open houses.

2.1.1 COMMENT FORMS

Hard copies of the comment forms were distributed at the two public open houses at Hudson's Bay High School and the Jantzen Beach Red Lion on April 12 and April 13, 2006, respectively.

The comment form included two questions and a space to write additional comments. The comment forms were designed so they could be left with project staff at the open house or be mailed to the project office, in case an open house attendee needed more time to respond to the questions. The two questions on the comment form were:

- The Columbia River Crossing project is recommending that nine crossing ideas and six transit ideas be further evaluated and packaged with other items such as bike/pedestrian solutions, freight movement, and highway improvements. Do you agree with the staff recommendation? Yes or No? If no, please tell us how to improve the recommendation.
- In the next two years, the project team will consider a number of factors as we develop project alternatives. These include items such as interchange locations, air quality, noise, neighborhood connectivity, aesthetics, land use, community livability, cultural and water resources. What additional issues should the Columbia River Crossing project consider?

Responses to the questions are summarized in Section 3 of this report.

As of April 19, 2006, the project office has received 57 comment forms.

2.1.1 OTHER MATERIALS FROM OPEN HOUSES

The public was invited to write comments on a flip chart and a court reporter was available to transcribe oral comments at both open houses. 14 open house attendees wrote comments on the flip charts and 14 open house attendees provided oral comments to the court reporter. Additionally, one e-mail was sent to the project website several hours after the open house from an attendee who wished to follow-up on comments he provided on a comment form.

3. ISSUES IDENTIFIED DURING OPEN HOUSES

This section contains a summary of the public comments described in Section 2 above. 138 comments were gathered from the 85 combined flip chart and court reporter entries and comment forms. Because some of the individual comments related to more than one comment category, the total number of comments by type is 291. All comments have been categorized, as follows:

1. Travel Demand, Congestion and Accessibility
2. Economy and Freight
3. Public Transportation and Modal Choice
4. Safety and Seismicity
5. Community Livability and Human Resources
6. Natural Resources
7. Project Financing
8. Specific Alternatives
9. Process
10. Other Comments

Discussions of the comments for each category are given in the remainder of this section.

3.1 TRAVEL DEMAND, CONGESTION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Approximately 44 comments were received regarding travel demand, congestion and/or accessibility.

Similar to previous public comments received and reported to the CRC Task Force on November 30, 2005, concerns identified at the open houses included traffic congestion, bottlenecks in the I-5 north/Delta Park area, safety/capacity issues related to on/off ramps and access roads. Some commenters felt that traffic demand, as opposed to limited traffic capacity, was the cause of congestion problems in the I-5 corridor. Commenters felt that there was not enough merging space for on/off ramps, and found the lack of shoulders to be frustrating and dangerous.

Several commenters recommended that local traffic be separated from through traffic, by managing travel lanes or by constructing separate roadways.

3.2 ECONOMY AND FREIGHT

Approximately 19 comments were received regarding the economy and/or freight.

Commenters mentioned that if more jobs existed in Clark County, fewer people would commute to Portland, thereby reducing congestion. One commenter suggested using money from the CRC project to create jobs in Clark County, therefore alleviating the need for another crossing.

Comments on freight mirrored previous thoughts documented throughout the scoping process. Commenters were concerned that congestion on the I-5 corridor was slowing truck freight and harming the Oregon and Washington economies. These commenters had a variety of suggestions for facilitating truck freight travel to and from the Vancouver/Portland area. Ideas included creating new bridges and roadways; allowing trucks in the “fast lane” of I-5; replacing the I-5 Bridge with a bridge that does not raise/lower; and providing an express lane for trucks with origins and destinations outside the Portland/Vancouver area. Other commenters felt that rail and marine freight were more efficient than truck freight, and suggested the project invest in those other freight modes.

3.3 PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND MODAL CHOICE

Approximately 54 comments were received regarding public transportation and/or modal choice.

