



Oregon

Theodore R. Kulongoski, Governor

Department of Transportation

Region 2

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October 14, 2004

Honorable Sidney W. Leiken, Mayor of Springfield:

FILE CODE:

I am writing to follow up with you to clarify the commitment ODOT has made to consider grade separated ramp connections between the planned I-5 Willamette River Replacement Bridge and Franklin Blvd. (a.k.a. OR 99, OR 126B). As you are no doubt aware, adding ramps to I-5 at this location raises many complex transportation system issues. Examples of such complex issues include neighborhood and parkland impacts, proximity of adjacent existing interchanges, and access management on Franklin Blvd.

ODOT firmly believes that we must resolve the transportation systems planning issues before we can address the proposed ramp connections through the NEPA process. ODOT has learned the hard way that the NEPA process can be an expensive and time-consuming substitute for a logical systems planning effort. Put another way, NEPA consideration of design alternatives is a much more effective process where the local system planning has been completed prior to engaging the environmental work.

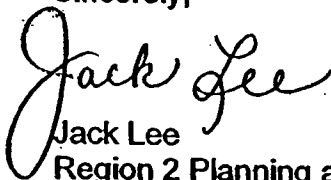
I want to reinforce the Department's commitment to evaluating ramp connection options; however, I believe that it is important for me to clarify ODOT's two-phase planning process. The first phase is a systems planning effort that identifies the problem to be solved, the value in addressing the problem, and identification of a feasible range of solutions. The outcome of this system planning phase would be adoption of an improvement concept and policies that support the improvement concept in the local Transportation System Plans (TSPs) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization's federally mandated Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). It will also be necessary to amend the RTP Financial Constraint project list to include the concept and cost.

Once this system planning work is completed and adopted into the local TSP, thereby demonstrating local support, the improvement concept could then move into the project planning and development phase. This phase will likely involve developing a federally approved environmental document that addresses the adopted improvement concept, with the goal of selecting a preferred alternative that enjoys combined local, state and federal support.

If the systems planning work is completed in a timely manner, this environmental analysis work could potentially become a part of the Environmental Assessment currently scheduled for the Willamette Bridge replacement project. We currently project that the Willamette Bridge EA will need to be completed no later than the fall of 2008 in order to meet construction goals of the OTIA 3 Bridge program. ODOT Region 2 stands ready to commit funds and technical expertise to help complete the transportation systems planning effort.

It is my expectation that our staffs will closely collaborate to successfully expedite this process, including taking the land use actions necessary to support our consensus conclusions. Area 5 Manager Bob Pirrie and Tom Boyatt are prepared to begin working out the details of this important study effort at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jack Lee". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jack Lee

Region 2 Planning and Development Manager