PORT OF BENTON

January 5, 2026

Commander
U.S. Coast Guard District Northwest
915 Second Avenue, Rm 3510
Seattle, WA 98174-1067
Submitted via: mailto: d13-smb-d13-bridges@uscg.mil

Re: Navigation Impact Report (NIR) comments related to the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program General Bridge Permit Application and Reevaluation of the Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination (PNCD)

Dear Commander,

It is critical to our region, state, and nation to replace the Interstate 5 Bridge as soon as possible. The impacts of congestion, due in part to the existing movable span, cause frequent delay, leading to a real and exponentially more costly impact on our regional economic viability. On behalf of the Port of Benton, we are writing to provide comments for the U.S. Coast Guard to consider for the General Bridge Permit and reevaluation of the Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination (PNCD) for the Interstate-5 Bridge Replacement (IBR) project, and to discuss the overall needs of the region's freight network.

Although the Port of Benton does not utilize this waterway for cargo efforts, we recognize that navigation clearance decisions affect the broader freight system. The Columbia River functions as part of an interconnected network of waterways, highways, and rail, and reliability in one mode supports the performance of the others. Ensuring safe and predictable navigation clearance helps reduce delays, improve efficiency, and supports freight movement and economic activity across the region. We understand the IBR Program has worked closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure the Corps' *Dredge Yaquina* can clear the bridge configuration at 116 feet to maintain the federal navigation channel and to model anticipated changes in water levels affecting river levels over time. Stable, predictable flows help ensure the safety of cruise vessels, crews, and passengers.

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It is vital to ensure the multi-modal transportation system is integrated to keep supply chains moving as expeditiously and safely as possible. The IBR program's extensive public process to develop bridge configuration alternatives provided ample opportunity for technical review and stakeholder engagement, balancing the project's purpose and needs while mitigating impacts. We understand that the IBR programs' formal agreements with entities determined to be negatively impacted by a 116' vertical navigation clearance for a fixed-span option have been granted adequate mitigation.

Communication and coordination are critical. As the IBR proceeds with demolition of the old bridge and construction of the new bridge, it will be very important to engage navigation interests and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that information on the construction phases and any potential impacts to river traffic is clearly communicated well in advance.

As we understand it, the IBR configuration will allow the tug and barge vessels to use the primary channel under the new bridge rather than the barge channel. Using the primary channel will increase safety, as operators can maneuver the vessels without having to make a sharp turn to clear the railroad bridge, then immediately line up to use the barge channel.

Safety and multimodal enhancements to meet the needs of all transportation modes, as defined in the IBR Program's supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement, will undoubtedly result in a positive return on investment.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments on the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program General Bridge Permit and confirm our navigation needs of the Port of Benton are met with 116' of vertical navigation clearance.

Sincerely,

Diahann Howard

Diahann Howard, PPM®, PPX®
Executive Director

Cc: Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR)
Port of Benton Commission