

Testimony on HB 2749 to **Joint Committee on Transportation**. April 14, 2025

From: Donna L Cohen, MLIS, MEd

Chairs Gorsek and McClain and Committee,

[Note: Please view maps at the end and appended to the testimony in a separate PDF file.]

Thank you for this Hearing. My name is Donna Cohen and I have been a resident of the St Johns neighborhood of Portland for almost 22 years. I am a community activist and I also teach Civics to adults, through libraries and community organizations. This summer I will be going to Lakeview, Oregon, to teach two of my workshops.

3 ½ years ago I was shocked to learn that my neighborhood, indeed, 20-30,000 residents and workers on the north peninsula of Portland, face a dire situation. I am here today, in unity with the dozens of families who have submitted testimony – regular folks who are legitimately fearful, and the many more who don't yet even realize the threat, to describe this situation and how HB 2749 is a straightforward approach to starting us down the long road to resolving it.

We all know that the coming earthquake [combined with the dangers of the CEI Hub] will result in many areas of the Northwest being damaged and destroyed, with many casualties. The north peninsula has a particular vulnerability, though. The good news is that we know what can be done to mitigate the danger! IF WE DO NOT MITIGATE THE DANGER, OREGON WILL FACE A SITUATION THAT WILL DWARF THAT OF THE HORRORS OF THE SUPERDOME AFTER KATRINA – the north peninsula will be an open-air superdome on steroids with thousands languishing and dying. I am not joking.

As you can see from the maps provided, the north peninsula – encompassing the neighborhoods of St Johns, Cathedral Park, the Rivergate Industrial Area [and University Park and Portsmouth] is situated across from the CEI Hub. Three sides [the pink area] of the peninsula will liquefy during the quake – damaging/destroying roads and structures and creating a barrier toward any ingress/egress by water. EVEN IF we could get to the Willamette, the impact of the inferno that will be the CEI Hub will make the river unusable.

The only direction for egress/ingress is SE, on our official-but-not-currently-actual emergency routes of Columbia Blvd and Lombard Street. These routes have short bridges over a 100'-deep ditch known as the "Cut", where the BNSF railroad runs. The bridges are over 110 years old and have been evaluated by PBOT, which says they will FAIL in the earthquake – IF NOT BEFORE.

WHEN THESE BRIDGES COLLAPSE the north peninsula will effectively be an island.

