

Objections to the Interstate Bridge Replacement Project Plan

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- 1) In the IBR presentation, the bus rapid transit (BRT) option has its own lane, thus artificially making BRT almost as expensive as light rail. However, BRT does not need its own lane. BRT in Vancouver runs on city streets (e.g. 4th Plain and soon Mill Plain), sharing a lane with regular traffic. Removing light rail and putting BRT or express buses on regular bridge lanes could save close to \$1 billion.
- 2) The express bus service to Portland has existed for years, is cheap, and efficient. A few years ago I commuted daily to downtown Portland via the express bus. It was fast, comfortable, reliable, and affordable. It is also flexible, so routes can be modified as needed, unlike light rail. In the future, if demand warrants BRT could be added in lanes shared with regular traffic or bus-on-shoulder.
- 3) In the IBR plan presentations, constant reference is made to its “modeling”, in which transit ridership is projected to increase as much as 10x from recent levels. However, no proof has been given. Certain assumptions were made to put into the models, but these assumptions are not explained or verified. We are just expected to believe the models. However, it is worth noting (see point #6 below) that previous predictions for light rail in Portland have been miserably wrong.
- 4) What historical traffic data are used in the IBR model? In the PowerPoint presentation (slide 11), it says IBR is using 2019 data as a baseline year, and alludes to the need to “rely on historical trends and current behavior”, but they do not specify the range of this data. What years are they using, and what have been the historical trends in both traffic and transit ridership? Joe Cortright recently claimed that “Traffic Projections for the I-5 Bridge are based on 15 year old data” https://cityobservatory.org/i5br_outdated_projections/.
- 5) In 2020 and 2021 we have experienced one of the biggest societal upheavals of the last 100 years. Many people are still working from home. Companies are closing or reducing office space. How has this been incorporated into the IBR models? To put it into perspective, how many of the people attending this meeting crossed the Columbia River to do so? Likely none... 10 years ago, all of the CRC meetings were in-person. Remote meetings were not common. Society and technology have changed. The need to commute has been reduced, possibly permanently. This needs to be included in the IBR modeling.

- 6) Predictions in Portland for light rail frequency of service, travel times, and ridership have been consistently and significantly wrong, and always on the overly-optimistic side. In September of 2019 Cascade Policy center checked the predictions: “TriMet’s MAX Yellow Line first opened 15 years ago in May 2004. The Yellow Line’s Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) made a myriad of predictions for the year 2020, ... Looking back after fifteen years, we find that key promises made in the FEIS were never kept...” Frequency of service is ½ to 2/3 of promised. Travel times are ~45% longer. Ridership is ~27% lower.
<https://cascadepolicy.org/transportation/the-max-yellow-line-a-look-back-after-15-years/>.
- 7) Similar rosy predictions and huge underperformance while experiencing vast cost overruns are typical of other light rail projects, such as Sound Transit in the Seattle area. This has been detailed for years by the Washington Policy Center:
<https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/state-auditor-confirms-sound-transit-light-rail-ridership-forecasts-are-unrealistic>
<https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/sound-transit-officials-report-ridership-figures-down-70-from-original-plan>
<https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/its-time-for-sound-transit-to-rethink-its-rail-expansion>
- 8) The “immersed tunnel” concept discussed by civil engineer Bob Ortblad deserves serious consideration. The enormous size of the IBR design is a detriment, and it would completely dominate downtown Vancouver flying high overhead. A tunnel would have minimal profile, make connections to Highway 14 and downtown simpler, and solve the problem of river traffic. Furthermore, it would have far less environmental impact, since it would use much less concrete (a major source of CO₂ emissions), and could be built more quickly, with potentially less disruption of salmon migration. Immersed tunnels have been around for decades with projects in the US, Europe, and Asia. Examples include the BART rail tunnel in San Francisco Bay, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel, as well as tunnels in Hong Kong, Tokyo, Rotterdam, Baltimore, Virginia, and South Korea.