

Submitter: Douglas Kelso
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation
Measure: HB2098

I support a new I-5 bridge over the Columbia River, but oppose the current bill. The legislation as currently written does not compel ODOT to study and implement a right-sized bridge replacement project.

The current proposal calls for a vastly larger project than needed. The IBR as planned is far longer, higher, and wider than is needed for a safer, sturdier freeway bridge. The proposed mega-project ignores the existence of realistic common-sense alternatives, such as building a freeway-only drawbridge with higher clearance than the current bridge, or a freeway-only tunnel underneath the river. It ignores the simple and obvious solution of using the two bridges that are already there for arterial traffic, public transit (including light rail) and pedestrian and bicycle crossing; this alone would save a vast amount of money by reducing the number of lanes needed on the freeway bridge.

Given ODOT's history of cost overruns on mega-projects, the proposed project could cost \$10 billion or more by the time it's finished. How many necessary transportation projects could be funded all over the state with that money instead? The Glenn Jackson bridge was built for \$170 million in 1977-1982. A standard inflation calculator shows that \$170 million in 1977 would be about \$850 million today. The IBR is an order of magnitude costlier than needed.

I also understand that the bicycle and pedestrian components of the IBR project cost about \$100 million, for a bike crossing that will be too steep for many riders and also barely used. Far better to just leave the existing bridge in place for non-freeway traffic and put the bikeway there. If Oregon can spare \$100 million for a bikeway, it would be better spent on hundreds of far more sensible pedestrian and bike projects across the state.

The project as proposed is a huge waste of money. This bill should force ODOT to genuinely study realistic alternatives to its preferred mega-project; a simple freeway bridge or tunnel with fewer lanes and no light rail or bike facilities, coupled with the prospect of rehabbing the bridges that are already there for multiple non-freeway uses. Given that ODOT has spent more than a decade obstinately refusing to even acknowledge there are better and cheaper ways to get this project done, the bill should also include enforcement provisions that will require ODOT to justify all of their decisions, and to show their work in court if necessary.

Oregon needs a better, less expensive crossing across the Columbia. We can and

should save billions of transportation dollars for roads, bridges, transit and bikeways all across Oregon over the next decade or so instead of wasting it on one Portland-area freeway project.

Please put an end to this boondoggle now.