PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR IBR EXECUTIVE STEERING GROUP

Received between March 6, 2025 and September 25, 2025

*ADA compliant versions of the attachments can be made available upon request

Comment Received: 3/6/2025
From: James Brown
Email Subject: ESG Public Comment
Attachment Included: No

Hello ESG,

I live in Oregon City and work in Vancouver, so I need to cross the Columbia nearly every day. Since moving to Oregon City it has been most convenient for me to take 205, but before that, my most direct route was along I-5 North, and my commute over the bridge was incredibly tedious. I am sure you are all familiar with the constant traffic bottleneck just before the bridge, which magically disappears the instant you get to the Washington side. Frequently, even with advance planning I would be late to work, occasionally by more than an hour. The bridge was simply not designed to handle modern rush hour traffic.

It is striking that in the very oldest historic photos of the I-5 bridge, front and center you can see, quite visible, the streetcar tracks that originally connected these two states. Long before the auto industry started demolishing public transportation systems across the nation to force buying cars to become the default way to travel, the founding fathers of this region understood that light rail was the most efficient way to move large numbers of people from one place to another.

I understand many comments you receive are negative, especially those from rural communities that are not near the bridge, and therefore do not use it. Many of these comments object to the cost, as though protecting the vital infrastructure of the largest transportation corridor on the entire West Coast of North America for the next hundred years is some trivial matter undeserving of investment.

But not once have I heard a convincing argument as to why we, our children, and our children's children deserve less than what our ancestors already had only a lifetime ago. We are the wealthiest nation in history; why should we settle for less? Why should we be forced to sit in traffic jams huffing diesel fumes when any random dockworker in 1917 could cross the river in leisure while reading the morning paper in a clean, electric streetcar?

The notion that light rail “doesn’t work” for this region is one that is completely ignorant of our history. Light rail is our heritage, and I wish every day I could simply step on a train and be carried to work while I sip my morning coffee. I urge you all to reject any motion to remove light rail from the bridge. We owe it to our ourselves and those who come after us.

Thank you for reading.
James

Comment Received: 3/20/2025
From: Bob Ortblad
Email Subject: ESG Public Comment
Attachment Included: Yes (Attachment 1)

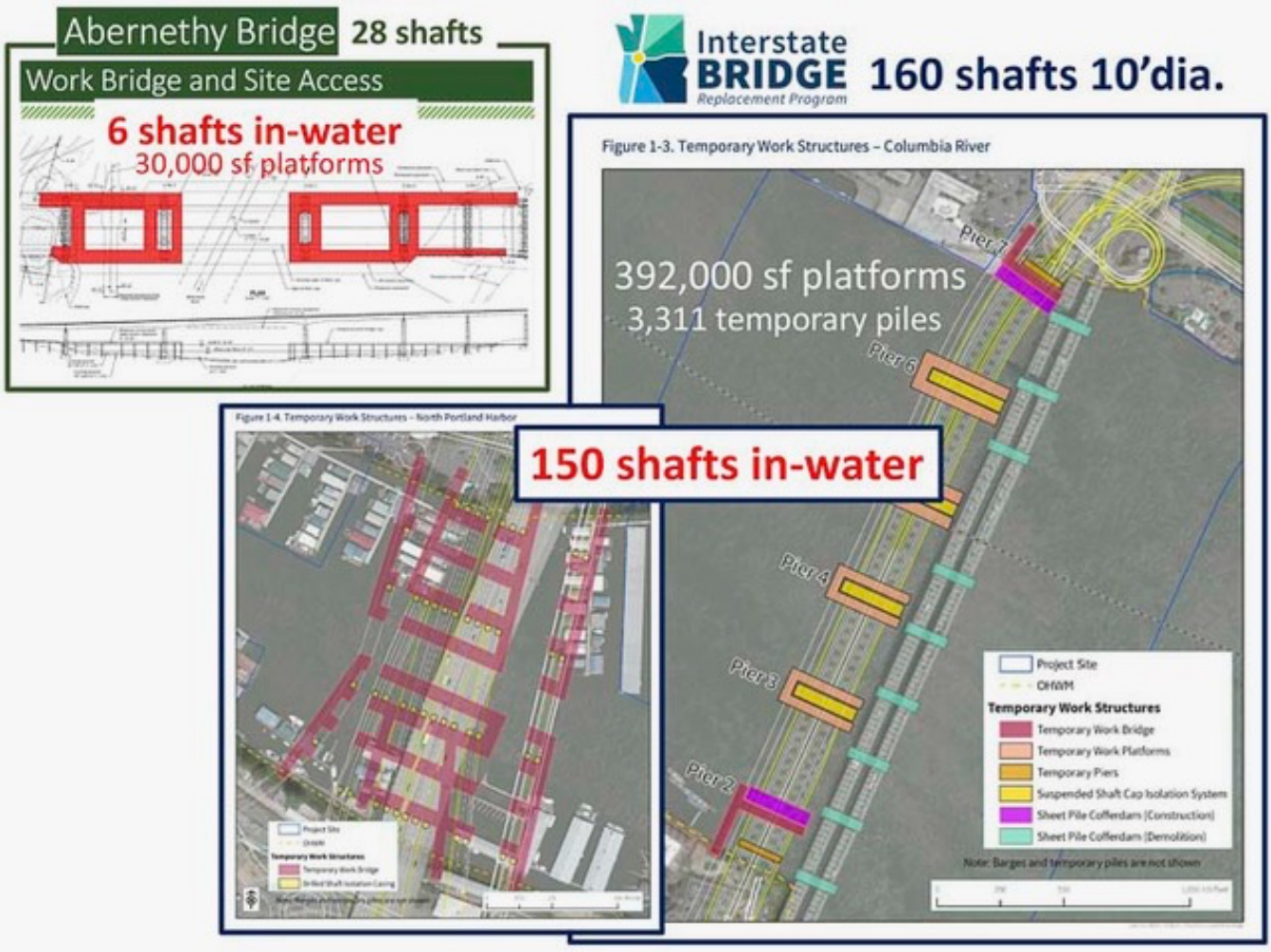
Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee

