

**Presentation to Project Sponsors Council
Regarding the Community Connector
Elson Strahan, President & CEO
Fort Vancouver National Trust
December 4, 2009**

It is my pleasure to offer testimony regarding a mitigation component of the Columbia River Crossing called the Community Connector. As a Columbia River Crossing Task Force Member I was pleased to support our final recommendations for the Crossing, although recognizing that the project would require mitigation for its impact on the Fort Vancouver National Site, also known as the Vancouver National Historic Reserve.

Of course, the I-5 corridor has already cut through the heart of Vancouver, but the Columbia River Crossing will produce additional significant negative outcomes. Over and above the construction impact and increased sound and visual encroachment that will be created by the new I-5 corridor, the Crossing will result in an actual taking of up to three acres of National Park Service land that is also on the National Historic Register.

Because of these impacts, mitigation is an absolute federal requirement of Section 4f of the National Highway Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. In the Draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the National Park Service regarding the Columbia River Crossing, the NPS states that the required mitigation will need to “provide improved connections” between downtown Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver National Site. Further, there will be need to minimize visual and sound impact of the Columbia River Crossing “through site-specific, culturally and historically appropriate design or visual buffers.”

To begin to address this requirement, an invitational design competition to reconnect the Fort Vancouver National Site and downtown Vancouver was held under the direction of Donald Stastny of StastnyBrun Architects, which happens to be a Portland firm. That competition has been completed, a design concept has been selected, and both the City of Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver National Trust have approved moving the design concept forward for inclusion in the planning process for the Columbia River Crossing.

Most importantly, the National Park Service has determined that the selected design concept for the Community Connector will substantially meet the mitigation requirements of the Section 4f of the National Highway Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as related to the Columbia River Crossing’s impact on the Fort Vancouver National Site.

Accordingly, we are looking forward to the integration of the selected design concept for the Community Connector in the final plan endorsed by the Project Sponsors Council. For your convenience, a comprehensive record of this process can be found at http://www.fortvan.org/pages/Community_Connector .

Finally, I would note that we could not have been any more fortunate than to have Don Stastny oversee this design competition. He is a professional with unmatched qualifications and experience, having conducted design competitions and providing professional design services throughout the world. The number of projects are far too lengthy to include in these remarks, but they include Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square, the Transbay Transit Center and Tower in San Francisco, the Alaska State Capitol, U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam as well as in Berlin and Beijing, and both the Oklahoma City Memorial and the Flight 93 National Memorial. In addition, StastnyBrun has provided consultation and design services to over twenty-five Native American, Alaska Native and First Nation projects, which provides the firm with some of the essential cultural awareness so vital to our historic site. Don has also just completed the design competition on behalf of the Smithsonian for its new National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Elson Strahan, President & CEO
Fort Vancouver National Trust
General O.O. Howard House
750 Anderson Street
Vancouver, Washington 98661
360.992.1835 phone
360.992.1810 fax
<http://www.fortvan.org>