Vancouver – Columbia River Crossing

Vancouver, Washington

(November 2009)

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) proposes to construct the Columbia River Crossing, an approximately $5 billion multimodal project that includes replacement of Interstate 5 (I-5) bridges, new interchanges, variable electronic tolls across the new bridge, park-and-ride lots, and an extension of the existing light rail system. Partner agencies include the Oregon Department of Transportation, Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District (TriMet), Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (the metropolitan planning organization for Clark County), Portland Metro (the metropolitan planning organization for the Portland region), Clark County Public Transit Benefit Area Authority (C-TRAN), and the cities of Vancouver and Portland. The transit portion of the project includes a 2.9-mile extension of TriMet's Yellow Line from the existing Expo Station in north Portland to Clark College in downtown Vancouver. The line includes an elevated transit structure over the North Portland Harbor, an elevated structure over the Columbia River via the new multimodal bridge and an at-grade portion in Vancouver. It also includes procurement of 16 light rail vehicles (LRVs) and construction of five stations and approximately 2,900 park-and-ride spaces. In addition, TriMet's current maintenance facility at Ruby Junction in the City of Gresham would be expanded. TriMet would operate the service under contract to C-TRAN.

I-5 is the primary north/south highway and the only crossing of the Columbia River in the corridor. It includes two drawbridges. Currently, congestion on I-5 reduces bus travel speeds and reliability. Congestion worsens when the bridges open to allow large river vessels to pass through. The LRT line would connect Portland and Vancouver – and link the region's largest and most concentrated employment area (downtown Portland) with the commercial and residential areas of Clark County. The transit project would provide direct links to the region's other LRT lines, streetcar lines, aerial tram, Amtrak passenger rail service and most TriMet and C-TRAN bus routes.

Summary Description	
Proposed Project:	Light Rail Transit 2.9 Miles 5 Stations
Total Capital Cost ($YOE):	$945.75 Million (Includes $116.00 million in finance charges)
Section 5309 New Starts Share ($YOE):	$750.00 Million (79.3%)
Annual Forecast Year Operating Cost:	$4.36 Million
Ridership Forecast (2030):	19,700 Average Weekday Boardings 10,900 Daily New Riders
Opening Year Ridership Forecast (2018):	13,800 Average Weekday Boardings
FY 2011 Local Financial Commitment Rating:	**Medium**
FY 2011 Project Justification Rating:	**Medium**
FY 2011 Overall Project Rating:	**Medium**

Project Development History and Current Status

In 1993, FTA, in cooperation with Portland Metro began studying high-capacity transit in the "South/North Corridor" from Clackamas and Milwaukie, Oregon to Vancouver, Washington. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was published in 1998 that identified a variety of LRT alignments. Subsequent funding challenges, including a failed voter referendum in 1998, did not allow construction of the entire corridor to occur, but did allow for implementation of TriMet's Yellow Line through North Portland in 2004. The Governors of Washington and Oregon appointed a bi-state task force in 2001 to address concerns about congestion on I-5 between Portland and Vancouver. In June 2002, a Final Strategic Plan to improve transportation in the I-5 corridor between the I-405 interchange in Portland and the I-205 interchange in North Vancouver was adopted. A Draft EIS for the Columbia River Crossing project was published in May 2008. The Vancouver and Portland metropolitan planning organizations adopted the locally preferred alternative into their fiscally constrained long range transportation plans in July 2008. The U.S. Department of Transportation designated the multimodal project as a "high priority project" under Executive Order 13274 for Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Reviews.

FTA notified Congress of its intent to approve the project into preliminary engineering in November 2009 and took formal approval action in December 2009. The Final EIS is anticipated to be published in June 2010, with receipt of a Record of Decision anticipated in August 2010.

Project Justification Rating: Medium

The project justification rating is based on the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the following criteria: the cost-effectiveness criterion is weighted 20 percent; the transit supportive land use criterion is weighted 20 percent; the economic development criterion is weighted 20 percent; the mobility improvements criterion is weighted 20 percent; the environmental benefits criterion is weighted 10 percent; and the operating efficiencies criterion is weighted 10 percent.

