



4145 NE Cully Blvd. Portland, OR 97218
www.verdenw.org

April 28, 2023

Co-Chair McLain, Co-Chairs Boshart Davis and Boquist, and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding HB 2098 and the Interstate Bridge Replacement. This written testimony expands on my comments at the April 20th and April 27th meetings of the Joint Committee on Transportation.

My name is Indi Namkoong, and I am the Transportation Justice Coordinator for Verde. Verde's mission is to serve communities by building environmental wealth through social enterprise, outreach, and advocacy. We were born in 2005 in NE Portland's Cully neighborhood, a neighborhood with more than its share of poverty and less than its share of environmental assets. Cully is called home by many Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, with a highly visible Latinx population. It includes the most racially/ethnically diverse Census tract in Oregon. This is both where we do our place-based work and a symbol of the environmental justice communities we advocate for statewide; we work in broad coalitions to expand affordable and accessible options for clean and equitable transportation for all of us.

The Interstate Bridge Replacement is a once-in-a-generation investment for our region. It could be an opportunity to make a downpayment on a thriving region and a more equitable transportation system, but our communities know this is far from a guarantee. A legacy of car-centric and overbuilt transportation infrastructure investments in our region has left polluted air, heat islands, unsafe streets, and scarce transit connections for neighborhoods like Cully and other communities of color, low-income communities, rural communities, and more across the state who share these challenges. **Projects like this one have promised more good jobs, safer travel, and connected communities in the past, but we're not seeing them in our neighborhoods.**

Oregon needs a seismically resilient I-5 bridge. We also need to ensure the largest infrastructure investment in Oregon's history does not repeat the mistakes of the past. **The -2 and -4 amendments risk missing the mark on both counts; they roll back fiscal safeguards, puncture the firewall between transportation funding and the general fund, neglect opportunities to secure community benefits and create local union jobs, and lock our state into an oversized financial obligation we may not be able to repay.** For this reason, we oppose the -2 and -4 amendments, and we urge this committee to consider amendments that would address these concerns as soon as possible by:



- **Authorizing only the amount of bonding required for Oregon and Washington to raise our hands and get in line for federal funding and secure funding for light rail in 2023;**
- **Refreshing and recommitting to robust financial safeguards and accountability measures in existing law** rather than rolling them back and authorizing a fiscal free-for-all;
- Directing ODOT to **work with labor unions and communities in North Portland and Hayden Island to incorporate Project Labor Agreements and Community Benefits Agreements into this project.** As I detailed further in my April 25th response to this committee, strong labor and community benefits standards can create life-changing career opportunities, invest in community needs like bike/ped connectivity and air pollution mitigation, and build wealth and well-being in our communities far into the future;
- Directing the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program to **explore at least one alternative design that would lower costs of the proposed replacement below \$5 billion while preserving critical elements like high capacity transit and active transportation** networks onto and across the bridge; and
- Setting in place an **enforceable total project cost limit of \$5 billion to ensure we spend within our means** and can fund future job-creating projects that will connect communities across Oregon.

The -3 amendment to HB 2098 is a significant step in the right direction and we are supportive of this progress. We are counting on you to ensure the project delivers on what we need - a seismically safe bridge with transit and active transportation - without locking ourselves into a financial commitment we can't follow through on and leaving other urgent statewide priorities in jeopardy. **We cannot raid the general fund—our children's education, our housing, our healthcare—for megaprojects that should be covered by designated transportation funding resources. Nor can we jeopardize future funding for critical transportation infrastructure and maintenance needs that have been delayed and deprioritized in communities like ours around the state.** You have the chance to write a new transportation history for Oregon with this project. We hope to be a partner and a resource to you in stewarding a right-sized bridge replacement that will truly serve our region in all the ways we need. Thank you for your consideration.

Indi Namkoong
Transportation Justice Coordinator for Verde