

# Columbia River Crossing alternatives are smarter, smaller, cheaper options

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by Jim Howell

There is a way to do this and do it right, far better than the mega-bridge now planned by the bureaucratic machines pushing the 10-lane monster that would connect Oregon and Washington between Portland and Vancouver.

It's clearly time to adopt an intelligent alternative to the proposed Columbia River Crossing. The CRC has no identifiable source of funds, is designed too low for shipping clearance say the U.S. Coast Guard and Army Corps of Engineers, and fails to consider declining vehicular traffic.

Up front, let's dispel one fear-laced bugaboo that the existing Interstate Bridges are worn out. Wrong. They are structurally sound and, with six lanes, can carry the traffic capacity of the existing I-5 freeway for years to come.

Further, these trustworthy bridges are unfairly taking the rap for traffic congestion, accidents and traffic delays resulting from bridge openings. Mega-bridge advocates have also demonized these bridges for alleged exposure to major earthquakes, while ignoring the susceptibility of many more vulnerable bridges and structures along I-5.

Here are the facts. The Interstate Bridges do not restrict the flow of freeway traffic. Rather, the two on-ramps adjacent the bridges are the culprits. They pump traffic onto the freeway, turn the outside bridge lanes into approach lanes and thus reduce the bridges' through-capacity to only four lanes.

Eliminate these on-ramps and much of the freeway congestion will disappear. On-ramp traffic can be relocated to a much less expensive local auxiliary bridge, which would allow the existing Interstate Bridges to accommodate the full six-lane freeway.

Columbia Street Bridge. This local bridge would connect Columbia Street in downtown Vancouver to Hayden Island Drive. This Columbia Street Bridge could be built for roughly one-tenth the cost of the mega-bridge project.

Six years ago, during the CRC screening phase, a team of analysts rejected a similar proposal. Team members argued primarily that such a bridge would not accommodate the traffic increases projected over 20 years. Many experts now consider these projections unrealistically high and out of date.

The Columbia Street Bridge could be a low-level, single-deck structure with a draw-span aligned with the existing lift spans and with a higher span in the middle similar to the existing Interstate Bridges. It could be constructed in the same location as the proposed mega-bridge, but with a straight alignment and could take advantage of the tests now underway.

The Columbia Street Bridge would cross the river only, not soar six stories through downtown Vancouver as would the mega-bridge. It could carry five lanes and a multi-use path for bikes and pedestrians. Two of the lanes would be for local traffic, accommodating the ramp traffic now clogging I-5 northbound.

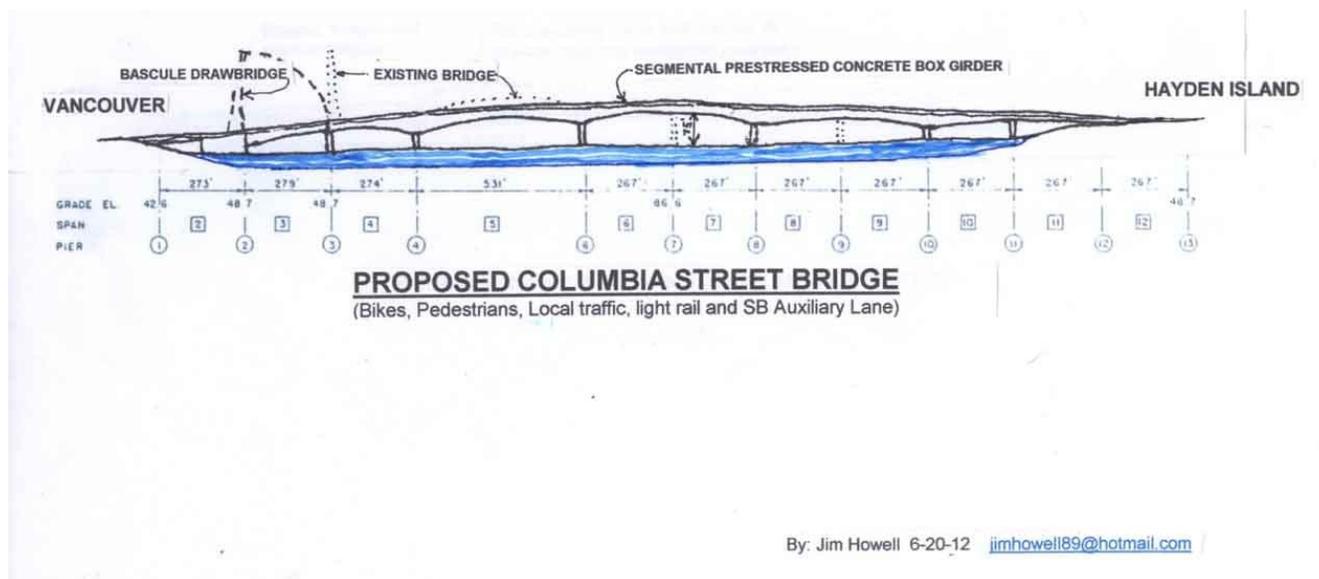
Two lanes would be exclusively for transit, either light rail or buses, and the fifth lane would be a separate lane for southbound traffic from SR-14 and downtown Vancouver, allowing vehicles to make a standard merge onto I-5 at Hayden Island.

