

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 16, 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 Federal Highway Administration's *Bridge Investment Program (BIP)*.

This critical effort, sponsored by WSDOT and ODOT, will replace the aging Interstate Bridge, which connects Washington and Oregon over the Columbia River, with a modern and seismically-resilient, 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 entire West Coast. Replacement 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 percent 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 is projected to grow as freight transportation volumes in the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan region are expected to double by 2040. Currently, freight movement is often delayed; the Interstate Bridge is ranked as the worst truck bottleneck in Washington state, the second-worst in Oregon, and the 31st-worst truck bottleneck in the nation due to routine congestion. The replacement of this critical infrastructure, and modification of adjacent interchanges using funding from the BIP program, will vastly improve the movement of freight through the I-5 corridor. The project will also reduce the costs of congestion on businesses near the arterial and for road users journeying between Washington and Oregon.

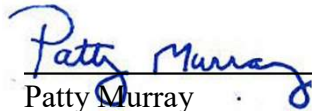
Further, there are significant, and increasingly concerning, issues with the structural integrity of the existing bridge. One span of the Interstate Bridge is more than a century old and the other span is more than 65 years old. Neither span has undergone a seismic retrofit which is of great concern 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 amounting to an average of \$1.2 million per year, with larger maintenance projects predicted to cost \$280 million between now and 2040 – not inclusive of the cost of a substantial seismic retrofit.


This project is expected to create approximately 43,300 direct, indirect, and induced person-year jobs across multiple industries, generating \$3.3 billion in economic activity. This includes 18,700 person-year jobs directly engaged in delivering the program, which will generate \$1.7 billion alone.

Since the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) 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 including reducing congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, enhancing public transit and active transportation facility access, improving safety and mobility, and bolstering seismic resiliency.

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. Federal 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 to see this essential project through to construction.

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator


Maria Cantwell
United States Senator


Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress


Rick Larsen
Member of Congress


Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress