HB 2931 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Joint Committee On Transportation

Prepared By:	Patrick Brennan, LPRO Analyst
Sub-Referral To:	Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Meeting Dates:	2/3

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Revises statutes related to the Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Project.

Detailed Summary

The measure revises the statutory definition of the Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Project to reflect the current iteration of the project as compared to the 2013 version. It also specifies that tolls, as managed by the Oregon Transportation Commission, will be kept sufficient to meet revenue bond or credit enhancement obligations. The measure repeals provisions related to reducing tolls once bond obligations are paid off and related to consideration of traffic demand management. The measure establishes the Interstate 5 Bridge Toll Account for construction of the project and outlines uses of moneys in that Account. The measure clarifies statutes related to collection of tolls and authorizes the Department of Transportation to impose civil penalties for failure to pay imposed tolls, and allows ODOT to enter into agreements with other governments and units of state government to enforce payment of tolls.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The bridge connecting Oregon and Washington along Interstate 5 is actually two bridges; the first was completed in 1917, and was designed to carry traffic both ways, while the second span was completed in 1958, after which the older, upriver span carried northbound traffic, and the newer span carried southbound traffic. Both bridges are dual truss facilities equipped with a counterweight lift system that improves the 72-foot river clearance of the bridge to as much as 176 feet when fully lifted. The entire structure is over 3,500 feet in length. Since its construction, the bridge has greatly expanded the daily traffic volumes, while the size of vehicles crossing the bridge have also increased greatly over time.

Over its decades of operation, the Interstate 5 Bridge became functionally obsolete, as its original design no longer aligned with its use in the modern interstate highway system. Because the spans predate the modern understanding of seismic risks in the Pacific Northwest, the bridge is believed to be incapable of surviving even a moderately sized earthquake, due in large part to the massive counterweights used to operate the bridge lift. Plans evolved in the early 2000s to replace the existing spans with a new facility, which was then referred to as the Columbia River Crossing (CRC), a modern double-decker bridge that would remove the lift span, anchor the bridge to the bedrock below for seismic stability, improve bicycle and pedestrian access, increase safety features, and use the bridge to extend light rail transit to Vancouver, Washington. However, after nearly a decade of planning, that project failed when the Washington failed to match Oregon's legislatively-approved funding for the project.

In 2019, the bridge replacement efforts were taken up again with the creation of bi-state bridge committees and a new Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Program. The new proposed bridge would be slightly smaller than the

original proposal, but also includes light rail transit and improved active transportation and safety features. To date, both Oregon and Washington have pledged over $1 billion apiece to fund the project, and the federal government has likewise pledged nearly $2 billion. As with the earlier CRC version, tolls are expected to provide a significant portion of the funds necessary to complete construction of the bridge.

House Bill 2931 modifies statutes enacted in 2013, 2017, and 2021 regarding the scope of the Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Project, financing the project cost, and the imposition and collection of tolling for the project.