Cost Effectiveness Rating: Medium

The cost effectiveness rating reflects the level of travel-time benefits (6,100 hours each weekday) relative to the project's annualized capital and operating costs based on a comparison to a baseline alternative.

Cost Effectiveness	
	New Start vs. Baseline
Cost per Hour of Transportation System User Benefit	$22.40*
Incremental Cost per Incremental Trip	$13.82

*Indicates that measure is a component of Cost Effectiveness rating

Transit-Supportive Land Use Rating: Medium

The land use rating reflects the population and employment densities within ½-mile of proposed station areas.

- Station area population densities average 2,400 persons per square mile. Including Yellow Line segments that are existing or under construction, the project would provide a one-seat ride to nearly 43,000 residents and over 145,000 jobs.
- Three of the five proposed stations are in the Vancouver, WA Central Business District (CBD), the second largest in the region after Portland, OR, which features a grid street pattern, complete sidewalk network, and numerous pedestrian amenities, and contains over 12,000 jobs, over 95 percent of which would be within 1/2 mile of a station. The Clark College Station area is well-served by trails and sidewalks but lacks a grid street network, and most of the land uses closest to the station are athletic fields or open space. The Hayden Island Station is surrounded by a major highway interchange, massive shopping mall, and some low- to medium-density housing.

Economic Development Rating: High

The Economic Development rating is based upon the average of the ratings assigned to the subfactors below.

Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies: High

- Oregon's comprehensive planning system has existed for more than 30 years and land use laws play a major role in determining how cities and regions grow. Portland Metro's Urban Growth Management Functional Plan requires that cities and counties define minimum densities for all residential zones, with typical policy targets of 45 to 60 persons per acre in transit station areas designated as growth centers. Portland updated its comprehensive plan and implemented ordinances in order to comply with regional requirements.
- On the Washington side, state, county, municipal, and district plans and policies all promote transit- and pedestrian-friendly design and development character. Compact, mixed-use downtowns, complete streets, and downtown pedestrian amenities are all reflected in the Community Framework Plan as well as the Comprehensive Plan for Vancouver and the Vancouver City Center Vision & Subarea Plan. The city's Transit Overlay District imposes minimum densities, increased maximum densities, and parking maximums. The Downtown District Plan also limits parking facilities, designates pedestrian corridors, and permits increased building heights.
- The City of Vancouver offers a multi-family housing tax exemption in the downtown area. The city has also designated two Revenue Development Areas (RDAs) which can be used to finance infrastructure improvements and has worked with private developers on large developments in both RDAs. Developments within the Transit Overlay District are eligible for up to 24 percent in transit impact fee reductions if certain conditions are met. Vancouver is also implementing an expedited permitting process.

Performance and Impacts of Policies: High

- TriMet estimates that light rail in the region has spurred over $6.0 billion in investment along corridors in the Portland region. Metro's Transit Oriented Development Program has assisted 29 development projects currently under construction or completed.
- In Vancouver, most of the land area within 1/2 mile of the four proposed stations falls within the CBD. A number of new projects in the southern part of downtown have already been completed, and many have taken advantage of reduced parking requirements and density bonuses allowed in the Transit Overlay District. Development goals, supported by a recent development capacity study, aim for over 3.5 million square feet of new commercial and institutional space, and 1,400 new residential units, in downtown Vancouver by 2023.

Mobility Improvements Rating: Medium	
	New Start vs. Baseline
Transportation System User Benefit Per Passenger Mile (Minutes)	9.9
Number of Transit Dependents Using the Project	2,100
Transit Dependent User Benefits per Passenger Mile (Minutes)	9.7

Environmental Benefits Rating: Medium	
Criteria Pollutant Status	**EPA Designation** Maintenance or Attainment Area for all pollutants

Operating Efficiencies Rating: Medium		
	Baseline	**New Start**
System Operating Cost per Passenger Mile (current year dollars)	0.35	0.29

Local Financial Commitment Rating: Medium

The local financial commitment rating is based on the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the following criteria: the New Starts share of project costs is weighted 20 percent; the strength of the capital finance plan is weighted 50 percent; and the strength of the operating finance plan is weighted 30 percent.