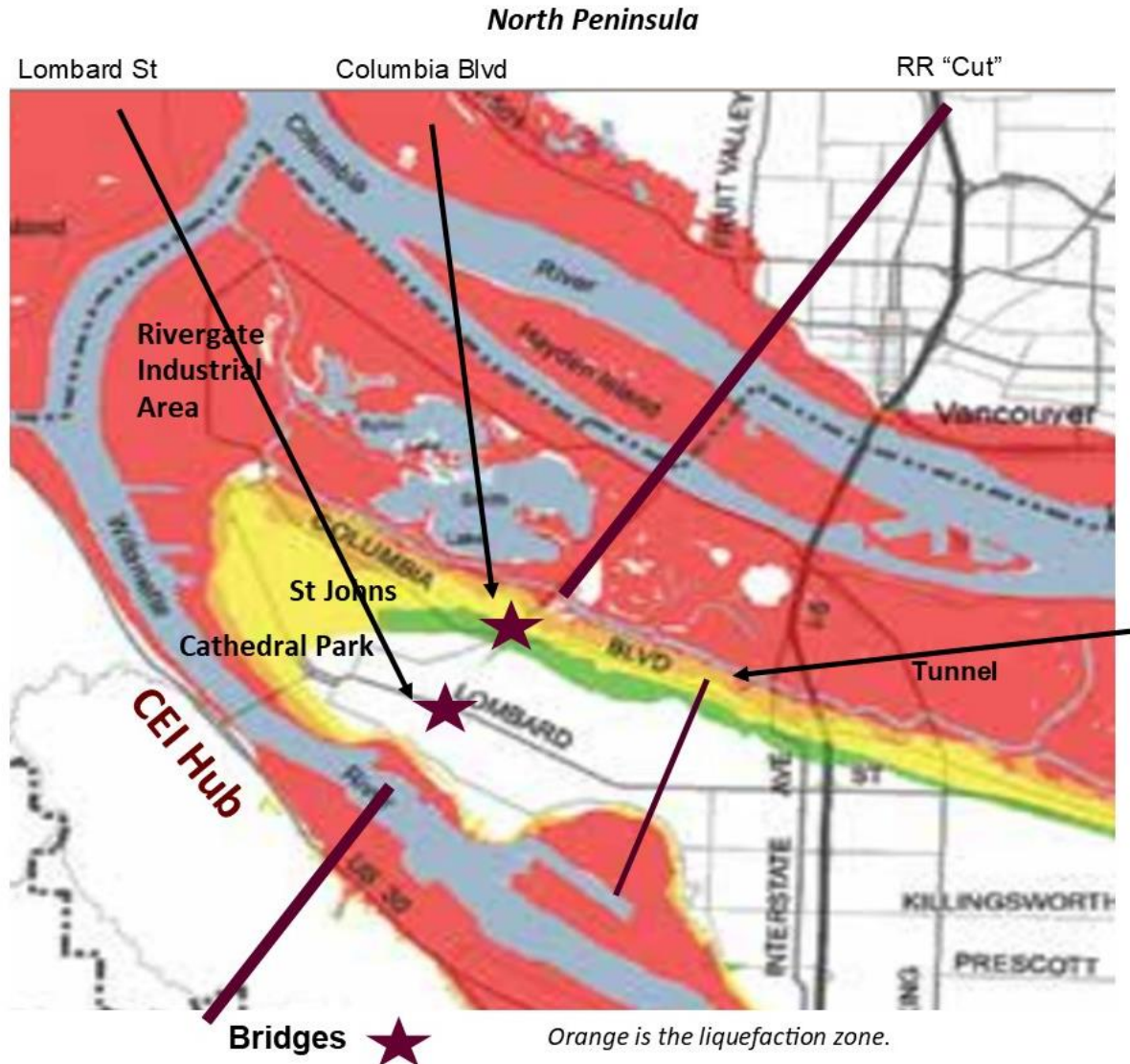
No way to receive medical/emergency/repair help, to resupply, for families to reunite, - IN THE WORST-CASE SCENARIO if/when a toxic cloud comes across the river, there will be NO ESCAPE.

Since so much of the larger geographic area will be dealing with problems from the earthquake, the above scenario will go on for weeks, possibly months! No one can prep for this magnitude of disaster although we're certainly doing what we can.

BUT THERE IS POSITIVE NEWS! HB 2749 gives us a beginning, a chance to start down the long road to rebuild and seismically secure our emergency routes – beginning with Columbia Blvd.

Please do not let Oregon be a state about which, after the disaster, the country says, "Look what it did to its poorest and disadvantaged, citizens. It ignored a potential tragedy which could have been rectified [assuming this gets done prior to the earthquake] had elected officials taken heed in time! Please move HB 2749 ahead with a "do pass" recommendation. It's the right thing to do. [And, also, ask Ways and Means to use current testimony to move the bill through quickly.] Thank you!

Ultimately, we need to look at rebuilding the bridge on Lombard and the railroad tunnel under Columbia Park at Lombard - which will also collapse - in the neighborhoods of Portsmouth and University Park. Should Columbia Blvd – on the edge of the liquefaction zone – liquefy, or should an accident in a crisis evacuation occur – we need to have the other “emergency route”, Lombard St, secured.]



St Johns / North Peninsula Emergency Route Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nopoemergencyroute>

Email list [put “emergency route” in Subject heading] NoPoEmergencyRoute@gmail.com

References:

Maps from: MULTNOMAH COUNTY MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL NATURAL HAZARDS MITIGATION PLAN. 2023
Revision. https://multco.us/file/nhmp_update_full_document/download Pages 388, 389 and 415

Map from Multnomah County report, section on “Earthquake Study”, page 6-17: https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/em/documents/mc-hmp_ch-6_earthquake.pdf

Also, Natural Hazards Mitigation Planning. Chapter 3 – Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment page 72. Multnomah County. Oct. 2023. https://multco.us/file/nhmp_final_draft_section_3.1_earthquake/download

Impacts of a Cascadia Subduction Zone Earthquake on the CEI Hub. ECONorthwest for City of Portland/Multnomah County. June 2021.

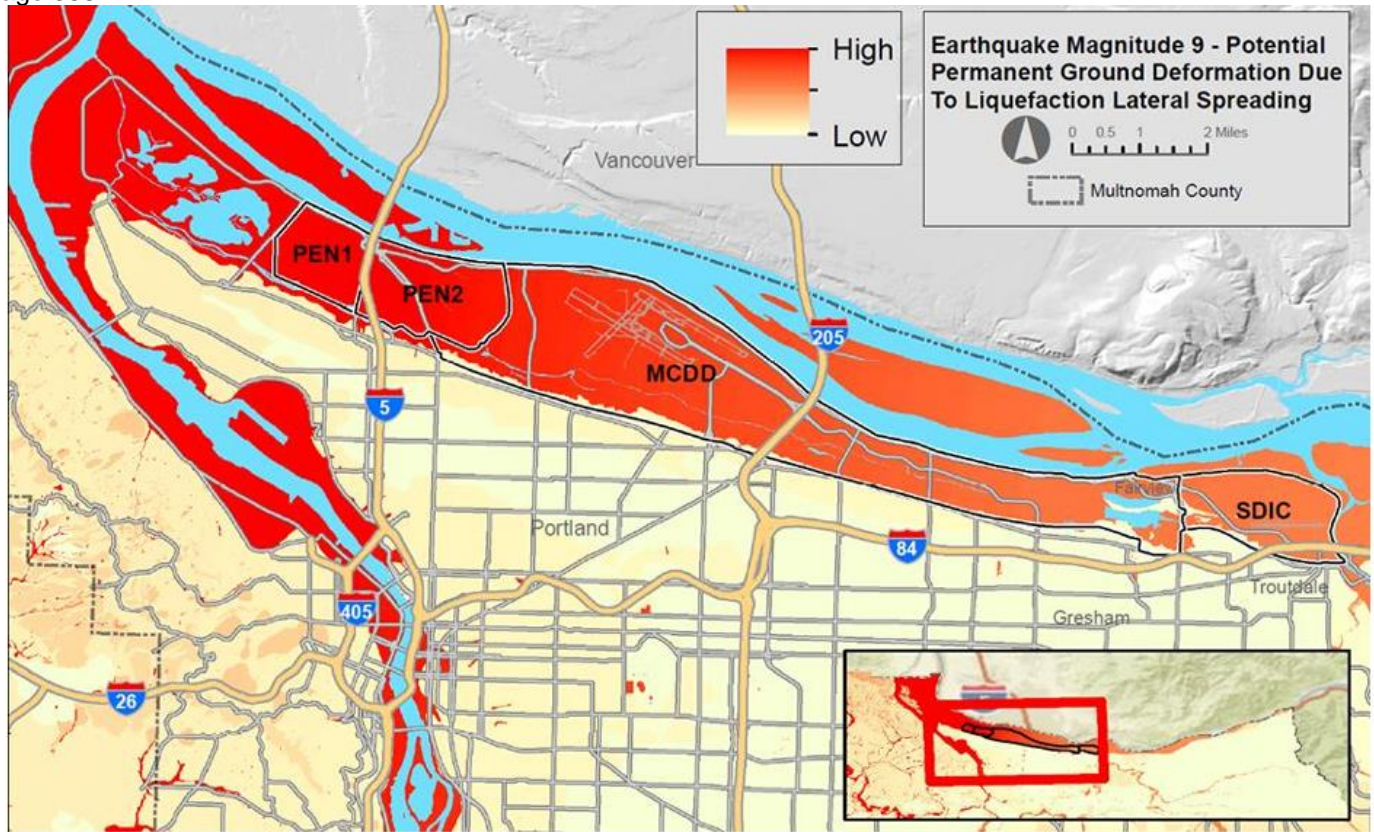


Figure 184 - Map of potential impacts in the Districts from a magnitude 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

