Goldfinch Consulting

July 21st, 2022

Bi-State Legislative Committee on the Interstate Bridge

Interstate Bridge Replacement Program

Dear Members of the IBR Executive Steering Group:

My name is Stephen Smelley, and I am the founder and CEO of Goldfinch Consulting, as well as the current Board Chair of the Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce and a current Board Member and Past President of the Independent Agents and Brokers of Oregon. My business for over three decades has focused on risk and risk mitigation. My volunteer work as well as my business allows me to meet with and work with many employers of all size businesses which help contribute to our region's vibrant economy. Over the past 30+ years, I have lived in the Portland metro area and managed over 30 offices in OR, WA, ID, and MT. I have watched our challenges with the I-5 bridge grow and I applaud you all for the work you are doing to solve those challenges.

It is not news to you that this heavily used bridge faces both safety and congestion issues on daily basis. Our current bridge has been operational for over a century and would collapse by an earthquake of decent magnitude. As a risk mitigation professional, that is a concern to me for all commuters who use this bridge with any frequency. For that reason alone, it is important that we move forward to construct a new bridge that can be in service for another century.

However, if we are going to spend over $4 billion to build a new bridge, we should also address a few other concerns so that the end solution isn't outdated by the time it is built. Based on my research and observation (and I am sure that you've all done more), I believe that our community deserves serious consideration of the following:

- We MUST build multi-modal options to increase accessibility, safety and preference for citizens and short distance commuters to be able to utilize improved bicycle, pedestrian, and mass transit options. The more recent local growth of the Vancouver waterfront and the increased housing and businesses in the surrounding area need to be accessible with or without a private vehicle.
- Transit studies in both Oregon and Washington have projected increases in total daily trips well into the lifespan of the new bridge yet to be built and there is agreement that most of that traffic will be via vehicles and freight.
- Under its current design constraints there are 7-10 hours of congestion that we experience every day by people trying to cross the Columbia river on this freeway.
- The existing bridge serves 140,000 vehicles daily and by 2040, that number could be as high 175,000 vehicle trips. Those vehicles may be electric vehicles, solar vehicles, gas (natural or petroleum powered) vehicles, cars and/or trucks but despite whatever best in class mass transit or light rail or pedestrian or bicycle path we build, this bridge is one of the top 30 bottlenecks in the US and is a major arterial for not only local commuter traffic but also the transportation of international goods and services from Mexico to Canada.
- Mass transit ridership to date has declined significantly as reported by both C-TRAN and TriMet and while those numbers should and WILL likely increase as the population increases and we build and maintain mass transit with safety and security in mind for the riders, all studies I have seen suggest

that vehicle and freight traffic over the I-5 bridge will exceed mass transit and all other forms of travel by a significant margin for decades to come.

- ➡ The effects of traffic congestion are felt in numerous ways, as it reduces free time for commuters, increases financial costs associated with the delayed delivery of goods, and an increase in GHG emissions from idling vehicles.
- ➡ Failure to address the GHG emissions from idling vehicles is NOT an option for the health and safety of the commuters, the local citizens who live in the area, the disproportionately impacted communities, or the long-term health of our planet. Those vehicles will be there however unless they can travel more safely and freely at decongested speeds.
- ➡ We MUST address multi-modal options AND increase capacity by increasing the number of lanes across this bridge. **Auxiliary lanes are a help in the surrounding area for safety but they don't solve the entire problem we are already facing.**

In May 2022, the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) team released new details on the status of the I-5 bridge when they unveiled the plans for the new Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The LPA detailed an I-5 bridge that would maintain the current 6 lanes with an additional auxiliary lane in each direction, an interchange on Hayden Island, and light rail expansion.

So far, the solution offered by the IBR appears to be a bridge with improved bicycle, pedestrian, and transit options. While this enhanced multi-modal approach is important and gives people more options, this will only provide slight relief to our congestion woes. These options are good for those who are taking short commutes from state to state but will not help commuters traveling beyond downtown Portland or Vancouver, or the freight trucks caring vital and time sensitive goods across the region.

As we move forward with the design of the bridge replacement, **I urge you to add capacity by increasing the number of lanes in both directions.** This will reduce the amount of congestion, which will decrease vehicle idling leading to less GHG emissions, gives critical free time back to our employees, and ensures freight can reach its intended destination on time and reduce this disparate impact on communities already having to suffer from the noise and other pollution caused by bottlenecked traffic.

Thank you for considering this critically important request.

Sincerely,

Stephen Smelley

Founder and CEO of Goldfinch Consulting

Board Chair of the Beaverton Area Chamber of Commerce and Board Member and Past President, IIABO