



Shelly Boshart Davis

From the Desk of Representative
Shelly Boshart Davis



Our view: Protect fair, open competition on Interstate Bridge replacement project

George Carrillo, Mike Salsgiver and Nate McCoy

May 1, 2023

For years, Oregon and Washington leaders have worked diligently on plans for the much-needed replacement of the Interstate 5 bridge across the Columbia River. Known as the I-5 Interstate Bridge Replacement Program, or IBR, the [project](#) is critical to supporting local jobs, fostering trade and helping families navigate our region safely and efficiently.

Our organizations represent some of the most significant faces in Oregon’s construction industry — both small and large, emerging and minority-owned and multi-generational, as well as union and non-union. To each of us, it’s not just imperative that this project be built, but that it be built equitably and cost effectively for Oregon taxpayers. We are united in the belief that our industry needs to be open and inclusive and that unbiased and fair competition must be the cornerstone of any publicly financed construction project in our state — particularly one where Oregon taxpayers are contributing a billion dollars in public money.

Last month, Washington legislators dedicated a billion dollars to the bridge replacement project and the co-chairs of the Oregon Legislature’s Joint Committee on Transportation recently unveiled a [bipartisan framework](#) to deliver Oregon’s share. Section 7 of their proposal calls for, “impartial and open competition, protecting both the integrity of the process and procurement maximizing the ability of Oregon and Washington contractors to compete on the Interstate 5 bridge replacement project.”

Unfortunately, efforts are afoot to drastically diminish competition and greatly restrict the number of contractors and workers eligible to work on this project by requiring a project labor agreement (PLA) for its totality.

Government-mandated project labor agreements require every general contractor or subcontractor performing work to negotiate with or become a party to an agreement with one or more unions. At their core they are discriminatory and anti-competitive.

We are pro-worker and pro-contractor. We represent a diverse pool of contractors who believe in democracy and the freedom of workers and their employers to choose the employment model that works best for them. But we have major concerns with artificially restricting competition and shutting local contractors and workers out of projects financed with their own tax dollars, especially since it is [well documented](#) that these types of restrictions increase costs by 13% to 20%.

Removing systematic barriers that marginalized communities face is critical. Instead of artificially restricting competition and preventing local workers and contractors from working on a publicly funded projects, efforts should focus on opportunities to increase the engagement of minority contractors, historically disadvantaged workers, and qualified small businesses by prioritizing their involvement, promoting training opportunities for underrepresented workers and creating greater economic opportunities.

It's our belief that now is the time to move forward with the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program as a unified, diverse industry. Washington has already stepped up. Now Oregon should do the same while protecting open and fair competition. Our legislators should move forward with their bipartisan plan as drafted to ensure open and fair competition, restrain construction costs and promote the most local and diverse workforce possible.

George Carrillo is the executive director of LatinoBuilt, a locally based non-profit trade association serving Latino business owners and entrepreneurs in construction. Mike Salsgiver is the executive director of the Associated General Contractors Oregon-Columbia Chapter, a local trade association representing nearly 830 commercial construction companies in communities in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Nate McCoy is president & CEO for the Oregon chapter of the National Association of Minority Contractors, the oldest minority construction trade association in the United States, which serves businesses owned by People of Color in the state of Oregon.