

RESPONSES TO SEPTEMBER 15 BI-STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

December 12, 2025

1. Was the \$30 million federal grant awarded for the community connector lid in Vancouver rescinded by the federal budget reconciliation bill?

No, the federal grant awarded to the City of Vancouver and Washington State Department of Transportation has not been rescinded at this time. The City of Vancouver and WSDOT submitted a joint application for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot grant in 2024. A \$30 million grant was awarded for the community connector at Evergreen Boulevard in Vancouver, which is part of the IBR Program proposed investments.

Earlier this year, the budget reconciliation bill rescinded Reconnecting Communities Grant funds that were provided through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) but not funds provided through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Since the funds for the City of Vancouver grant were provided through IIJA, the reconciliation bill did not impact this award.

The Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program continues to monitor actions at the federal level that might impact access to funding. The grant agreement process that is required in order to access funds has not yet been initiated by the Federal Highway Administration.

2. What is the plan to alleviate the additional financial burden on low-income drivers if the low-income program is not up and running when tolling starts?

WSDOT Toll Division understands the importance of a low-income program and will implement the policy when it is set by the commissions.

3. Will there be design changes that are responsive to feedback from bike/pedestrian advocates?

The IBR Program appreciates the thoughtful feedback we continue to receive from active transportation and transit users and advocates throughout the environmental review and design processes. While the key elements of IBR Program investments have been identified, the design process is still in the early stages at between 15% and 30% completion, depending on the specific element of the Program. As more detailed design has continued, the Program has made some adjustments in response to input related to bike/pedestrian improvements. However, some specific requests — such as placing the shared-use path and transit facilities side by side in constrained areas — present complex design and right-of-way challenges that

limit feasibility. The Program continues to seek and evaluate feedback through the lens of safety, usability, comfort, and constructability.

The active transportation investments included in the IBR Program reflect the best balance of structural design constraints, connectivity, and access on both sides of the river, and minimization of land use and marine impacts on both sides of the river. Input received during the Draft SEIS comment period is anticipated to result in adjustments to the alignment of the shared use path and improvements to connectivity. More information on this will be included in the Final SEIS in response to the specific comments that provided feedback on these aspects of active transportation.

Adding the shared use path on the west side of transit, as has been requested by some, would have structural and constructability challenges with landing the path in Vancouver and would result in additional impacts to properties on the Vancouver side (including to the Port of Vancouver) and Hayden Island.

The IBR Program has also assessed the possibility of extending a shared use path from the Waterfront Station or Vancouver Waterfront to Evergreen Station both during previous project work and again during current work. The additional width required to extend the shared use path would result in additional property impacts, including new residential displacements, or it would require additional foundations and columns in environmentally sensitive areas to support the elevated shared use path. The alignment of an elevated shared use path in Vancouver would require construction over southbound I-5 traffic in some locations, which would pose challenges to keeping I-5 open and the ability to maintain safety for travelers and construction workers.

The investments proposed by the IBR Program will improve the existing active transportation network within the Program area to provide safe and accessible connections in all directions. In many locations, the specific type of facility for these connections — whether they are intended for shared use or pedestrian-only walkways — will be determined during the future design process and guided by input the Program has received to date. Regardless of type, these facilities will be designed in accordance with applicable state and local requirements, including dimensions and clearance from obstructions.

The Program is evaluating the shared use path design with attention to traffic safety, user comfort and personal security, specifically considering factors such as a sense of enclosure or isolation, proximity to other bridge users, and visibility.

Engagement with active transportation users and the community on potential refinements to design will continue as the process moves forward.

4. How does the cost of light rail on the IBR Program compare to other projects?

Comparing the per-mile for either construction or operations and maintenance costs of one light rail project to another can be misleading because each project is shaped by a unique set of circumstances. Factors such as terrain, existing infrastructure, environmental requirements and the surrounding urban development all influence design and maintenance complexity and the needs of each project. Additionally, costs fluctuate based on inflation, and materials or labor price escalation can significantly impact expenses. Even within the same region, variations in project scope, frequency of service, required staffing, and community context mean that cost-per-mile comparisons often fail to capture the full picture or the specific challenges behind the costs of each project.

There's been some comparison between the IBR Light Rail Transit (LRT) extension to Vancouver with TriMet's recent Better Red project. These two projects are very different, which results in the variance in costs. For example, IBR LRT will include purchasing necessary right-of-way, a portion of the Columbia River Bridge, new structures over North Portland Harbor and into Vancouver, new stations, track, signals, overhead catenary system, signal systems, substation buildings, and facilities to store and maintain additional transit vehicles. The 10-mile extension portion of the Better Red Project utilized the existing Blue Line track and stations to extend the Red Line from Beaverton to Hillsboro with adjustments to the signals, track and operator break room.

