



# COALITION FOR A LIVABLE FUTURE

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Dear Metro President Hughes and Metro Council:

Metro created the Opt In tool to better understand the Portland metropolitan region's residents' views and to inform Metro's efforts to improve the region's quality of life. This is a laudable goal and a potentially valuable tool. However, the Opt In survey of December 19, 2011 on Regional Infrastructure Projects dramatically fails to live up to that mission. Misleading and skewed questions perpetuate the false dichotomy that the region must choose either environmental protection or economic development as its priority for the future, a dichotomy that Metro and the region's residents have rejected many times.

Several questions in the survey directly pit a strong economy against a healthy environment.<sup>1</sup> This is a specious proposition; these two goals have never been in opposition. The survey offers no option for residents who believe that a high quality environment is essential to a strong economy. Experience and evidence demonstrate that productive businesses and talented people choose to live in communities that have a healthy environment, and that protecting environmental quality creates good-paying, stable jobs for the region's residents while saving taxpayers' money from being wasted on unnecessary, sprawling infrastructure. Actually, Metro itself has put this well in its governing documents:

“The Portland metropolitan region is set in an exceptional natural landscape. It is surrounded by hills and mountains and laced with rivers and streams. It is a region of national distinction for clean water, clean air, outdoor recreation, and an abundance of green; a place where nature is always nearby. This tremendous natural inheritance sustains residents' health, fosters the region's economy, provides healthy activities for all and is central to the region's identity.”<sup>2</sup>

“Thoughtful choices and coordinated action can foster economic vitality, preserve our natural resources and ensure that people and neighborhoods thrive.”<sup>3</sup>

And as Metro has also explained, smart land use planning is smart for business:

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<sup>1</sup> For example, one question asks participants which of the following two statements comes closest to their views, with choices being that they believe:

- Environmental sustainability should be the region's top priority, and businesses and individuals must learn to adapt to this priority. This needs to be our focus, even if our economy suffers.
- Improving the economy, creating family-wage jobs, and making the region more attractive to businesses is more important than environmental sustainability. Jobs and the economy need to be our focus, even if the environment suffers.

<sup>2</sup> Metro, *Nature in Neighborhoods*.

<sup>3</sup> Metro, *Our Place in the World*.

“Directing growth and redevelopment inward – rather than outside the urban area where it is more expensive to serve – is good for business. ... ‘The stability that Portland’s urban growth boundary provides makes the city attractive for investment.’”<sup>4</sup>

“Smart land use policies and public investments in transportation and other infrastructure create the underlying conditions for a prosperous and resilient economy. The Portland metropolitan area’s worldwide reputation for livability attracts talented people and private investments that infuse our communities with energy and help us all thrive.”<sup>5</sup>

The questions on regional infrastructure funding priorities and the Columbia River Crossing also require numerous false choices and read like a push poll. A question on regional transportation funding priorities forces readers to indicate which transportation mode they do not support “at all,”<sup>6</sup> creating an unnecessary “us vs. them” dynamic between transportation modes. This “choice” eliminates the possibility for residents to indicate they believe the region should pursue a multimodal, balanced approach to meeting its mobility needs. Similarly, the question about the CRC forces residents to express support for the current proposal (referred to as a bridge and ignoring five miles of expanded freeway and interchanges) if they want to express support for light rail to Vancouver.<sup>7</sup> Neither question provides an opportunity to say “none of the above.”

A basic tenet of quantitative social research is that how survey questions are framed has a direct impact on the reliability of the results. Put simply, if Opt In surveys use questions that present false choices and inexplicably constrained options, they will produce results that do not reflect the actual opinions of residents about our region’s future. Thus, Metro’s use of these results to indicate support for or opposition to a particular project or priority will be highly suspect.

We understand that questions have to be constructed to constrain the respondent’s choices and force decisions between opposing values. But this is only legitimate when it is unambiguous that the values are truly in opposition. By implying --with no basis in fact--that jobs and environmental quality are mutually exclusive goals, the Metro Opt-In poll transforms what could be useful opinion research into research that yields meaningless and misleading results.

If any metropolitan region can demonstrate to the nation and the world that economic development, environmental protection, and equity are mutually accomplishable goals, the Portland region can, and should. As Metro itself concluded in its 2040 Growth Concept:

“This innovative blueprint for the future, intended to guide growth and development over 50 years, is based on a set of shared values that continue to resonate throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> Metro’s Nature of 2040, *2040 Means Business*, quoting regional real estate developer.

<sup>5</sup> Metro, *Our Place in the World*.

<sup>6</sup> The question asks: “When it comes to transportation improvements in the region, which should not be a focus at all?” The choices are neighborhood streets, regional roads and highways, bicycle lanes, light rail, sidewalks, and “don’t know”.

<sup>7</sup> Columbia River Crossing question, Option 3:

- A new bridge is needed to offer more travel options like light rail across the bridge and to eliminate bridge lifts for shipping traffic to reduce traffic congestion. This new bridge is a priority and needs to be built now.

region: thriving neighborhoods and communities, abundant economic opportunity, clean air and water, protecting streams and rivers, preserving farms and forestland, access to nature, and a sense of place. These are the reasons people love to live here.”<sup>8</sup>

The questions asked in this Opt In survey do not present this possibility, and call into serious question Metro’s long-standing commitment to this vision. We urge Metro to disavow this flawed Opt In survey and affirm its commitment to seeking both a healthy environment and vibrant economy. We also ask that Metro ensure that future surveys reflect adopted and acknowledged Metro policy and present real choices about how our region can pursue the thriving future its residents desire and deserve.

Sincerely,

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<sup>8</sup> Metro 2040 Growth Concept.

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cc: Jim Middaugh, Metro Communications Director