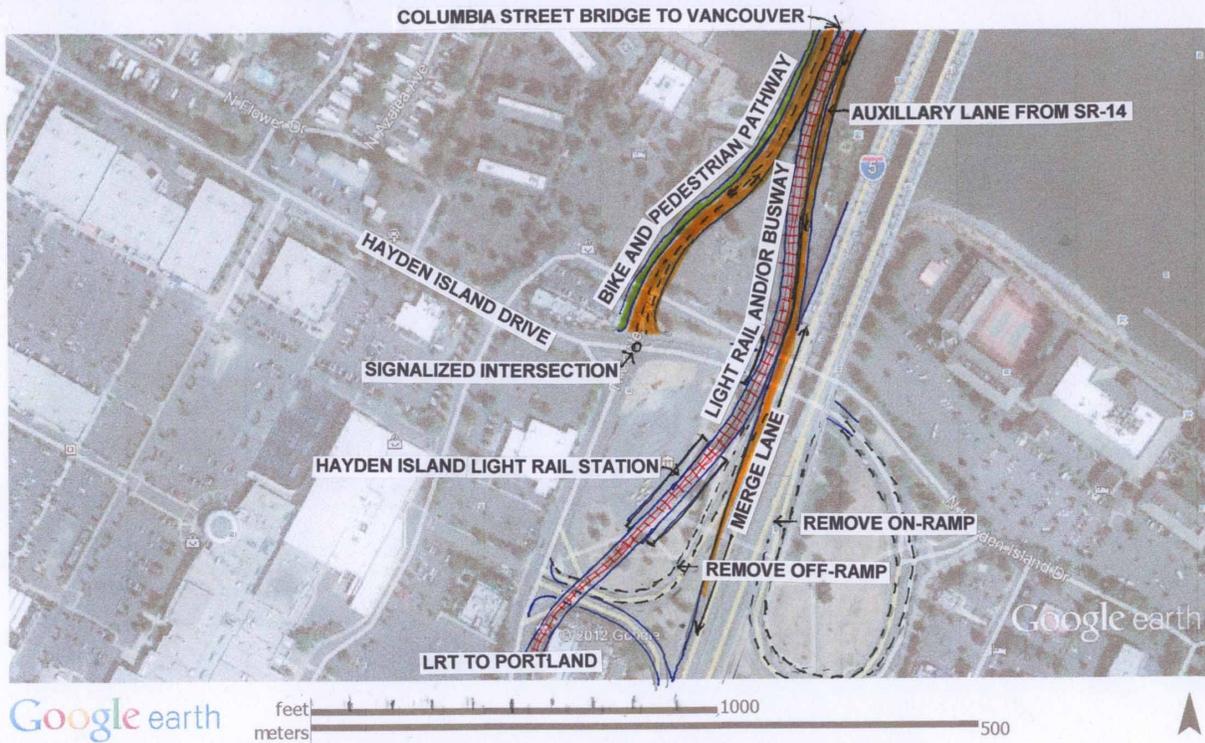
Building the Columbia Street Bridge with associated ramps and fixing the downstream BNSF rail bridge to reduce the number of bridge lifts would eliminate most of the causes of local freeway traffic incidents.

Common Sense Alternative. Building the Columbia Street Bridge and upgrading the rail bridge are part of a package widely known as the Common Sense Alternative. Other elements include a new local Portland Harbor bridge and a new passenger rail bridge adjacent the BNSF rail bridge.