Inflation is another factor that impacts the cost difference between IBR LRT and Better Red. The four Light Rail Vehicles (LRVs) for Better Red were purchased through an option on that contract, increasing the order from 26 to 30 vehicles, with the additional four vehicles costing \$4.859 million each. By adding these onto an existing contract, it resulted in a lower cost for these four vehicles due to the one-time design and production setup costs that were contained in the original order of 26.

The IBR team is anticipating a 2032 year of expenditure, so current estimates for the cost of light rail vehicles includes a contingency to account for uncertainty with price and timing to purchase given that we are still in the planning/environmental phase of the Program.

As mentioned, the IBR team is currently working on updating our cost estimate and financial plan. We recognize that transportation projects nationwide and regionally are experiencing inflation, higher construction bids, and changing market conditions. If we are in a situation where costs exceed our funding sources, we have various tools available to address the issue and will build investments within the available budget and funding sources

5. How many new light rail vehicles are required to serve the frequency of light rail for the IBR Program?

The number of light rail vehicles needed for a project is not based on the length of the light rail line; it is determined using an operational model that looks at the level of service within the context of the needs of a specific line, as well as within the context of the broader regional system. This includes the frequency and schedule of trains at different times of the day. It is also based on the projected number of riders and how many light rail vehicles are needed to support the level of demand from riders.

The Program's latest level of service assumption for light rail used in the CIG process anticipates 15-minute train frequency all day in the year of operation (2035). In order to provide this 15-minute train frequency all day for the extension of light rail to Evergreen Station in Vancouver, we expect that three new light rail vehicles will be required in 2035 when the light rail line opens. As demand increases, the level of service and number of needed light rail vehicles would also increase.

Previous estimates for the necessary number of light rail vehicles used the 2045 frequencies and demand developed for NEPA. Those estimates assumed more frequent service and more transit vehicles required to meet the demand expected on the project. What we have developed through the CIG process includes a revised service level assumption that utilizes post-pandemic ridership and a more near-term estimate of ridership. This translates to a reduced level of service, fewer needed transit vehicles, and fewer needed transit operators.

The number of vehicles required to meet demand will continue to be refined as service assumptions are updated as more information becomes available the closer we get to the year of operation. Adjustments to service and anticipated ridership will continue to be refined and may impact the current estimates for the number of light rail vehicles.

6. Property Impacts

As we have shared previously, the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement posted on the IBR website identifies, describes and evaluates anticipated specific properties impacted by all multimodal elements. The information provided in [Chapter 3.3](#) is based on the analysis described in the [Acquisitions Technical Report](#) which provides information about each property acquisition and displacement. The IBR Program will do everything feasible to avoid and minimize potential impacts to property, which includes making reasonable efforts to avoid taking property when it is not necessary for the delivery of the proposed investments. However, there may be certain situations in which the Program will need to acquire property owned by private individuals and businesses.

If it is determined that all or a portion of a property is necessary for the program investments, property owners will be contacted well in advance of any construction activity, in accordance with federal requirements laid out in the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act of 1970. These requirements include receiving just compensation at fair market value determined by an appraisal, and receiving relocation assistance and benefits. The Final SEIS will identify the anticipated program footprint and mitigations. It is anticipated that formal discussions about property acquisitions can take place after the program publishes its Final SEIS and receives a federal Record of Decision (ROD).

The TriMet Ruby Junction Maintenance Facility in Gresham, Oregon was studied in the Draft SEIS as a potential property impact as an expansion would be needed to accommodate the additional LRVs associated with anticipated service in 2045. That improvement would be needed to support the proposed frequency of light rail service and projected number of riders with that frequency in 2045.

Improvements would include additional storage for LRVs and maintenance materials and supplies, expanded LRV maintenance bays, expanded parking and employee support areas for additional personnel, and a third track at the northern entrance to Ruby Junction. These improvements would not be built until it was determined in the future that ridership demand demonstrates need for this level of additional service and more vehicles to support that level of service.

7. How are transit O&M costs determined?

The IBR Program is continuing to work with C-TRAN and TriMet, as well as other local partners, to identify the appropriate level of service, operations and maintenance (O&M) costs associated with the transit investments, and the appropriate resources to pay for those services. Funding for transit O&M will be used to pay for a variety of transit elements including staffing, utilities, vehicle maintenance, facilities maintenance and service support such as security staff, customer service, etc.