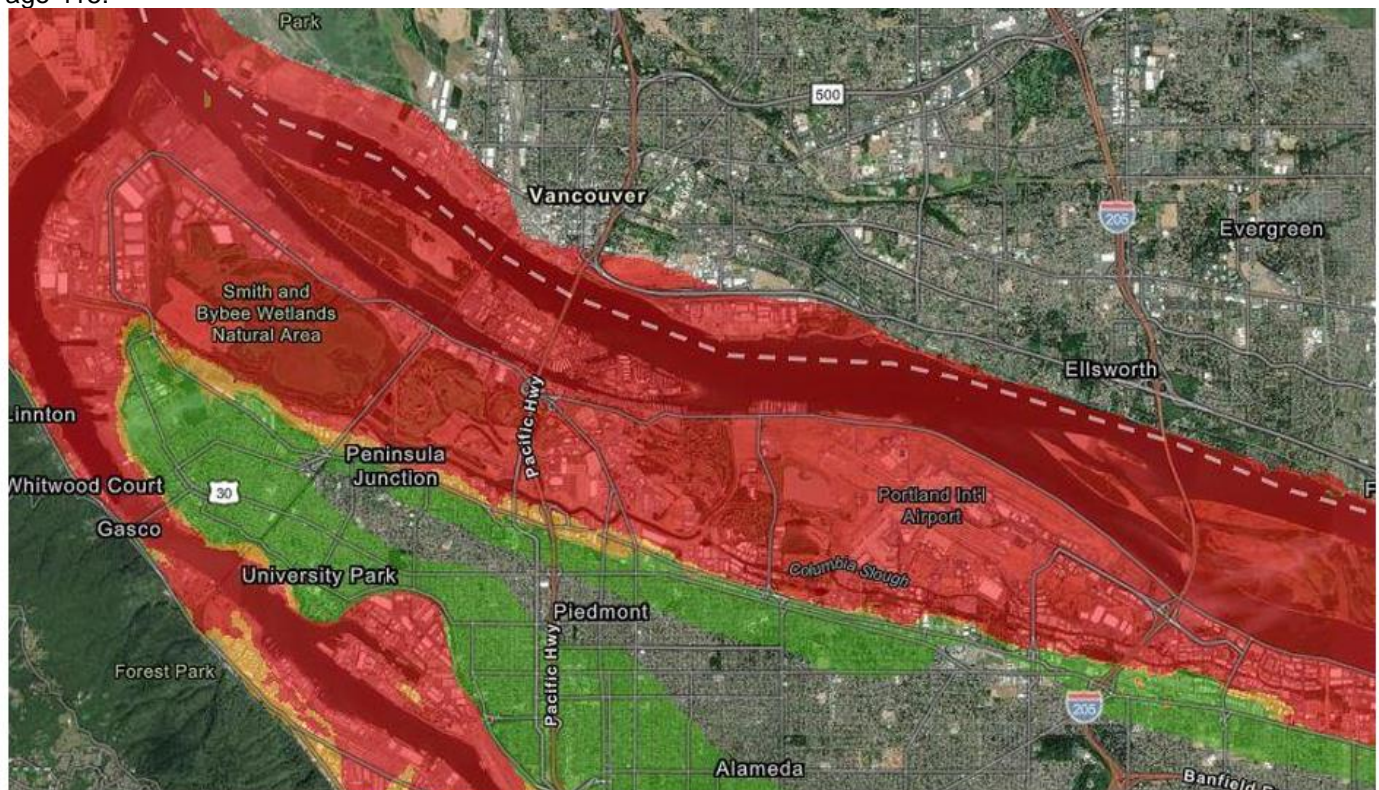


Figure 196 - Map showing soil **liquefaction** risk at the Port of Portland's critical community assets. Areas in red, which include the Portland International Airport and Terminal 6, have high risk of soil **liquefaction**. Map from DOGAMI

