Washington State Legislature

Jan. 12, 2014

Commissioner John Ludlow, Chair
Commissioners Bernard, Savas, Schrader, and Smith
Board of Clackamas County Commissioners
2051 Kaen Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Electronic: bcc@clackamas.us

Dear Commissioners:

As elected Washington state representatives, we represent Clark County residents in Southwest Washington. In this capacity, we urge Clackamas County commissioners to join us in respecting the will of an overwhelming majority of voters to soundly reject any light rail crossing project between Portland and Southwest Washington.

Clark County citizens have voted against light rail numerous times, most recently on Nov. 5, 2013. In this last election, voters passed Clark County Advisory Vote No. 1 by an overwhelming 68 percent. Advisory Vote No. 1 stated that Clark County commissioners must first ask voters' approval prior to moving forward with any light rail project in Clark County.

Our primary concern is that the Oregon Legislature is considering a proposal which not only would go against the will of a large majority of our voters in Clark County, but would also bypass the required federal "local buy-in" from Oregon residents and its local governments. The $850 million federal match should not be approved when a measurement of "local buy-in" is established by special and conflicted interests who are attempting to override the will of citizens and locally-elected county officials on both sides of the river.

Additionally, we are troubled by the recent interpretation of CDM Smith's CRC traffic and toll revenue forecast by Oregon's Department of Transportation. According to Portland economist Joe Cortright and retired federal government economist Terry Maynard, author of the 2012 Maynard Report, CDM Smith routinely over-estimates likely traffic and revenues, and does so by large enough margins to throw major toll-backed projects into financial turmoil and bankruptcy on a consistent basis.

A key finding in the 2012 Maynard Report is that "optimism bias" is endemic in the toll forecasting business - driven by sponsors to produce the exaggerated forecasts they want. All too often, taxpayers are left holding the bag, resulting in actual tolls being much higher than original forecasts.

Other significant risks include:

- Lenders refuse to fund the project without the full faith backing of state governments; and

- Future economic growth in corridors would be hampered by high tolling costs.

Due to CDM Smith's alleged track record, and the fact that an overwhelming majority of Southwest Washington residents would be forced to make up any financial shortfalls through many years of high cost tolls, we believe it is imperative that a second, independent tolling and revenue forecast must be completed by another forecasting group before a decision is made to further consider the CRC or any similar project.

Further, the signatures below show that legislators representing Clark County citizens are opposed to the bridge as it is currently designed. We are troubled by the proposed lower height and the impact it would have on commerce by blocking shipment of products currently being manufactured upstream of the bridge. Despite the unfunded $86 million in compensation that has been promised to only three of the many Vancouver companies that would be harmed, the issue remains that current manufacturers would likely be forced to relocate due to the lower clearance of the current proposal. And, at a time when all other ports around our nation are designing infrastructure to get larger loads through their ports and beneath their bridges, this becomes an especially unwise decision to make the new span lower than the current one.

We remain opposed to the inclusion of light rail in the project. We understand that transit can be an important component of urban transportation, but this investment grade tolling plan would require local commuters in Southwest Washington to pay for the greatest share of the bridge and general purpose lanes, as no federal funds would be provided for construction of those lanes. Additionally, light rail would not deliver the promised congestion relief since it would substitute for current bus routes. This threatens to leave transit riders with longer commutes and higher taxes as the only outcome.

We believe attempts to build an Oregon-only bridge may face legal hurdles, delaying the process far more than if we spent time redesigning the bridge to meet actual regional transportation needs—and not the needs of special interests.

As state legislators representing a majority of Clark County residents, we urge Clackamas County commissioners to respect the will of our voters by rejecting any light rail crossing project between Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Sincerely,

Representative Liz Pike
18th Legislative District
360-786-7812

Senator Ann Rivers
18th Legislative District
360-786-7634

Senator Curtis King
14th Legislative District
360-786-7626

Senator John Braun
20th Legislative District
360-786-7638

Senator Don Benton
17th Legislative District
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Representative Ed Orcutt
20th Legislative District
360-786-7990

Representative Norm Johnson
14th Legislative District
360-786-7810

Representative Paul Harris
17th Legislative District
360-786-7976

Representative Charles Ross
14th Legislative District
360-786-7850

Representative Brandon Vick
18th Legislative District
360-786-7850

cc: Oregon CRC Oversight Committee,
Multnomah County Board of Commissioners