Co-Chairs, Co-Vice Chairs, and members of the committee,

My name is RJ DeMello, and I'm Chair of the St. Johns Neighborhood Association. I write to you today as a concerned citizen of Portland's North Peninsula.

One way or another, the four bridges over the railroad cut that connect St. Johns and Cathedral Park to the rest of the state will come down in my lifetime. They are well over 100 years old, and three of the four are in disrepair due to BNSF's neglect.

BNSF was charged with building and maintaining these bridges in perpetuity when they received the right to create the railroad cut. They have utterly failed in their mandate.

Thankfully, we can act on one of the bridges right now. The city owns the bridge on Columbia Blvd., and a feasibility study is complete. PBOT just needs matching funds (Roughly $10–$20 million) to go after grants to complete the project.

The question is, do we want to wait until the bridge comes down to do anything? Or, do we want to make the difficult yet responsible choice (and cheaper as a bridge in 20–30 years will be more expensive than a bridge now) to make the needed improvements before catastrophe strikes?

In addition to the matching funds for Columbia Blvd, I ask for your help getting BNSF to do their part. I'm sure I need not remind you that one of the three bridges they neglect is N. Lombard St, aka State Highway 30. Lombard's bridge over the cut is in such bad shape that a weight restriction is not far off. With its connection to commerce facilities like Rivergate, such a restriction would negatively impact the Oregon economy. The bill for Lombard's bridge should not be on Oregonians. It should be on BNSF.

Just about 17k people live in St. Johns and Cathedral Park. That's more than Troutdale or Dallas. Co-Chair Gorsek and Co-Vice Chair Boquist, I know that if this same issue faced your constituents in those communities, you would not rest until there was some resolution. All I ask is the same investment in your fellow Oregonians beyond the cut to help solve this severe problem we face.

Thank you for your time,

RJ DeMello