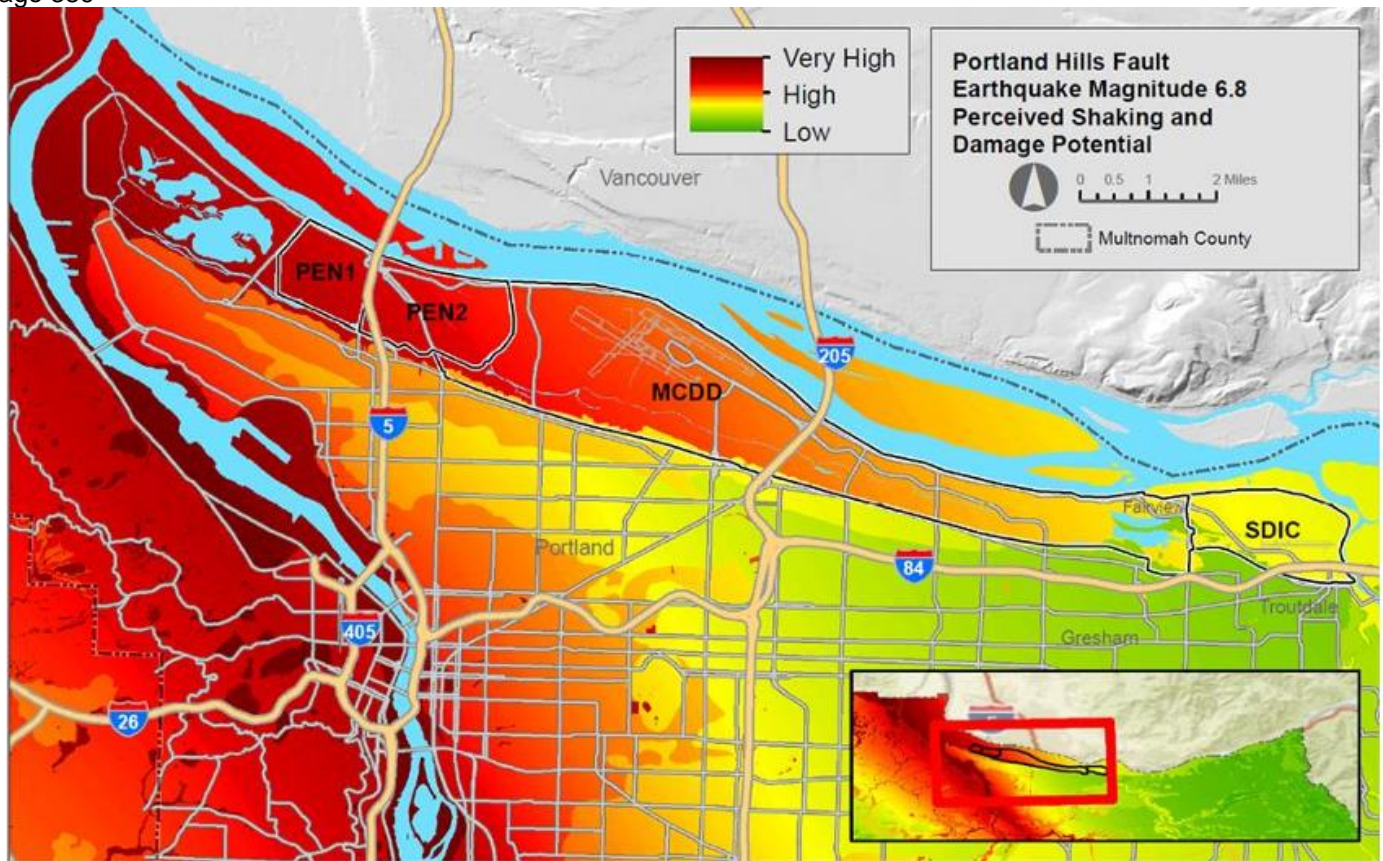


Figure 185 - Map of potential impacts in the Districts from a magnitude 6.8 Portland Hills Fault earthquake.