

Washington, Oregon need compact for transportation

By David McDevitt

For over 50 years, Oregon and Washington have been at odds in resolving and implementing solutions for transportation and infrastructure projects.

Federally, we are considered collectively as the Portland Metropolitan Planning Area, yet we have two Metropolitan Planning Organizations. In Oregon, the MPO is the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation, and in Washington, it is the Regional Transportation Council.

Several joint projects in the past have been canceled or failed to move forward because either Oregon or Washington were unable to reach agreement. The latest round was failure of the Columbia River Crossing project

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Local View

because the Washington Senate failed to pass the state's half of the needed funding.

During the August meeting of the RTC, John Ley of Camas discussed construction of the Portland Area Bypass, including Interstate 205, and the failure to complete the western bypass.

The Portland Western Bypass was proposed in 1988 and canceled in 1996 because two groups, Sensible Transportation Options for People (STOP, a group that is apparently defunct) and 1000 Friends of Oregon, along with Oregon's governor, helped prevent it.

The failures to reach agreement have been across both states, and now it is time to focus on our collective future.

At this time, we should be looking carefully at how our Metropolitan Planning Area is expected to grow in population over the next 25 years. We know Clark County grew by 221,442 people over the last 25 years and we expect growth over the next 25 years of about 140,866 new residents. According to some forecasts, the tri-county area around Portland (Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas) is expected to grow in population by over 500,000 by 2040. We need to prepare.

In looking for precedent for resolving transportation and infrastructure issues between two states, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey was established as a joint venture between those states in 1921 through a compact authorized by Congress. In the early years of the 20th

century, there were disputes between the states similar to the disputes between Oregon and Washington. Both Oregon and Washington would benefit from having an interstate compact authorized by Congress.

Appointed by governors

As to governance, a Joint Powers Authority could be cooperatively controlled by the governors of Oregon and Washington, who would appoint the members of the agency's board of commissioners and retain the right to veto the actions of commissioners from his or her own state.

Each governor would appoint six members to the board of commissioners, as is done in New York and New Jersey, who are subject to state Senate confirmation and serve overlapping six-year terms without pay. An executive director

is appointed by the board of commissioners to deal with day-to-day operations and to execute the port authority's policies.

Under an informal power-sharing agreement, one of our governors would choose the chairman of the board and the deputy executive director, while the other would select the vice chairman and executive director.

Under such an agreement, the Joint Powers Authority could be chartered to handle all joint transportation and infrastructure issues from our border with Idaho to the Pacific Ocean at Astoria, Ore., and Ilwaco.

The agreement could cover interstate freeways, bridges, high speed and mass rapid transit, buses, taxis, airport access, and other sensible solutions that would be responsive to our population growth.

*Submitted to RTC By David McDevitt
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