

## Public Input on proposed I-5 Bridge Replacement, transit choice and tolls

Margaret Tweet, Clark County resident who has observed and offered input since 2010.

The Following news articles include information that is hard to find in IBR presentations and should be considered. I have added comments with a \*\*

In 2009, some Clark County Officials suggested a low toll rate of about \$1 to cross the I-5 and I-205 Bridges.

“The new scenarios varied rates based on time of travel, considered tolling the Interstate 205 bridge, and posed a fixed rate of \$1.65.

**The various tolling scenarios range in price from \$1 to \$6, generating between \$1.3 billion and \$2 billion for construction.”**

<https://tdn.com/news/officials-consider-toll-scenerios-for-i-5-bridge-over-columbia-river/>

### April 21, 2021 EMERGENCY TOLL RATE HIKE IN WA

#### Toll increase likely for State Route 520 Bridge due to decline in revenue

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Drivers could see a sharp toll rate increase for State Route 520 Bridge by this summer as the state works to mitigate reduced revenues that began with the [coronavirus pandemic](#).

The Washington State Transportation Commission began discussing new toll rates, which could include **a 120-day emergency rate, followed by a permanent rate**. To meet upcoming financial and legal obligations, **toll rates could increase an estimated 25-35%**.

Due to revenue projections and absent subsidies, a toll rate increase will be required for the state to meet its financial and legal obligations, according to information presented to the Transportation Commission on April 20. The Transportation Commission works with the Washington State Department of Transportation and the public to establish toll rates for all highways and bridges in the state...

Toll rates could be set by June 15 and take effect by July 1. Full story at link

[Toll rates on WA SR 520 Bridge](#) between Seattle and the east side fluctuate throughout the day, with the highest tolls during peak commute times on weekdays.

#### **\*\*520 Bridge Toll Rates as of April 21, 2022**

	<u>One Way</u>	<u>Roundtrip</u>
<b>Toll for a car 7 a.m. to 9 a.m.</b>	\$6.30,	\$12.60
-\$2 w/ a transponder that tracks movements	\$4.30	\$ 8.60
<b>30% increase on car transponder rate</b>	<b>\$5.60</b>	<b>\$11.10</b>
(50 weeks a year, 5 days a week, \$11.10 per day)	<b>\$ 2,775 annual tolls</b>	

#### **Multi-axle toll rates**

Vehicles with more than two axles will pay a [higher pro-rated toll rate](#).

Peak time **11 AM-6 PM tolls** for a **6-axle** vehicle- **\$13.95 one-way, \$27.90 roundtrip**

**Rates for 18 wheel freight truck not shown, Toll rates are expected to increase over time**

## Transit gets much attention as details on IBR about to be released

“During an April 7 meeting of the Executive Steering Group (ESG), Johnson said demand for transit on the I-5 corridor would [increase 10-fold](#), to 26,000 to 33,000 boardings a day. His team had previously shared that 3,200 people used transit over the Columbia River daily. That was **less than 2 percent of the people crossing the river**.

“C-TRAN Recent analysis on transit costs showed C-TRAN’s operating costs for its BRT system are **34 percent cheaper than the operating costs (per boarding rider) for the MAX light rail**. TriMet’s MAX costs are \$8.24 versus C-TRAN’s \$5.44 BRT cost per boarding passenger.”

**See also [Is the IBR setting up another transit failure?](#)**“C-TRAN offers the only transit service across the Columbia River, as there hasn’t been enough demand for TriMet to offer service as well. C-TRAN’s ridership to Portland peaked in 2016 and has been in decline ever since.

Average [weekday ridership](#) on C-TRAN express bus routes to Portland:

2016 – 3,040

2017 – 2,874

2018 – 2,844

2019 – 2,892

2020 – 971

C-TRAN experienced a **61 percent drop in passenger boardings** on the express bus system over the past two years.

**The flexibility of BRT (or express bus) to serve different communities far exceeds the ability of light rail, which is limited by where you put the tracks down...**

Transportation architect Kevin Peterson has pointed out that one vehicle lane can handle about 1,800 vehicles an hour. If that’s the case, it would seem all those BRT double-articulated buses could easily travel in a vehicle lane, alongside cars and trucks and freight. They would only occupy at most 10 percent of the vehicle capacity one lane provides.

**Why not allow other vehicles to use that lane when buses are not present?”**

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**\*\*In 2012, Proposition 1, CTRAN a 0.1 percent sales tax increase to pay to extend Portland light rail into Clark County, rejected in every city in Clark County.**

**2013, a county-wide advisory vote on light rail was held. Over 68 percent of voters agreed that voters should be allowed to vote before any taxpayer funds are spent to bring light rail into Clark County.**

Today, CTRAN buses and vans on the 3 thru lanes on the I-5 bridge share the road with other traffic like freight, commuters, commercial vehicles. Buses are flexible in route and vehicle size ( 40 ft bus ,60 ft articulated bus, or smaller bus/van).

What data and assumptions are being used in the secret models to predict an unrealistic 10-fold increase in the use of public transit across I-5? It appears to be “strategic misrepresentation”.

