



Oregon, Washington governors sign intention to restart I-5 Bridge replacement project

by KATU Staff

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With the Interstate 5 Bridge as the backdrop, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown officially restart the process to replace the bridge during a signing ceremony Monday, Nov. 18, 2019. On the left is Washington Transportation Secretary Roger Millar and on the right is Oregon Department of Transportation Director Kris Strickler. (KATU Photo)

VANCOUVER, Wash. — The governors of Oregon and Washington took an important step Monday in restarting a major effort to replace the aging Interstate 5 Bridge connecting their two states.

With the bridge as a backdrop, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and Washington Gov. Jay Inslee signed a memorandum of intent, committing each state to the project.

The bridge, which is more than 100 years old, is a seismic risk and a major source of congestion for Portland and Vancouver drivers, officials say.

In 2013, efforts to replace the bridge were stalled after Washington didn't match funds Oregon allocated for the project. Recently, Washington set aside funding to explore replacing the bridge.

"It's high time that we address the congestion between our two states and invest in a bridge that will stand the test of time," Brown said.

We know that it's mandatory to replace this bridge," Inslee said. "We do not have an option. This bridge has to be replaced."

The new bridge will include some form of high-capacity mass transit and tolls may be used to help pay for it.

"The memorandum of intent makes reference to not eliminating the possibility of tolling," Inslee said. "I think anyone understands the financial necessities here."

The memorandum establishes a joint office between the two states to investigate what progress was made in the past, what needs to be done to replace the bridge and what federal dollars are available. As of now, no federal funding is secured.



"I think it's critically important that we have our federal partners at the table," Brown said.

"It is very difficult to understand how this project would not be a top echelon for any national infrastructure project," Inslee said.

KATU asked Inslee what is different this time around and how the states will work to ensure money doesn't go to waste.

"Number one, there's no other option. This has to be done," Inslee said. He added there are different people in Washington's Legislature and people are more aware now of the seismic risks.

"There's no question for me that our absolute number one priority has to be seismic resilience for this particular project," Brown added.

The office will report back to each state Legislature with an interim report at the end of this year and a final report near the end of next year.



[KATU Video][p][p]

Memorandum of Intent:



Oregon – Washington
Memorandum of Intent
on
Replacing the I-5 Bridge over the Columbia River

Whereas replacing the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River remains a high priority for Washington state and Oregon;

Whereas the current I-5 bridge is a major seismic risk and traffic bottleneck for the region and the entire nation;

Whereas, as governors of Oregon and Washington state, we have worked to align our states for a restart of the project, and community leaders from both sides of the Columbia river have expressed interest in coming back to the table;

Whereas Washington state and Oregon have allocated a combined \$44 million to reopen an office for the I-5 bridge project, and;

Whereas, we encourage the community to join us in advancing a bi-state effort that moves this critical project forward.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that:

We commit our states to the reopening of a joint Oregon-Washington state project office (project office) to replace the Interstate 5 bridge over the Columbia River.

The work of this project office should include, but is not limited to, the reevaluation of the purpose and need identified for the project previously known as the Columbia River Crossing, the reevaluation of permits and development of a finance plan, the reengagement of key stakeholders and the public, and the reevaluation of scope, schedule and budget for a reinvigorated bi-state effort for replacement of the Interstate 5 Columbia River bridge.

When reevaluating the finance plan for the project, the project office shall assume that some costs of the new facility may be covered by tolls.

Additionally, in reevaluating the project scope, the project office shall assume any plan for a new bridge will include high capacity transit.

The project office shall provide a draft progress report to the governors and the transportation committees of the legislatures of Washington state and Oregon by December 1, 2019, and a final report to the governors and the transportation committees of the legislatures of Oregon and Washington state by December 1, 2020.

Term and Effect

This MOI shall come into effect upon signature by the two parties and shall remain in effect for a period of five years and can be renewed or amended with the consent of the parties. Either party may decide to terminate the agreement by notifying the other party with three months' written notice.

Limitations

The undersigned signatories agree that this MOI shall have no legal effect or impose a legally binding obligation on either the State of Oregon or the State of Washington. Neither party shall be responsible for the actions of third parties who may participate in the activities outlined in this MOI.

Agreed, signed and dated in two originals in Vancouver, Washington, this 18th day of November, 2019.

Kate Brown, Governor
State of Oregon

Jay Inslee, Governor
State of Washington