

Testimony to the Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee
aka Joint Interim Committee on the Interstate 5 Bridge
C/O Oregon State Capitol
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Dear Joint Committee Members:

Thank you for your time reading this testimony. This is my first written testimony to such a committee. These are my opinions and they are not reflective of any other group. I've never testified like this before. I verbally gave testimony during the meeting on 10/25/2019 but didn't have time to finish. I said that I would submit more in writing and this is it. I have thought about these ideas for years and have talked to a lot of people about them. I hope to contribute to positive dialogue about the future of our region.

Background:

My wife and I have lived in the Portland area for a very long time. The two of us have commuted in and out of the Portland area in all kinds of traffic and weather from as far away as the Gorge and Vancouver. I've taken the bus and Portland's light rail. We currently live in Lewis County as we prepare for retirement. We still relate to the Vancouver/Portland area often attending our church in Vancouver, shopping, and seeing our family and friends in the area. Besides the 12 years we lived in the Seattle area, we have lived in Portland, Cascade Locks, Vancouver, and Camas. We have contributed to the region in our occupations. My wife is a hospital RN who also volunteered to work on an ambulance crew. I served a pastor, chaplain, city councilor, and crisis responder. I also worked at PDX for the Department of Homeland Security and for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We have seen the traffic problems in Portland through the years. Improvements to I-84 and the construction of I-205 helped a lot in the early years but the downtown and Rose Quarter chokepoints limited the success of those improvements. Light rail was supposed to help but it has turned out to be a hugely expensive project that has done little to alleviate the reality of the traffic nightmare that Portland is known for. In fact, I believe it contributes to the traffic congestion because of how it shares surface streets with automobiles. Ridership is not where city leaders had hoped and its revenue is not meeting expenses.

A recent PEMCO study found that just under 95% of those polled prefer to drive their automobiles in the area than to take public transportation. I agree. Public transportation is slow. I didn't like taking light rail when I had to commute daily to downtown Portland to work but I did until I had had enough of it.

I am not against public forms of transportation. When I worked in Washington, DC for a year and a half I found the Metro to be a great system but it was just as expensive as driving a car! The public could use more and better options in the Portland area. "Forcing people out of their cars" is not an option.

From my perspective, I see most of the regional problems of congestion as being mostly the result of Portland's priorities. In trying to address the issue; I refer often to Portland but where Vancouver has concerns, they should be addressed as well.

Slugging:

Definition: Slugging, also known as casual carpooling, is the practice of forming ad hoc, informal carpools for purposes of commuting, essentially a variation of ride-share commuting and hitchhiking.

Slugging was an option in the DC area and was not the brain-child of government. An idea by commuters led to become a good option for those who opted for it. You can read more about Slugging here:

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90700559>

http://www.slug-lines.com/Slugging/About_slugging.asp

http://www.slug-lines.com/Slugging/About_slugging.asp

<https://www.commuterpage.com/ways-to-get-around/carpooling-vanpooling/>

Slugging is an option that I believe can help Portland's traffic nightmare but of course will not solve all of it. It's low-cost and it can help. For this to work, vacant properties could be utilized to give commuters free parking, then those drivers can get riders from those lots. Those drivers adding two more passengers to their cars can get the free use of HOV lanes which in the DC area are HOV-3. The driver and the two additional passengers get to ride to work in a stress-free commute and they have reduced traffic by two cars for each one on the road! Please look into this option as one of a number of measures that can be incorporated to help ease congestion.

Some may express concerns about female safety but it was never a problem in the DC area. The rules for slugging etiquette helped ensure safety for all.

HOV:

At least one lane on any bridge in the region (especially the new bridge) should be HOV in each direction for use by busses and vehicles of high occupancy (perhaps HOV-3 to allow for slugging.) In fact, I would like to propose that at least one HOV lane in each direction be installed on I-5 and I-205 from Salem to Ridgefield. Right now, an HOV lane exists in NE Portland along I-5 and goes for just a short distance. It does nothing to help with congestion. Think of the incentive people would have to avoid traffic by buddying up in order to use the HOV lanes that actually took you somewhere.

The New I-5 Bridge:

Vancouver residents do not want light rail. Perhaps that will change in the future but for now, we don't want it. Light rail and tolls were the main reasons Vancouver residents fought the Columbia River Crossing (CRC). I would gladly support a new crossing without these two. But, perhaps a compromise here is in order. Build the new bridge with room to add some form of rail

system that could be added in the future should the culture change. We need more through-put now. We need more automobile lanes. Not the same number of lanes in each direction like was proposed previously. 6 or more lanes in each direction would be a good starting number.

Seattle has had good results with reversible express lanes. This would be a good idea to add to the new bridge and this could provide space for future light rail without the initial upfront costs of adding it now.

Repurposing the Old Bridge:

Leaving the old bridge in place for local traffic sounds like a “green” idea. Plus, it does have a historic charm that would be nice to maintain if there can be a useful purpose for it and if it can be saved in a cost-effective manner.

Third Bridge:

Before we even think of changing out the current I-5 bridge (which we can all agree needs to be dealt with) we need to first build a 3rd bridge. I favor a West side bridge in part because Portland had plans for a 3rd corridor that was proposed previously. Then, after that 3rd bridge has been built, replace the I-5 bridge. If a West side bridge can't be accomplished, then perhaps an East side bridge should be considered.

On a practical note: wouldn't it make more sense to have the 3rd bridge up and operating before taking the I-5 bridge off-line to replace it? You are asking a lot of I-205 to handle the traffic of both bridges! Even if I-5 continued to be used during construction, wouldn't it be easier to build a replacement bridge without having to work around flowing traffic.

If the need for tolling is absolute, then why not have the two states build that 3rd bridge as part of a bi-state highway system and they could toll it leaving I-5 and I-205 free of tolls. Then commuters and travelers could have a choice to pay the toll to avoid congestion or take the already free freeways understanding that they may be congested. Dallas Texas does this and I think it's more fair and reasonable.

Tunnel:

I like the idea of a tunnel as was mentioned during the first meeting of this committee.

Tolls:

I am very unhappy with Oregon's unilateral tolling they are implementing on the two freeways. While they may legally be able to, it's wrong. It hurts the poor and lower and middle-class income citizens. The interstate freeway system should not be tolled because they were supposed to be for the American people; a resource for all of us. I do not believe any interstate freeway should be tolled but I know they are in some places but I disagree with them. States, on the other hand, could offer toll freeways as a means to keep traffic moving. I'd gladly pay those tolls if I needed to get somewhere quickly if the interstates were backed up.

I see Oregon's unilateral toll as yet another way to get more money from Washington residents who already pay the ungodly 9% Oregon income tax who get little in return. It wouldn't be so bad if Washington residents who pay Oregon income tax get in-state benefits like Oregonians do such as in-state tuition rates, etc.

Conclusion:

Again, thank you for reading this testimony. I do not take this issue lightly and I trust that I have contributed to the discussion. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of this in more detail, please let me know.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank L. Corbin".

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