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Pitch made for CRC alternative

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George Crandall, an architect with Crandall Arambula, is touting a simpler and cheaper alternative to the Columbia River Crossing. He worked with retired architect Jim Howell to create it. (Crandall Arambula)

Architect George Crandall, a principal at **Crandall Arambula** in Portland, believes there is more than one way to solve a problem. That is why he and retired architect Jim Howell for years have pitched what they call a “**Common Sense Alternative**” to the **Columbia River Crossing** – a controversial \$3.45 billion project proposal that died recently. The CSA would cost about \$950 million; it would keep the **Interstate Bridge** intact and use a phased approach to alleviate **Interstate 5** congestion.

The latest CSA iteration, unlike the one from four years ago, would make light rail optional – agencies could pursue that component later if they were to secure funding. The revised plan is simpler and has fewer moving parts, Crandall said. “I am not talking about doing it all at once,” he said. “It would be a pay-as-you-go approach.”

The CRC’s light rail component would have cost \$646 million and carried a heavy political weight. “Light rail isn’t going to fly (and) neither are tolls,” Crandall said. “We have to back off and face the political realities. An alternative approach needs to take these into account.”

However, any alternatives to the CRC will face significant hurdles – including approvals from local, regional and state agencies, said Andy Cotugno, policy advisor for Metro. For a new project to move forward, some sort of government-sponsored process would need to be made, he said. “Nobody has initiated any sort of process to reinstate an evaluation of ideas,” he said. “In order to build it – regardless of the funding, it would have to be part of Metro’s transportation plan.”

Any concerns about an alternative requiring another 10-year planning effort – like the one for the CRC – are unfounded, Crandall said. “If you have an open process, and you created a statement of need that was inclusive enough, you could move the process forward very quickly,” he said. “Ten years has been a red herring for those saying we’ll never do it. If you have an open process, it can happen very quickly.”

The phasing of the CSA would allow immediate fixes relieving congestion, Crandall said.

In the first phase, a lift would be added to the middle of a railroad bridge one mile west of the Interstate Bridge. Currently, to navigate under the low railroad bridge, some barges traveling downriver require the Interstate Bridge to lift. The new railroad bridge lift would allow barges to travel under the Interstate Bridge’s highest span – and reduce

the number of lifts. That portion of the project would cost \$100 million, Crandall said.

“When the river is running high, barges can’t get over in time,” he said. “This would give them a straight shot. We would eliminate 95 percent of bridge lifts by that simple fix.”

A second phase of the CSA was part of the CRC plan – construction of a new bridge between **Hayden Island** and the mainland that would reduce use of I-5. That would cost \$50 million.

“These are things that need to be done,” Crandall said. “They are not heroic, but they would all relieve congestion. It would just take a couple of years to get the pieces in place.”

After those efforts in the first five years, the third phase would take up to five years to complete. A new single-deck, eight-lane bridge would be built alongside the Interstate Bridge, Crandall said. The existing spans would be retained for local traffic.

“We would not mess with the existing bridges,” he said. “The new bridge would be up to seismic standards and it would have more capacity.” This phase also would include interchange modifications at Marine Drive and Washington State Route 14 that would tie in with the new bridge, Crandall said. The total cost for this phase would be \$600 million.

In a fourth phase, existing bridges and approach roads would be modified for local traffic and lanes for pedestrians and cyclists would be created, he said. This would cost \$20 million.

An optional, \$50 million fifth phase would be extension of the **MAX** yellow line across the existing bridges to Hayden Island and Vancouver, Wash.

Right-of-way and professional services would cost \$150 million, Crandall said.

The second version of the CSA has several advantages over the CRC, said Howell, who in the past was a transit planner for TriMet. “The main benefit is you can build a new freeway bridge that will not interfere with marine traffic,” he said. “The one they were proposing (CRC) would have had to pay off upstream industries.” Howell also noted that the CSA’s Hayden Island interchange component would cost \$520 million less than the CRC’s because it would use the Interstate Bridge for local traffic.

Bridge project cost comparison

	CRC	CSA II
Railroad bridge modification	0	\$100M
Hayden Island interchange	\$550M	\$30M
Washington S.R. 14 interchange	\$463M	\$50M
Marine Drive interchange	\$328M	0
Portland harbor bridge, approaches	0	\$50M
Fourth Plain interchange	\$134M	0
Mill Plain interchange	\$74M	0
Washington S.R. 500 interchange	\$9M	0
Columbia River bridges	\$818M	\$500M
Demolition of existing bridges	\$74M	0
Light rail to Hayden Island	n/a	\$20M
Light rail to Vancouver, Wash.	\$646M	\$30M
Local approach roads	0	\$20M
Professional services	\$292M	\$100M
Right-of-way and utilities	\$162M	\$50M
Total cost	\$3.45B	\$950M