For light rail O&M costs, C-TRAN and TriMet have agreed to split the cost 45% Washington / 55% Oregon, which is proportionate to the amount of guideway in each state. For Express Bus service, C-TRAN and TriMet have agreed to split the cost 38% Washington / 62% Oregon, which is geographically proportionate. Transit O&M costs will continue to evolve as we refine ridership and level of service as we get closer to the target revenue operation date (anticipated in 2035) and as ridership and service assumptions are refined. Furthermore, detailed design and engineering must still be completed for all components of the IBR Program, including the transit elements.

Fare recovery refers to the percentage of operating costs that are covered by fare revenues collected from riders. For example, if it costs \$100 to operate a route between Portland and Vancouver, and the fare recovery rate is 25%, then \$25 of that total operating cost is recovered through passenger fares. The remaining \$75 would typically be covered through other funding sources.

The Program's latest transit O&M cost estimates for service beginning in 2035 assumes a fare recovery rate of 10% for light rail and 15% for express bus. This calculation amounts to approximately \$1 million per year.

Previous O&M cost estimates calculated a fare recovery at 25% based on past fare recovery data. Between 2015 and 2023, TriMet saw a recovery rate for light rail between 39% and 10%, while C-TRAN reported fare recovery for express bus during that same period between 22% and 5%. These assumptions will continue to be updated as we have more fare recovery data, as we get closer to operation date, and as ridership and service assumptions are refined.

The Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Grant process requires any project to demonstrate adequate funding plans for both capital costs and ongoing operations and maintenance. Appropriate agreements solidifying these plans need to be in place before CIG funding would be provided to the Program. The Program currently anticipates receiving funding in 2028 and would need these agreements in place by 2027 based on the current schedule.

8. Addressing TriMet's financial stability and service levels

While TriMet is experiencing a structural deficit due largely to inflation and other factors outside of TriMet's control, the agency remains committed to regionally chosen transportation priorities like the IBR Program. TriMet recognizes that the IBR Program has its own dedicated funding source outside of TriMet and that it will help grow ridership and, in turn, increase TriMet's fare revenue.

Extending LRT into Vancouver, the second largest city in the Portland Metro Area that continues to experience year over year population and employment growth, opens access to 60 miles of the LRT system that is already built out, including locations beyond the downtown Portland area, such as PDX and other employment hubs throughout the region.

9. Why do the states use consultants to deliver work and what is the process to amend consultant contracts?

WSDOT work is delivered by both agency and consultant staff, providing the technical expertise necessary to support development and delivery of projects. Because of the

technical challenges, overall size, and complexity of megaprojects, there is a heavy reliance on the capabilities and expertise of the consultant community for the bulk of staffing on megaprojects. Consultants also allow us to be flexible in increasing and decreasing staffing levels quickly based on project needs. Agency staffing levels are designed to provide a strong owner role, appropriate managerial and technical oversight and decision making necessary to deliver projects.

WSP was selected as the prime consultant for the General Engineering Consultant contract by a selection board made up of members from ODOT and WSDOT following an open and impartial competitive advertisement process. Negotiated contract rates are not project-specific and are negotiated through WSDOT's headquarters contracting services office located Olympia through a standard process applied to all firms—IBR Program staff did not set that rate.

The overall consultant contract amount includes WSP's efforts as the prime and over 60 subconsultants that WSP oversees. WSP holds less than half of the overall contract amount, with subconsultants holding approximately 58% of the overall contract amount. Of the more than 60 subconsultants over the life of the program, over half have been local small and/or disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs). Specifically, more than 75% of the subconsultants are based in Washington and Oregon, and over 40% are in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area.

Consultant contracts are updated as needed based on deliverable needs and required work, and within available funding. The initial agreement with WSP that executed when the Program started was within the funds available at that time to allow the General Engineering Consultant to build out milestones, coordinate with partners, and identify what work was needed in order to complete the NEPA phase. This initial contract was never intended to cover all work needed, as it was necessary to get a consultant team on board in order to identify a plan for all required steps to advance design, conduct external engagement, do financial planning work, and reach a Record of Decision.

Subsequent task orders were executed to get us through specific milestones, under the assumption that new task orders would be executed to reach additional milestones. This is the typical process for WSDOT megaprograms to identify work that needs to be achieved, and to cover it through amendments agreed upon by the consultant and state. The contract will continue to be amended within available funding as needed—this could include changes to deliver the same work over a longer or shorter time period or changes to address new or different requirements.