IBR’s bridge design is a high-risk solution that could double in cost and time to construct. WSDOT & ODOT both have serious funding problems, and it is doubtful FTA will fund IBR’s light rail.

An immersed tunnel has less cost risk, is faster to build, more earthquake resilient, safer, and has environmental benefits.

Please read the following articles and view the video of the Hayden Island public meeting that describes an immersed tunnel alternative.

Respectfully
Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA



https://www.clarkcountytoday.com/opinion/letter-ibrs-billion-dollar-risk-another-abernethy-bridge-financial-disaster/

Bob Ortblad says the IBR is hiding a serious "boulder" problem that threatens the feasibility of the Columbia River bridge design

Editor*'s note: Opinions expressed in this letter to the editor are those of the author alone and do not reflect the editorial position of ClarkCountyToday.com*

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program's (IBR) I-5 Bridge replacement project will make the I-205 Abernethy Bridge cost overrun look like a bargain.

The cost for the Abernethy Bridge has more than tripled, from $248 million to $812 million, and continues to rise. A significant portion of this increase is attributed to the bridge's 28 drilled shafts, of which only 6 shafts are in the Willamette River.

Bob Ortblad

In comparison, the IBR plans to use 160 drilled shafts, with 150 of them situated in the more challenging Columbia River. Most of these shafts will be far from ether riverbank, making their construction more difficult and costly. The IBR's shafts will necessitate 3,311 temporary piles and 392,000 square feet of temporary platforms. These will require a costly fleet of barges, tugs, marine cranes, impact pile drivers, vibratory piles drivers, and a very specialized 100-ton shaft oscillator.

While each Abernethy Bridge shaft took about one month to complete, the IBR claims it can finish the more difficult shafts in just 5 days each, completing all 160 shafts in 800 nonconsecutive days. Additionally, the IBR claims that drilling can occur year-round. However, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Oregon Fish & Wildlife, there is a four-month in-water work window from November 1 to February 28. The IBR also estimates it can complete the Columbia River bridges in 4 to 7 years and the North Portland Harbor bridges in 4 to 10 years.

It is doubtful the IBR can complete a shaft in five days and drill year-round, ignoring a four-month in-water work window. The Abernathy Bridge was restricted by an in-water work window, and each shaft took 30 days. Based on this, 160 shafts, at 30 days each, would require 4,800 nonconsecutive days to complete, potentially adding a decade to the construction timeline. Conservatively assuming Abernathy Bridge's 28 drilled shafts are 25% of the current $812 million cost, then each shaft would cost about $7.25 million. At $7.25 million/shaft IBR's 160 shafts will cost over $1 billion.

Click for PDF

In 2012, the Columbia River Crossing estimated each shaft would cost $1.25 million ($2.5 million today) and spent $4.2 million to test a few piles and a single shaft. Malcolm Drilling Co. tried to sink a single 10-foot diameter steel casing 250 feet deep on Hayden Island. In a trade journal, Malcolm Drilling recounted its failure to sink this test shaft due to boulders.

