

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 29, 2023

The Honorable Pete M. Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

We write in support of the joint Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) grant application for the Interstate Bridge Replacement program (IBR) through the National Infrastructure Project Assistance (Mega) program. This critical effort, sponsored by WSDOT and ODOT and in coordination with eight local partner agencies, will replace the aging Interstate Bridge which connects Washington and Oregon over the Columbia River with a modern, seismically resilient, and multimodal structure. Interstate 5 (I-5) connects tens of thousands of people to jobs throughout Southwest Washington and the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area and is an essential interstate link for the West Coast. The IBR program will ensure reliable travel times, reduced congestion, improved safety and quality of life, reduced emissions, and better access to goods and services.

The Interstate Bridge is part of a crucial trade route for regional, national, and international commerce. Freight makes up nearly 10% of daily traffic across the bridge and, in 2019, the structure supported approximately \$82 million in freight commodity value daily. The bridge's significance to the national freight system will only grow as freight transportation volumes in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region are expected to double by 2040. Currently this freight movement is often delayed; the Interstate Bridge is ranked as the worst truck bottleneck in Washington, the second-worst in Oregon, and the 31st worst truck bottleneck in the nation due to routine congestion. The replacement of the critical infrastructure and modification of adjacent interchanges through the IBR program will vastly improve the movement of freight through the I-5 corridor, reducing the costs of congestion on businesses near the arterial and for users of the connector as they travel between Washington and Oregon.

Further, there are significant and increasingly concerning, issues with the structural integrity of the existing bridge. One span of the Interstate Bridge is more than a century old and the other span is more than 65 years old. Neither span has undergone a seismic retrofit, which is of great concern for a region susceptible to earthquake hazard. As it stands, the entire Interstate Bridge structure is at risk of collapse in the event of a major earthquake. Maintenance of the existing structure is, alternatively, a more timely and expensive endeavor with annual maintenance costs amount to \$1.2 million per year on average and larger maintenance projects are predicted to cost \$280 million per project by 2040 – not including the cost of a necessary seismic retrofit, which would be substantial. Today, these maintenance costs are split equally between WSDOT and ODOT.

This project's economic significance cannot be understated. The IBR project is expected to create approximately 43,300 direct, indirect, and induced jobs across multiple industries, generating \$3.3

billion in earnings overall. This includes 18,700 jobs directly engaged in delivering the IBR program, which will generate \$1.7 billion alone.

Since the program's inception in 2019, local agencies, organizations, and community members have worked together to identify a solution that addresses the physical, contextual, and regulatory changes made since the previous project planning session to replace the Interstate Bridge. The IBR program seeks to address key priorities which include:

- Replacing the existing I-5 bridge spans and North Portland Harbor Bridge, which are both at risk of collapse in the event of a major earthquake. The two bridges will be designed to withstand a major earthquake and continue to provide access for interstate travelers and emergency services.
- Addressing the needs of vehicles and freight while minimizing impacts to communities, improving local street connections, and bolstering access to transit and active transportation facilities with the reconstruction of seven closely spaced interchanges.
- Improving the safety and mobility of travelers and freight with the addition of auxiliary lanes, safety shoulders, ramp metering, and comfortable lane widths.
- Improving commutes and reducing emissions by ensuring Washingtonians have access to multimodal public transportation options.

The IBR program has made significant progress toward reaching the construction phase of the project. As of this year, the program has all non-federal matching funds committed in both Washington and Oregon, demonstrating strong bi-state support and determination to complete this critical multimodal investment. Congress created the Mega program with nationally significant, multimodal projects like the Interstate Bridge Replacement program in mind and we believe the dollars invested in this program will have a substantially positive impact in the region and I-5 network that cannot be overlooked. We fully support this application for grant funding and look forward to continued collaboration with the Interstate Bridge Replacement program to see this essential project through to construction.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



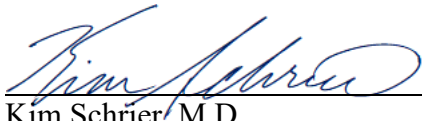
Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



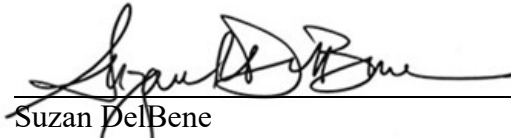
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