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November 26, 2018

Rear Admiral David G. Throop, Commander  
Thirteenth Coast Guard District  
U.S. Coast Guard  
915 Second Ave  
Seattle, WA 98174

Dear Admiral Throop,

I am writing on behalf of multiple constituents who have approached my office regarding their desire for a further restriction of the lifts during rush hours for the I-5 drawbridges on the Columbia River.

The ever-increasing traffic along the I-5 corridor, fueled by increasing population in Southwest Washington and the region has resulted in a corresponding increase in vehicular traffic congestion and accidents. According to the SW Washington Regional Transportation Council, vehicle crossings over the I-5 drawbridges have increased from 116,500 per day in 1995 to nearly 140,000 per day in 2018.

At the same time, the hours for peak traffic have also steadily gotten longer, particularly for the evening commute. According to the Oregon Dept. of Transportation, the evening rush hour now lasts for approximately 6 hours from 1:30 pm to 7:30 pm. Unfortunately, the morning commute also gives us little cause to celebrate with recent news reports noting that the traffic often slows to approximately 9 mph during the southbound morning commute along the I-5 corridor. Lifts of the drawbridges during the peak traffic hours only serve to compound the challenges the region is experiencing in the movement of traffic and freight across the region.

As you know, current regulation provides for rush hour traffic by limiting lifts of the bridges for the morning commute during the hours of 6:30 am – 9:00 am, and from 2:30 pm – 6:00 pm for the evening commute. Although the Rivers and Harbors Act gives precedence to navigation traffic over vehicular traffic and multiple stakeholders would need to be involved in any effort to amend the current regulations, practical concerns must also weigh into the balance during this interim period while the region works to reach consensus on a plan for replacement of the two drawbridges.

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Admiral Throop, USCG

Given the seriousness of the points raised to my office, I request that you review this situation to determine if extending the hours for limiting lifts of the I-5 drawbridges is warranted. Thank you for your assistance in this matter. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler  
Member of Congress