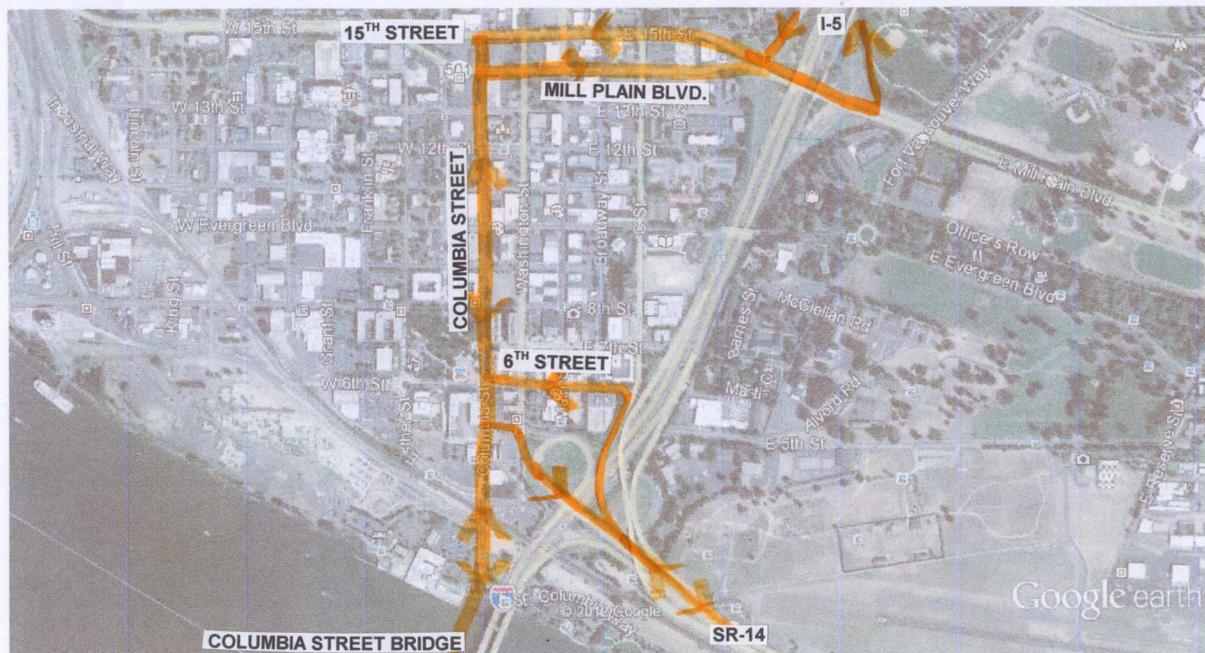
Together, they would be far more valuable for emergency movement in the event of a major earthquake than the planned high-level mega-bridge towering over downtown Vancouver connected to an impassable freeway. Addressing matters of the moment, the Common Sense Alternative solves the bridge clearance conundrum and puts to rest vehicle congestion.

*Jim Howell is strategic planning director for the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates. AORTA supports the Common Sense Alternative to the CRC. Find it on YouTube.*

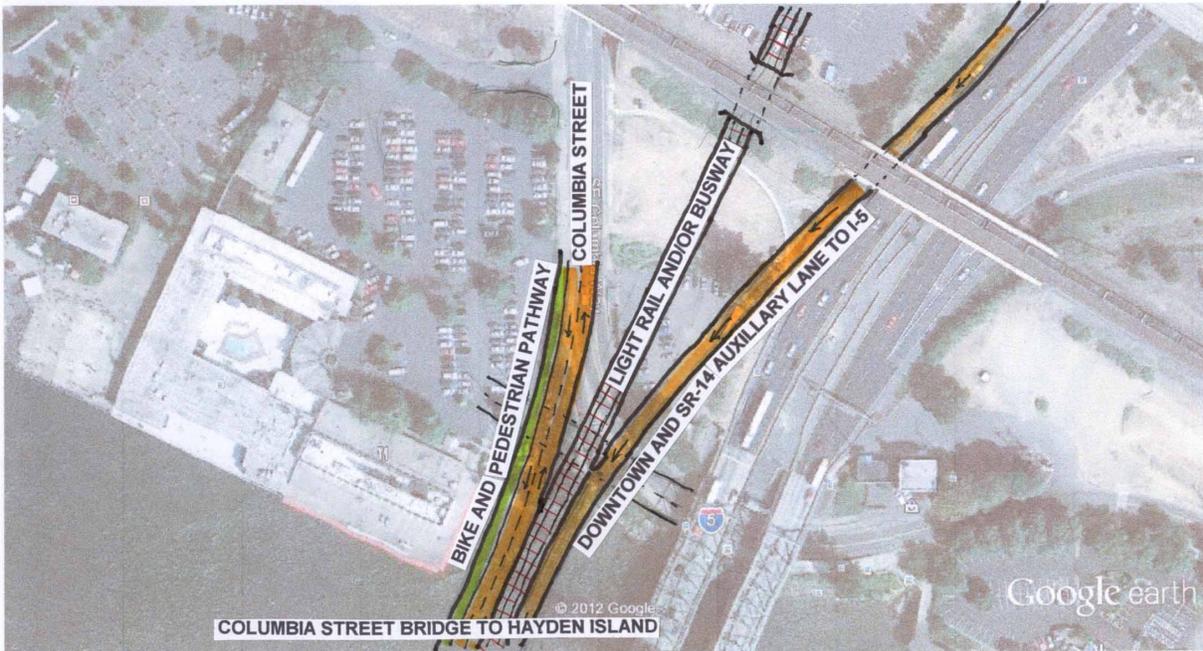




**South Terminus – Columbia Street Bridge**



**Hayden Island Access - to/from I-5 N and SR-14**



COLUMBIA STREET BRIDGE TO HAYDEN ISLAND

Google earth



**North Terminus – Columbia Street Bridge**

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