

Bi-State Legislative Committee

Comment by Dave Rowe March 23, 2022

The State of Washington is prepared to fund one billion dollars to the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program. The IBR design with 12 traffic lanes may cost the taxpayers more than four billion dollars to build. And requiring tolls to pay back the cost. Yet the design does little to lessen climate change objectives. More autos will be required to travel around Portland and Clark County. A tall, large concrete bridge will create a huge urban heat island over the top of Vancouver and Hayden Island. The expensive IBR tall bridge design is planned to eliminate the stop light used for the lift span on I-5. Yet just modifying the BNSF railroad bridge would reduce the I-5 lifts by 90 percent. An eight-lane draw bridge would be one-fourth the cost of the IBR preferred alternative. The world class Vancouver waterfront view of Mt. Hood would be changed forever if a mega-bridge is built. Bicycles and wheelchairs will find it very hard to climb to the elevation of the IBR designed ramp. Wheel chairs may have brake problems on the descent leading to tragic results.

The Common Sense Alternative version 2 (CSA II) designed by Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) addresses all the original design goals stated for the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program. (Attached is the CSA II proposal). IBR Program rejected the CSA II because the desire was to remove the stop light on I-5. Modifying the BNSF railroad bridge would eliminate 90% of I-5 bridge lifts. The CSA II design allows local traffic and climate reducing transit to utilize the existing bridge. Then CSA II requires building a smaller eight lane less costly interstate highway bridge for about one billion dollars. Which is one fourth the cost of the IBR design and as a result tolling may not be required. The cost to demolish the current bridge is estimated to be over one hundred million dollars. It has been stated that there is a 25% chance a seismic event will damage the current I-5 Bridge in 50 years. Which also means there is a 75% chance the current I-5 bridge will survive another 50 years. The CSA II proposal repurposes the I-5 bridge for local traffic, bicycles, pedestrian, and transit use. The CSA II design also has a draw span to allow tall barges to travel up the river. The IBR bridge design stops tall ships from the upper Columbia River. Large structures cannot be manufactured at Thompson Metal Fab if the IBR bridge is built. CSA II advocates moving the BNSF Railroad bridge opening to eliminate 90% of the bridge lifts on I-5.

Also, Commuter/Regional Rail could be another climate saving alternative to freeway congestion on I-5. Regional Rail corridors are already established with a Clark County owned rail line from Battle Ground to Vancouver. Private Rail corridors come from Ridgefield-LaCenter and Camas- Washougal to Portland. (Attached are maps of these corridors). Electric Rail technology is proven to reduce climate change tremendously. The I-5 congestion would be reduced at the Rose Quarter and the Columbia River Bridge with a Regional Rail bypass. A public/private rail system is possible to reduce fossil fuel dependency.