



## BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

---

Sen. Lee Byer  
Rep. Susan McLain  
Joint Transportation Committee  
900 Court St NE, Salem, OR 97301

February 3, 2022

**RE: BI-STATE SUPPORT FOR BRIDGE COMMISSION LEGISLATION (HB 4089-1)**

Co-Chair Beyer, Co-Chair McLain, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon and Washington local governments that we represent have been working together for the last twenty years to replace the century-old Hood River-White Salmon Bridge. In 2018, we came together to form the Bi-State Working Group (BSWG) as a unified political voice to support the ongoing effort to replace the bridge. Both sides of the Columbia River Gorge are united in our support for **HB 4089-1**, which would create a new bi-state governance entity to own, operate and maintain the new Hood River-White Salmon Interstate bridge.


The current bridge is functionally obsolete, weight-restricted, seismically deficient, and a hazard for maritime freight on the Columbia River. Repair costs continue to grow year over year, and unless construction on a new bridge is underway by 2026, \$50 million will need to be spent on the current bridge over the next fifteen years to provide for its continued safe operation. Replacing the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge is vital to the local economy, and to the safety of our communities on both sides of the river.

While our informal local government partnership has worked well so far, a clear, comprehensive, and permanent bi-state governance structure is needed to finance, construct, and operate the replacement bridge. After a year-long study, the BSWG found that the replacement of a local government-owned interstate toll bridge can best be accomplished by an independent bi-state commission, chartered by the affected local governments, with sufficient powers to oversee the bridge replacement project and own and operate the new bridge. Since current statutes in Oregon and Washington do not provide a means to establish such an authority, the BSWG has prepared legislation to create this bridge commission and seeks to pass it concurrently in the Oregon and Washington Legislatures during their respective 2022 legislative sessions.


The financing, construction, operation, and maintenance of the replacement bridge will require cooperative decision-making by local governments from both states, and this bi-state commission would facilitate that bi-state collaboration. The proposed legislation would also establish the clear legal framework required to finance the replacement bridge, achieve investment-grade ratings for toll bonds, and ensure transparency and accountability for bridge operations. Additionally, the commission would create a legal separation between the bridge and local and state governments, avoiding unwanted legal and financial entanglements. The governance structure outlined in HB 4989-1 is expressly designed to address the replacement of interstate toll bridges owned by a local government, so it is not applicable to state-owned interstate bridges.

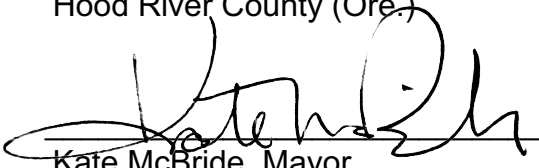
**We respectfully request your support for HB 4089-1** so that we can create this new bi-state governance structure and this vital infrastructure project can move forward without delay. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

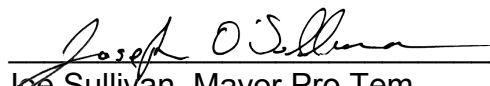
Sincerely,


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jacob Anderson, Commissioner  
Klickitat County (Wash.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bob Benton, Commissioner  
Hood River County (Ore.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Marla Keethler, Mayor  
City of White Salmon (Wash.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kate McBride, Mayor  
City of Hood River (Ore.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Joe Sullivan, Mayor Pro Tem  
City of Bingen (Wash.)

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mike Fox, Commission  
Port of Hood River (Ore.)