Section 5309 New Starts Share of Total Project Costs: 79.3%
Rating: High

Section 173 of the FY 2010 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Act directs FTA to base the New Starts share rating for interstate, multi-modal projects located in an interstate highway corridor on the unified finance plan for the multi-modal project rather than only on the transit element of the plan. While the New Starts percentage reflected above and in the table below is calculated based solely on the transit project, the rating assigned reflects the legislative language, which lowers the New Starts share to 18.3 percent of the total cost of the multi-modal project ($4,096.1 million).

Locally Proposed Financial Plan

Source of Funds	Total Funds ($million)	Percent of Total
Federal:		
Section 5309 New Starts	$750.00	79.3%
Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Funds	$57.34	6.1%
State:		
Transportation Partnership Account	$10.02	1.1%
Toll Revenue Bonds	$128.38	13.5%
Total:	**$945.75**	100.0%

NOTE: The financial plan reflected in this table has been developed by the project sponsor and does not reflect a commitment by DOT or FTA. The sum of the figures may differ from the total as listed due to rounding.

Capital Finance Plan Rating: Medium

The capital finance plan rating is based upon the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the subfactors below. The agency capital condition is weighted 25 percent, the commitment of capital funds is weighted 25 percent, and the capital cost estimate, planning assumptions and capital funding capacity subfactor is weighted 50 percent.

Agency Capital Condition: Medium

- The average age of TriMet's bus fleet is 10.6 years, which is older than the industry average. The average age of C-TRAN's bus fleet is 6.4 years, which is in line with the industry average.
- WSDOT's good bond ratings, which were issued in July 2008, are as follows: Fitch AA, Moody's Investors Service A1, and Standard & Poor's Corporation AA+.

Commitment of Capital Funds: Medium

- Approximately five percent of the non-New Starts funding for the transit project is committed or budgeted. Funding sources include Washington Transportation Partnership funds, toll revenues and bond proceeds, and as yet-to-be-determined state and/or local funds.

Capital Cost Estimates, Planning Assumptions, and Financial Capacity: Medium-Low

- The interest rates and financing terms used were reasonable when the submittal was prepared. However, given current market conditions, the assumptions are now optimistic.
- The capital cost estimate is consistent with TriMet's methodologies, protocols, and unit costs, which are based on its recent experience completing the I-205/Portland Mall LRT project. Risks must be closely monitored as project development continues.

Operating Finance Plan Rating: Medium

The operating finance plan rating is based upon the weighted average of the ratings assigned to each of the subfactors listed below. The agency operating condition is weighted 25 percent, the commitment of operating funds is weighted 25 percent, and the operating cost estimates, planning assumptions and operating funding capacity subfactor is weighted 50 percent.

Agency Operating Condition: Medium-High

- TriMet's current ratio of assets to liabilities as reported in its most recent audited financial statement is 3.1. However, this includes assets and liabilities that are restricted to the Wilsonville to Beaverton Commuter Rail and I-205/Portland Mall LRT projects. After adjusting for these restricted items, the adjusted current ratio is 1.6. C-TRAN's current ratio of assets to liabilities as reported in its most recent audited financial statement is excellent at 9.23.
- TriMet has covered annual cash flow shortfalls during a prolonged regional recession with local funding sources and cash reserves. TriMet has increased paratransit and rail service significantly in the last few years along with minor increases in fixed route bus service. CTRAN has also increased service in recent years.

Commitment of Operating Funds: High

- Over 75 percent of operating funding, including fare revenues, sales tax revenues, operating grants, miscellaneous revenue (advertising), and interest income, for both TriMet and CTRAN is committed.

Operating Cost Estimates, Planning Assumptions, and Financial Capacity: Medium-Low

- Several assumptions supporting the operating and maintenance cost estimates and revenue forecasts are optimistic relative to historical experience, especially in the short term.

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