Old CRC data estimated ~ \$ 850 Million for gold plated light rail, to serve less than 2% of the trips across the bridge. What are the new estimates?

**Roads for all traffic, including affordable buses, not. gold plated light rail for the 2%**

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## ‘Solution’ for Interstate Bridge replacement, including transit option, to be revealed April 21

Jake Fey, (Democrat, 21st District) spoke about significant “vendor performance problems” with the Washington tolling system. That caused the legislature to demand an audit. It is a big red flag for him.

“It did not discuss the many issues and delays and vendor performance problems that have occurred . . . on every occasion of setting up the tolling facilities in the state of Washington,” Fey said. “The delays and implementing this in Washington have been very problematic. There have been contract issues where the state ran out of remedies with the vendor.”

much of the projections on transit ridership came from the Metro and RTC modeling programs, “where we think the growth will occur.”

Economist Joe Cortright criticized the IBR team for not delivering on Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s promise to conduct traffic projection studies before making recommendations. “You’re using 15-year-old data,” he told the legislators.

Cortright also criticized the lack of a real financial plan. He noted what they have was based on the failed Columbia River Crossing project, and with a \$5 billion price tag, it has a multi billion hole in the budget.

Cortright called for an investment grade analysis on tolling. He noted the previous effort caused the toll price to be doubled, which in turn caused a significant drop in demand to use the bridge.

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# IBR adds new transit options for consideration to new bridge over Columbia River

The last time traffic demand studies were completed was in 2005 and 2008 during the early part of the failed Columbia River Crossing (CRC) process. The IBR team won't be conducting new traffic projection studies until after it has made a revised Locally Preferred Alternative recommendation.

With just 2 percent of I-5 crossings being transit riders, it makes sense to focus on costs when considering options for transit on a replacement bridge.

TriMet has spent \$200 million to \$400 million per mile to create new light rail lines. Whereas The Vine BRT is six miles long, spending \$50 million to build. The new Mill Plain BRT line will be about 10 miles long, costing \$50 million as well. That is \$5 million to \$8 million per mile.

C-TRAN officials informed the Federal Transit Administration that The Vine bus rapid transit system would lower operating costs per passenger by 21 percent. Their 2016 filing stated \$3.68 per passenger versus \$4.66 to continue normal bus service. Both compare favorably with MAX light rail costs of \$8.24 per boarding rider in 2020.

Why is "high capacity" transit needed, when there has been such severe declines in transit ridership, even before the pandemic?

C-TRAN had lost over 22 percent of their ridership before the pandemic. TriMet had lost nearly 13 percent.

Since people want to save time, either on transit or while driving, the time-saving is clear. C-TRAN delivers passengers to their downtown destinations twice as fast as light rail. It also does it cheaper.

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Following the COVID-19 pandemic, will people continue to work from home? Will people continue to avoid riding transit? Is there a need for any form of high capacity transit on a replacement Interstate Bridge?

"Given the reality of the lack of demand for transit and the continually declining ridership of C-TRAN, we should be using the precious transportation funds we have on meeting the need of our commuters who drive their vehicles to work," said Kraft. "That means we should be investing this money into building additional road lanes across the Columbia River into Portland, not wasting those dollars on transit which very few people use. It's vital that we build a third bridge now to address our commuters' need for more capacity and our region's future growth."

<https://www.clarkcountytoday.com/news/what-is-the-need-for-transit-on-a-replacement-interstate-bridge/>

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## President Joe Biden visit to tout federal funding for Interstate Bridge Replacement

Governors Jay Inslee and Kate Brown restarted discussions about replacing the Interstate Bridge in November 2019 [signing a Memorandum of Intent](#). The governors promised to be data driven.

“I think what else is key is that we’re going to be doing a traffic analysis ahead of time,” noted Brown, “to help us determine what’s the best solution for the I-5 Bridge Replacement Project.”

Many citizens have lamented the fact that IBR Administrator Greg Johnson and his team have not delivered on those promises. “The IBR has yet to release new traffic projections – the latest are from the CRC, based on 2005 data,” said economist Joe Cortright.

“That means they’re flying blind,” he said. “Accurate traffic projections are essential for correctly sizing the project, assessing alternatives, understanding environmental consequences and minimizing financial risks. Relying on outdated projections is professional malpractice.”

In November 2020, the IBR team shared that “if” the previous Columbia River Crossing (CRC) were built, the cost would run from [\\$3.2 billion to \\$4.8 billion](#). Both state’s legislators were told they would have to come up with at least \$1 billion, and the project would need tolling.

The IBR team has already decided there will only be three through lanes for traffic; it is the number of “auxiliary lanes” that remain to be revealed.

<https://www.clarkcountytoday.com/news/president-joe-biden-visit-to-tout-federal-funding-for-interstate-bridge-replacement/>

\*\*What is the true cost of the light rail option?

No Tolls and buses are a better choice to serve more people for less taxpayer \$.

We need Truth in Bonding, where the cost of the interest must be publicly disclosed.

Out of every \$1 spent on the proposed toll, how much of it goes to collecting the toll?

Please, eliminate costly tolls that residents can’t afford.