

HB 4089 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Joint Committee On Transportation

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 2/3

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs Department of Transportation to study the establishment of a bi-state Hood Riber Bridge Commission, and to report findings to the Legislative Assembly by September 15, 2023. Sunsets January 2, 2024.

[note – this is placeholder language – see “Effect of Amendment” section below]

[NOTE – measure has subsequent referral to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means]

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Replaces original measure. Provides framework for local governments to enter into commission formation agreement once both Oregon and Washington have enacted enabling legislation. Specifies commission must be approved and executed by owner of an existing interstate bridge and by the governing bodies of both counties where bridge is situated. Indicates that formation agreement must specify name of commission, effective date, place of business and purpose, composition and appointment process for board members, commissioner terms of office and leadership, requirements for formal board action, and any other provisions adopted by local government. States that purposes of commission include design, engineering, finance, and construction of replacement bridge; serve as governance structure for bridge; oversee operation and maintenance of bridge; and other duties as conferred by law. Clarifies that directors shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for expenses. Specifies that board is to elect co-chairs, one each from Oregon and Washington. Grants board exclusive right to exercise powers outlined in measure. Outlines powers of commission. Directs board to appoint or retain executive director and legal counsel, and authorizes board to employ engineering, and other support personnel, either directly or as agents. Requires commission to provide information, upon request, to states or local governments. Outlines budget requirements. Authorizes commission to acquire or resume control of real property, franchises, easements, or other property interests. Grants commission power of eminent domain. Gives commission exclusive power to impose, fix, and adjust the rate of tolls for using the bridge. Authorizes agreements necessary to enforce payment of tolls, including use of RFID tags and photographs. Specifies requirements related to bridge design and construction, including financing and impact mitigation. Outlines requirements for bridge operation.

BACKGROUND:

The Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge is a bi-state span connecting the communities of White Salmon and Bingen in Washington to Hood River in Oregon. Originally constructed in 1924, the bridge was essentially rebuilt in 1938, following construction of the Bonneville Dam, which raised water levels significantly. The bridge features a lift span to accommodate larger marine traffic in the river channel, as its vertical clearance is typically 57 feet, compared to 148 feet with the lift span raised. The bridge includes one narrow lane of travel in each direction (lanes are slightly less than 9.5 feet wide), is currently weight-limited (no vehicles exceeding 48,000 pounds), and has a vehicle height restriction of 14 feet, seven inches. Total length of the bridge is 4,418 feet.

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The current span is also one of only two toll facilities in the state of Oregon, the other being the Bridge of the Gods near Cascade Locks, about 20 miles west. The Hood River Bridge assesses a toll of \$2 on passenger vehicles, \$6 for commercial vehicles with dual axles, \$3 per axle for larger commercial vehicles, and \$0.75 for motorcycles. Tolls are paid in cash at a toll plaza, or electronically by use of a “BreezeBy” account.

The current estimate for cost to replace the Hood River Bridge is in excess of \$250 million. House Bill 4089 provides for creation of a bi-state bridge authority to replace and manage a new toll bridge to replace the current span.