



**ECUMENICAL
MINISTRIES**
— OF OREGON —

April 27, 2023

Re: Support HB 2098-3

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Frederick, Co-Vice-Chairs Boshart Davis and Boquist, and committee members,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (EMO and OIPL) would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2098. EMO consists of 15 member denominations and hundreds of congregations, faith-based organizations, and institutions across the state. We also partner with groups and individuals from a variety of faith traditions to care for our common home through Oregon Interfaith Power & Light.

We recognize the necessity to build a new Columbia River crossing, and to pass a bill this year so we can utilize federal funds from the American Infrastructure and Jobs Act, ushering in excellent union-wage jobs.

We are concerned, however, about the proposed expansion of the bridge. Our concerns include:

1. displacement and reduced public health in human communities;
2. environmental harm to the river and nearby ecosystems;
3. increased emissions contributing to global climate change;
4. the massive and unnecessary cost to taxpayers for more lanes and interchanges without apparent attention to alternative designs;
5. lack of clarity and equity regarding the tolling process and the communities that will bear the brunt of these tolls; and
6. the proposed use of General Fund monies that will prevent more urgent and more important investments around the state for biennial to come.

Therefore, we oppose HB 2098-2 and -4 and support the -3 amendment because our communities need this bill to limit cost, center justice, be beneficial to public health, and reduce environmental and climate impact.

In building a new river crossing, we do not want to displace communities or damage public health. We do not want to sacrifice neighborhoods to create large roads, such as displacing a community on Hayden Island and reducing the air quality for those who live near the Interstate. We would like the new I-5 bridge to remain within the footprint of the current bridge and take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants that are harmful to public health. This building project must support the principles of environmental justice, including air pollution reduction.

It is morally unjust to expand a freeway during the climate crisis. The I-5 bridge does not need additional lanes. Rather, we encourage a multimodal I-5 bridge that would increase access for

pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transportation. Active and public transportation that is safe, fast, easy, and affordable for everyone aligns with Oregon's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

Additionally, expansion is a wasteful expenditure in general, and particularly if tolls are ultimately going to be put in place that will reduce traffic demand. A new bridge should not be built to accommodate the current number of vehicles crossing the bridge, but should instead be informed by traffic levels as predicted by independent tolling analyses. In 2016, a bridge replacement project in Kentucky doubled the former bridge's number of lanes. Because of post-construction tolls, however, traffic decreased by 49% by 2018 in comparison to pre-construction traffic, making these additional lanes unnecessary. Preliminary data by Metro indicates tolls would have a similar effect in Oregon. Tolling in the Portland Metro region needs to be done in a way that is economically equitable, transparent, and has community buy-in. HB 2098 needs to require investment-grade tolling analysis and public engagement to create a tolling (or other funding) strategy that is fair and has community support.

The bridge project needs to also maintain the health of the Columbia River and other ecosystems near the bridge and its infrastructure. A supplemental Environmental Impact Statement should be completed and its findings should be incorporated into the project prior to approving the bridge design. HB 2098 should commission and require approval from a choice of alternative designs, cost estimates, and ecological impacts, independent of Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Alternative options could include different bridge designs, sizes, and assessment of the viability of approaches such as a tunnel or diverting vehicles to existing bridges.

It is crucial to minimize the cost of this program, recognizing needs across our state. EMO and OIPL represent communities across Oregon. We want to ensure funds are available for communities in the whole state to complete necessary infrastructure fixes and meet other needs in addition to this project.

The fact that versions of this bill to build an expanded bridge draw on Oregon's general fund suggests that:

- An increase in lanes is more important than lowering Oregon's worst-in-the-nation K-12 homelessness rate;
- Building miles of interchanges is more important than providing clean drinking water in rural Oregon or health coverage for low-income Oregonians.
- The interstate through north Portland is more important than addressing hunger. EMO's food pantry in northeast Portland — one of the largest in the state — witnesses Oregonians' ongoing need for access to affordable food, especially Oregonians of color.
- We're willing to mortgage our own and our children's future to build a larger-than-necessary bridge, but not to adequately fund climate change solutions.

Crucially, we support a phased approach to the I-5 bridge reconstruction project, prioritizing the most essential pieces of construction first, and focusing on environmental justice and climate solutions. The -3 amendment moves us in the right direction.

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