



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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DATE: March 22, 2017

TO: House Committee on Transportation Policy

FROM: Paul Mather, Administrator
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SUBJECT: House Bill 2749

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2749 directs the Port of Hood River, in collaboration with the Oregon Department of Transportation, to study the feasibility of replacing the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge. The study must evaluate: environmental impacts; engineering requirements and design and construction options; costs and financing options and project delivery methods and schedules. The bill allocates \$5 million in lottery bonds and requires ODOT to reimburse the Port of Hood River for study expenses prior to lottery bonds being available. The bill directs the study to be completed by December 31, 2018.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation of environmental impacts called for in House Bill 2749 to study the feasibility of replacing the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge would likely be summarized in a Federal Highway Administration National Environmental Policy Act Environmental Impact Statement. Although the bridge is owned by the Port of Hood River, the bill directs the Port of Hood River and ODOT to collaborate to complete the work. In ODOT's experience, it is likely that the work will exceed both the timeframe and cost identified in the bill.

While the bill calls for the use of state lottery bond revenue for the feasibility study, in order to be eligible for any federal construction dollars, the Federal Highway Administration NEPA process must be completed. Because ODOT serves as that pass-through agency for federal construction dollars, ODOT must have a role in the development of the EIS. However, since this is a Port-owned bridge, ODOT would prefer to keep its role in the study to the minimum required by the FHWA.

To date, however, the Federal Highway Administration has indicated that all toll revenue collected must be dedicated to maintaining or improving the bridge or for other public highway purposes. FHWA will not participate in providing federal funds to invest in the bridge until a Federal-aid agreement is executed to clearly delineate acceptable uses of future toll revenue.

The bill requires that ODOT reimburse the Port of Hood River for expenses incurred prior to the issuance of the lottery bonds, and the bill does not indicate who is responsible for costs beyond the \$5 million in lottery bond revenue, should costs of the work exceed estimates.

ODOT has discussed its concerns with the proponents of the bill. We would suggest amending the bill to better delineate responsibilities for the study between the Port of Hood River and to clarify how any costs that exceed the \$5 million in the bill will be covered. We will collaborate with the proponents on language to address these issues.

SUMMARY

HB 2749 requires the Port of Hood River and ODOT to complete a study on the replacement of the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge—a bridge owned by the Port of Hood River, and not state-owned. ODOT will work with the proponents of the bill to develop amendments to address the agency's concerns.