

Testimony of Sandra McDonough
President and CEO
Portland Business Alliance
House Committee, Transportation & Economic Development
HB 4113
February 12, 2014

Good afternoon Chair Read, members of the committee. I am Sandra McDonough, President and CEO of the Portland Business Alliance. The Alliance represents more than 1,800 employers in the greater Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area.

I want to leave you with this simple message: this project is critical to Oregon business. Our state is one of the most trade-dependent in the country, and we are lucky to have a strong manufacturing sector producing jobs with family-wage incomes. Freight is our lifeblood, and the I-5 replacement project is the main pivot point for Oregon's entire freight network. If our manufacturers can't get their products to our ports and out to the marketplace in an efficient, predictable and cost-effective manner, we will lose those great jobs and our working families will suffer.

When the Alliance and the Port of Portland released our ground-breaking statewide Cost of Congestion report a few years back, we interviewed businesses from Anderson Hay in Aurora to Gary Smith Trucking in Baker City to Monrovia Nursery in Dayton to Powell's Books in downtown Portland. Over and over we heard how freight congestion in Portland forced them to change shifts or shipping schedules, pay drivers to sit in traffic, or find alternate – and frequently more costly – ways get their products to market. The I-5 bridge is the state's biggest freight facility, and congestion there is sand in the gears not just of Portland's economy, but of the entire state's economy.

We know the bridge is unsafe, susceptible to earthquake, unable to accommodate light rail and every time it opens slows the flow of commerce in the region. And, as we saw just last week, as it ages it is more and more prone to mechanical failures that are harder and harder to fix due to the fact that the replacement parts are no longer manufactured.

We recognize that neither the final proposal nor the process that got us here have been perfect. We also recognize that a project of this size is never going to be entirely free of risk. But the reality is, if a perfect project with zero risk is our standard for moving forward, than we will never build a replacement for this failing bridge.

As business people, we know that in the real world we can not be paralyzed by "what ifs". Instead, we have to measure the risks of action against the risks of inaction. It's clear to us after nearly a decade of study that the existing bridge must be replaced and this is our best

and probably only opportunity to achieve that. If this effort is somehow defeated, we will wake up the next morning with the same failing bridge in dire need of replacement – but we will have a billion fewer dollars to build it.

The Alliance appreciates your leadership on this important issue, and we are happy to add our support for this critical endeavor. We urge you to approve legislation allowing the project to move forward. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

