

From: [Media neighbors](#)
To: [D13-SMB-D13-BRIDGES](#)
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Solicitation for Navigation Comments - Replacement I-5 Portland to Vancouver Bridge, across the Columbia River, river mile, Portland, OR.
Date: Monday, December 15, 2025 6:04:06 PM

The Coast Guard has the authority and the responsibility to ensure that any proposed structure meets the reasonable needs of navigation on the Columbia River—including the authority to reject the IBR’s recent attempt to offer mitigation payments to major river users in exchange for lowering the navigation clearance established in the June 2022 Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination, which requires a minimum of 178 feet of vertical clearance.

On behalf of Neighbors for a Better Crossing (NFBC)—representing residents, small businesses, floating-home communities, river-dependent users, and stakeholders across both sides of the bridge—we respectfully urge the U.S. Coast Guard to **deny** the IBR program's proposed 116-foot low fixed-span bridge over the Columbia River.

Based on the Coast Guard’s statutory mandate, the formal Preliminary Navigation Clearance Determination issued by USCG in June 2022, and the evidence provided by independent engineers, maritime users, and the regional business community, we believe the IBR proposal:

Constitutes an unreasonable obstruction to navigation

Fails to meet the Coast Guard’s legal and regulatory standards

Restricts future commerce on a federally protected waterway

Creates permanent harm for short-term roadway convenience

Violates USCG’s obligation to safeguard future navigational needs

This proposal does **not** represent a long-term solution. It is a short-sighted workaround that locks the region into 125 years of restricted river commerce.

1. The Coast Guard has Already Determined that 116 Feet is Insufficient

In its 2022 PNCD, the USCG concluded that IBR’s proposed clearance:

- **Creates unreasonable obstruction**
- **Fails to meet current and future maritime needs**
- **Prevents several classes of vessels from safely passing**
- **Reduces clearance relative to the existing bridges (178 ft)**

IBR has offered no new maritime data, no new vessel-height analysis, and no industry justification to override this determination.

2. Federal Law Requires Protecting *Future* Navigation, Not Just Present Users

Under the **Rivers & Harbors Act**, **General Bridge Act**, and long-standing Coast Guard practice:

- The USCG must consider **future** vessel types, industry growth, commerce expansion, and emergency needs—not just today’s traffic.
- The burden of proof lies **entirely on the applicant** to show the new bridge will not obstruct navigation.
- Lowering clearance is only permissible if navigation needs **decline**, which is not supported by any data on the Columbia.

A low fixed span permanently restricts maritime innovation and industrial flexibility for the next century.

3. The Proposed Bridge Conflicts with the Long-Term Economic Role of the Columbia River

The Columbia River is an essential transportation corridor for:

- Renewable energy components
- Tall industrial equipment
- Shipbuilding and repair
- Oversized cargo
- Dredging and maintenance fleets
- Emergency response vessels
- Commercial and tribal fishing infrastructure

River commerce has repeatedly changed over the last century—and it will continue to evolve. A fixed-span at 116 ft assumes future industry will never require additional height.

This assumption is demonstrably false.

4. “Mitigation Payments” Highlight a Structural Flaw in the Design

IBR’s proposal:

- Offered **cash payments** to at least **three** major river users (Greenberry Industrial, JT Marine, and Western Machine Works)
- Attempted to settle objections rather than address actual navigation needs
- Relied on “one-off deals” to justify a design that fails river-wide requirements

These payments—while legal—highlight that the design **obstructs navigation** and would otherwise be rejected.

The Coast Guard cannot permit a bridge that satisfies navigation **only if companies are paid not to object.**

5. The Proposal Locks the Region into a Single, Non-Scalable Design

A low fixed-span:

- Cannot be raised
- Cannot be modified without full replacement
- Cannot be adapted for new industries
- Becomes a permanent bottleneck for regional commerce

This fails the long-term planning principles embedded in USCG bridge-permitting duties.

6. A Low Fixed Bridge Represents a Temporary Workaround, Not a Long-Term Solution

A recent article by Joe Cortright with City Observatory notes:

[“You can’t bribe your way to a navigational clearance.”](#)
“The proposed design constrains the waterway for a century.”

NFBC agrees.

This proposal is not:

- Future-proof
- Compliant
- Adaptable
- Aligned with USCG’s legal obligations
- Protective of long-term commerce

It is an **expedient solution** that sacrifices the river’s integrity and economic potential.

REQUEST

Given the above, we respectfully request that the U.S. Coast Guard:

- 1. Reject the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program’s 116-foot fixed-span proposal.**
- 2. Require IBR to submit a design that meets or exceeds existing navigational clearance.**
- 3. Re-open evaluation of alternatives, including a immersed tube tunnels.**

The Columbia River is a federally protected resource and one of the most important waterways in the Pacific Northwest. Decisions made today will shape its use for the next century.

We urge the Coast Guard to uphold its mandate to protect navigation—now and in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter..

Kimberly Haslett

Neighbors for a Better Crossing, volunteer and Hayden Island homeowner