

Joe:

Among the down-ballot issues in tomorrow's election will be Clark County's Proposition 1, a request by CTRAN (the mass transit agency) to get voter approval for a one-tenth of one cent sales tax to subsidize the operating costs of light rail for the Columbia River Crossing.

You may be asked to comment on this measure in the next couple of days. Here are some key points you should know.

If this measure goes down, it will be a major blow to the proposed \$3.5 Columbia River Crossing.

--The federal government will not provide funding for capital costs without assured local funding for operations. The Federal Transit Administration requires that local transit agencies show that they can finance new service without cutting back existing service before it will grant money for new capital projects.

--Washington law requires a voter approval before implementing a high capacity transit project (RCW 81.104.030). In Washington, unlike Oregon, local mass transit agencies can't build "high capacity transit"--meaning light rail or a dedicated busway--without first getting voter approval. If Proposition 1 loses, CTRAN will have to come back to the voters with another measure to seek approval.

--Proposition 1 has clearly been positioned as a referendum on CRC. Opponents to Prop. 1 have made tolls and light rail their key issues. Representative Jamie Hererra Beutler has called this the "one and only opportunity" Clark County voters have to weight in on light rail and said: "if Proposition 1 fails, I will oppose any attempt to finance light rail into Clark County that does not win the approval of county voters."

--Lots of CRC opponents recognize that this may be their only chance to vote on any aspect of the CRC. Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt upset then-incumbent Royce Pollard two years ago by running against tolls on the CRC, only to have a change of heart after elected--"discovering" he could do nothing as Mayor to influence tolling. Many Clark County voters are still angry about this flip-flop.

--Clark County voters aren't anti-tax, or anti-transit. Just last November, they voted 54% to 46% to approve twice as large an increase in the sales tax (two-tenths of one percent, 2 cents on a \$10 purchase), to preserve existing bus service. If Proposition 1 fails, it will be because people didn't like CRC/tolling/light rail--not because of the economy or a general anti-tax or anti-transit sentiment in Clark County.

--CRC doesn't have a plan "B". This election has been on the critical path for the CRC for the past several years. If they lose on Proposition 1, they have to come up with a new source of

operating money--and get voter approval for that new plan.

I and other CRC skeptics will be watching the outcome of Proposition 1 closely--if it fails, it could be the beginning of the end for this project.

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