

## News

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# The Columbian: R.I.P., CRC

by **Eric Florip/Columbian staff writer** [the\\_columbian](#) | May 21, 2014 8:01 p.m. | Updated: May 22, 2014 10:17 a.m. | Vancouver, Washington

This month marks an important shift in the way local leaders talk about the Columbia River Crossing. They'll now refer to the defunct Interstate 5 Bridge replacement in past tense.



([http://www.opb.org/images/fetch/c\\_l\\_photos/67d8d6011d422924adoob6abc3](http://www.opb.org/images/fetch/c_l_photos/67d8d6011d422924adoob6abc3))

Even the CRC website now notes the project's 2014 demise, saying it was completely closed in May of that year.

The CRC's downtown Vancouver offices were all but cleared out earlier this week, save for only a scattering of boxes and loose papers. All of the temporary walls, desks and furniture once inside are gone.

Officials are sticking with May 31 as the formal shutdown date. That's the day the project's lease ends, too. Even though the office is mostly empty, some cleanup work remains, said Dave Thompson, an Oregon Department of Transportation spokesman.

The CRC had been a bistate effort before Washington lawmakers walked away without authorizing any money for it in 2013. The project later emerged as an Oregon-led version, only to be spurned by the Oregon Legislature this year. Without political support in either state, and without funding, the \$2.9 billion project began shutting down in March.

Unlike last year, when Washington pulled out, the CRC's unfinished permit applications have been halted. The project had been seeking two key permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, known as Section 404 (for in-water work) and Section 408 (for levee modification). Both of those processes are now closed.

In the case of the Section 404 permit, the Army Corps asked the CRC a couple times about its intent after the project started closing down this year, said Marci Johnson, a program manager with the Army Corps. When it got no answer, the agency administratively stopped

the review, she said.

On the Section 408 process, both agencies signed a termination agreement in April.

“We are not doing anything on the 404 or 408,” Johnson said. “Our books are closed.”

Other loose ends remain in limbo. A controversial contract signed last year by C-Tran and TriMet, spelling out how the two agencies would operate light rail as part of the CRC, is dormant, effective only if the project is actually built. Some C-Tran board members have expressed interest in revisiting and possibly terminating that deal. But its unclear if a majority of the board would vote to kill it.

Meanwhile, a lawsuit challenging the CRC in 2012 still hasn't been resolved. Attorneys representing the Federal Highway Administration and other defendants recently asked for and received a stay, delaying the case for one year. But that doesn't mean the states are planning to make another attempt at reviving the CRC, Thompson said.

“Nothing has changed,” Thompson said. “ODOT is not seeking funding, and we are shutting down the project.”

Whats also unclear is whether Washington and Oregon will have to repay tens of millions of dollars in federal money spent on the failed project. A letter from two federal officials last year suggested the two states may have to do just that should the CRC not materialize. But a final decision has not been made, a Federal Highway Administration spokesman said Wednesday.

The controversial plan to replace the I-5 Bridge and extend light rail into Vancouver spent close to \$200 million on planning. A state audit of the CRC identified \$17 million in excess or questionable spending, but no financial misconduct or abuse.

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