Of those commenters who mentioned public transportation, most of them supported public transportation for the CRC project. Many commenters spoke in favor of bringing light rail from Portland across the I-5 Bridge into Vancouver/Clark County. Many commenters said that without light rail, the CRC project will be unsuccessful. Several commenters also supported improved bus service in addition to light rail, or in place of light rail.

Some commenters disagreed with the project team’s recommendation to drop commuter rail as a transit component, and suggested that commuter rail be reconsidered as a component.

Several commenters felt that the existing bicycling and pedestrian facilities on the I-5 Bridge were noisy, unsafe, or both, and requested improved facilities on the existing I-5 Bridge or any new Columbia River crossing.

3.4 SAFETY AND SEISMICITY

Approximately 11 comments were received regarding safety and/or seismicity.

One commenter noted that safety should be highly considered when designing a new crossing.

As in previous scoping efforts, many commenters feel that bicycle and pedestrian facilities on the existing bridge are unsafe. One commenter mentioned that the bicycle approach to the bridge from the southeast side is unsafe and should be improved.

Commenters noted that, in the event of an earthquake, multiple river crossings would be beneficial in case one or more crossings were damaged. One commenter noted that eliminating the current lift towers and the heavy counter weights would greatly reduce seismic risk. Additionally, the commenter suggested that the current piers could be further stabilized with additional peripheral piling and the trusses could be more securely anchored to the piers. Some commenters felt as though the existing bridges cannot be properly seismically retrofitted, and that entirely new crossings are necessary in order to be seismically sound.

3.5 COMMUNITY LIVABILITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Approximately 26 comments were received regarding community livability and/or human resources.

Historic/Aesthetic

A few comments were made regarding historic and aesthetic resources. One commenter asked that the project team avoid disturbing historic districts. Another commenter advised that the project team reconnect the two historic areas of downtown Vancouver that were separated when the interstate was originally built.

One commenter indicated that the best aesthetic approach would be to build a beautiful bridge, and if a beautiful bridge was not an option, build a tunnel instead. The commenter specifically advised against building a bridge that would look similar to the Marquam Bridge over the Willamette River. Another commenter said that aesthetics rank lower in importance than bridge functionality.

Neighborhoods/Environmental Justice

As mentioned during previous scoping efforts, the April open houses included comments regarding displacements and relocations. One commenter said that light rail should not be pursued as a component because he felt that homes would need to be removed to create a light rail park and ride facility. Another commenter asked where a floating home would be moved if it was displaced by the project. One commenter asked what kind of process would be used to purchase private property for the project and how residents would be made aware of any lost property value they might experience as a result of the project. Another commenter said that residents who may be displaced should vote on project alternatives. Commenters also noted that impacts to downtown Vancouver and Vancouver neighborhoods should be avoided.

A commenter mentioned building a lid over I-5 in Vancouver and several mentioned the importance of local access.

Quality

Commenters frequently cited traffic congestion as contributing to air pollution, and noted that mass transit would help to improve air quality. One commenter stated concerns over diesel emissions in the project corridor. The commenter recommended using a cleaner burning fuel source in heavy equipment during construction and developing a plan to mitigate air quality impacts during construction.

3.6 NATURAL RESOURCES

Approximately six comments were received regarding natural resources.

One commenter asked what impacts the project would have on the river and wildlife species. Another commenter asked the project team to consider the environment, fish, and water quality in the project selection process. One commenter said that the project area is already a major transportation corridor, and therefore the CRC project was likely to enhance, rather than degrade, the environment.

3.7 PROJECT FINANCING

Approximately 27 comments were received regarding project financing.

Tolling was the major theme of financing comments. Most commenters were in favor of tolling for a variety of reasons. The most common reason was the notion that those who use the bridge should pay for the bridge. One commenter said that tolls will help discourage single occupancy vehicles. Another commenter said that single occupancy vehicles should be charged larger tolls than higher occupancy vehicles.

Several commenters suggested electronic tolls to avoid delays. One commenter suggested frequent users could purchase toll cards that allow for multiple crossings at a lower per-crossing rate, and low-income users could buy toll cards at a reduced rate. Some commenters said that bicyclists, pedestrians and mass transit riders should pay tolls. A few commenters suggested collecting tolls now, in order to help pay for the project in the future.

