

January 5, 2026

Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program General Bridge Permit Application



Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary:

I am writing on behalf of my customers and neighbors, as well as for my concern for the future of Portland's transportation systems. I was involved in a technical advisory committee for the previous Columbia Crossing replacement effort representing the Portland Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

Businesses, freight, and commuters routinely sit for long periods as the result of accidents, bridge openings, and congestion from commerce between two growing cities. The existing bridge was built 110 years ago, is no longer adequate to handle the traffic for which it was designed and provides only dangerous pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The bridge is one of the nation's top freight and commerce bottlenecks. It is built on wooden pylons that are not anchored in bedrock, making the bridge highly vulnerable to a major seismic event.

Connections to Hayden Island from the Portland side force all traffic and transit to use the already over-crowded bridge. A separate arterial bridge is needed to address this connection including an extension of light rail to the densely developed residential areas of Hayden Island.

BRT Feeder bus service from the greater Vancouver area is likely the most efficient means for transit to cross the river and serve downtown Portland for speed, economy, and the comfort of riders. Existing light rail takes 30 minutes and to reach downtown Vancouver it will likely add 15 minutes to the schedule. The bus (or heavy rail) takes about 17 minutes.

The on-off movements at Hayden Island are especially unsafe and problematic. In the previous replacement plan, the massive lane expansion needed to address connections to Hayden Island from the I-5 bridge was expensive, problematic and compromised the safety and efficiency of the bridge design. Three lanes in each direction would match road capacity leading through Portland. Retail on the island is important but has primarily served as a sales tax free zone for Washington State shoppers. That function can be adequately served without the direct interchange that is extremely expensive and a great waste of valuable real estate.

I am encouraged that Oregon and Washington have assigned funds to restart planning. Now, our federal, state and local leaders must unite to fund and construct a practical replacement to the I-5 bridge and a new arterial connection to Hayden Island. We support such efforts.

Sincerely,

Rod Merrick, AIA