One commenter supported tolls, but was concerned about the accountability for the money generated by tolls. Another commenter questioned how toll booths would impact bridge design.

Those who opposed tolling said that funds from Washington and Oregon taxes should be used to fund the CRC project. Some commenters said that tolls are unfair to people who live in Vancouver but work in Portland. Other commenters said that tolls are unfair to people with children in daycare or school, because they make frequent trips to drop children off or pick them up. Another commenter said that tolls will cause more congestion because they will confuse people and make drivers slow down to understand how to use the tolls.

One commenter asked how much money had been spent on public outreach meetings and materials over the past five years.

3.8 SPECIFIC ALTERNATIVES

Approximately 69 comments were received regarding specific alternatives.

Check boxes were included on the comment forms, so commenters could indicate if they agreed or disagreed with the river crossing and transit component recommendations of staff. Of the 57 surveys collected, 22 commenters indicated they agreed with staff, 14 disagreed with staff, and 21 chose not to check the boxes.

Though the river crossing and transit components presented at the open houses were identified by numbers (RC-1 to RC-23 for river crossings and TR-1 to TR-14 for transit components), most commenters did not reference these numbers when making their comments.

Several commenters supported the creation of an arterial or local access river crossing for cars, bicycles, and pedestrians, in addition to or in place of a new or improved freeway

crossing. Other comments about separating local traffic from freight traffic suggested multi-level bridges or lanes dedicated solely to freight. Most commenters favoring a new bridge supported a multi-modal bridge.

Several commenters supported a tunnel option, citing that the tunnel option has the least impacts on the surrounding environment. Some commenters were concerned about the cost of a tunnel.

Several commenters suggested new corridors for a river crossing, such as a new I-5 bridge and alignment west of downtown Vancouver, or a bridge from Camas-Washougal to Troutdale. Another new corridor idea included a bypass around Hayden Island and Jantzen Beach.

Many commenters said that a new bridge should not include a lift span because a lift span would perpetuate problems associated with the current bridge.

Some commenters supported a ferry system as a permanent or temporary means of alleviating congestion, and one commenter supported a form of personal automated transport.

Comments on transit components were included in Section 3.3, Public Transportation and Modal Choice.

3.9 PROCESS

Approximately 16 comments were received regarding process.

Several commenters asked what negative effects would occur in Vancouver and Portland from the project, and encouraged a further exploration of these effects before more potential alternatives are removed from consideration. Another commenter supported narrowing the current list of components, but indicated that there were likely components not on the list that should be discussed.

Many commenters expressed the importance of quickly moving the project forward. One commenter said that WSDOT and ODOT need to agree on a corridor now. Another commenter cautioned against letting the project get delayed.

One commenter said that the project should be built to accommodate traffic demands far into the future, because the commenter felt it could take 20 years for this project to be built. The commenter said that, at the very least, whatever the final alternative is, it should contain provisions for the next I-5 project.

Public Involvement

As mentioned in the Neighborhoods/Environmental Justice section, some commenters asked how and when people who may be displaced by the project will be informed of the process. One commenter asked the project team to make simpler posters, maps, and graphs for public outreach purposes.

Several commenters said the open houses were helpful and informative, and that they appreciated having knowledgeable staff on hand to answer questions. One commenter requested that once construction begins, the project team continue to hold open houses with engineers, project coordinators, construction managers, and site superintendents on-hand to provide project updates.

The Vancouver chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) commented that they are working with the City of Vancouver to reintroduce a streetcar system into the downtown area. The AIA would like to coordinate their effort with the CRC project.

3.10 OTHER COMMENTS

Approximately 19 comments were received that did not correspond to the comment categories described above. One comment form received included no comments, only contact information.

A few commenters mentioned immigration control, limiting population growth in the area, development moratoriums, and future diminishing oil supplies as issues that should be taken into account by the project team. Comments were received for and against protecting the Pearson Air Park.