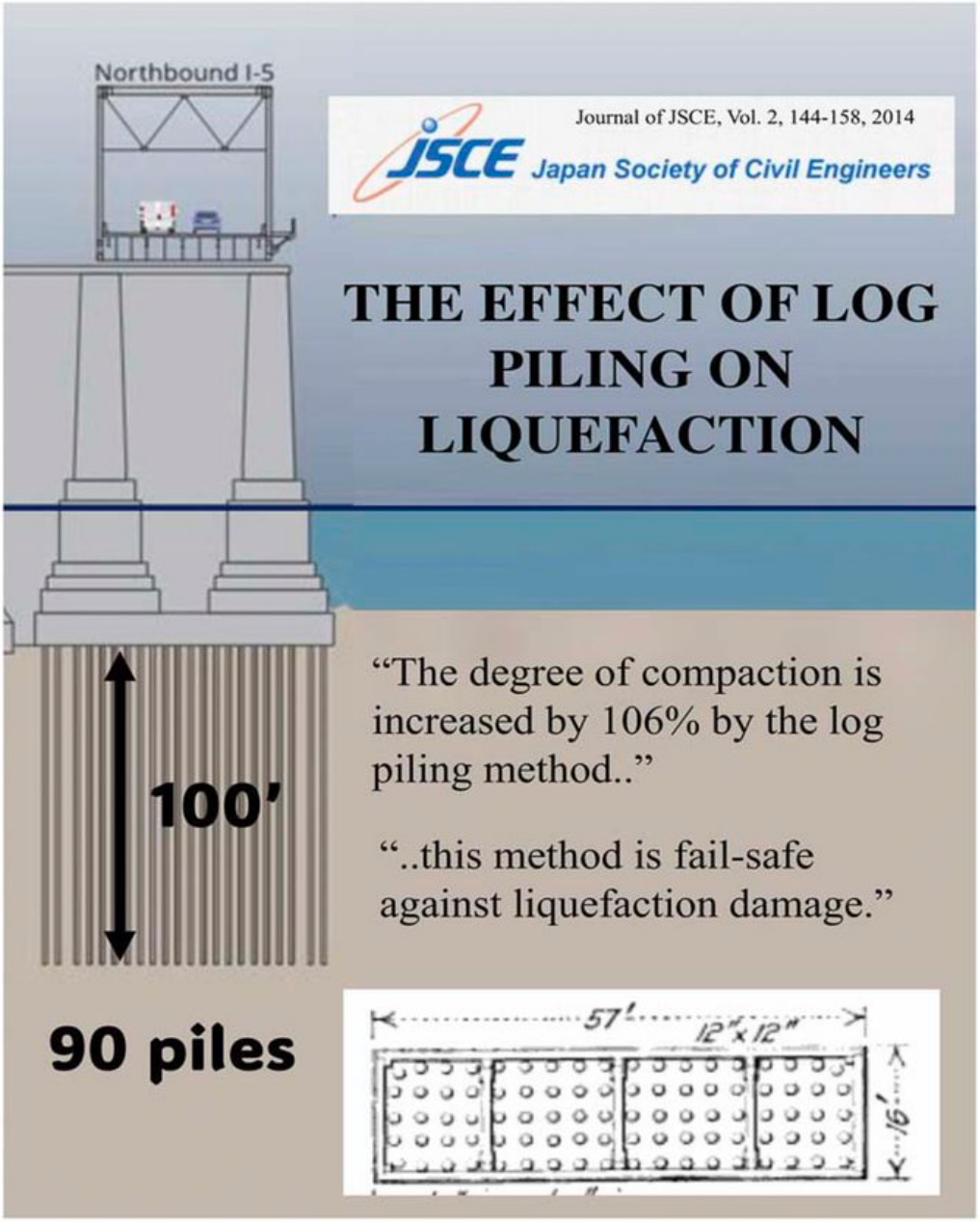
"However, during excavation and casing installation of the 10-foot diameter shafts, an unknown layer of very dense boulders in a "fixed condition," resulted in damage to an installation tooth ring to the point that excavation to the planned shaft depth was impossible."

The IBR is hiding a serious "boulder" problem that threatens the feasibility of the Columbia River bridge design. IBR's Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement includes 26 technical reports, but a critically important geotechnical report is missing, and the IBR has offered no explanation. I filed a Public Disclosure Request and obtained IBR's "Geotechnical Data Report" dated May 2024. This report describes the encounter of many boulders and cobbles in a 200-foot layer of sediment. The report referenced boulders 106 times and cobbles 175 times.

Shockingly, the IBR has fraudulently disqualified an immersed tunnel alternative that would eliminate the need for drilled shafts. Similar to a floating bridge, an immersed tunnel is supported by displacing its weight, according to Archimedes' principle. This design is faster to build, could potentially save $1 billion associated with drilled shafts, and would also be more earthquake-resilient than a foundation based on drilled shafts.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA
Seattle

Showa Bridge Niigata, Japan 1964




South Jackson St.
Seattle
350 feet
S Jackson St


12 AVE S
South Jackson St.

Dec. 5, 2022, Video of Hayden Island Neighborhood Network meeting, 200 attendees. Bob Ortblad presented an Immersed Tunnel alternative to the Interstate Bridge Replacement's high bridge design. Greg Johnson's, IBR Administrator, bellicose response.

Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRXJqqNEZMY

Comment Received: 3/31/2025
From: Bob Ortblad
Email Subject: ESG Public Comment
Attachment Included: Yes (Attachment 2)

IBR Communications Team

The IBR has a $23 million Communications Team budget but only once answered of my fact-based criticisms. The Team continues to regurgitate five incorrect and unsupported bullet points.

Greg Johnson claims IBR's team of professional engineers has looked at a tunnel and that it will not work. These engineers issued the July 2021 "Tunnel Concept Assessment" without a professional engineering stamp, making it illegal. The Assessment also fraudulently inflated dredging and excavation cubic yards by four times. A public disclosure request obtained the IBR's calculations and forced an amended report that reduced estimated cubic yards by half but still inflated. The IBR sent me an email that admitted incompetence to avoid being guilty of fraud. Thirteen professional engineers are listed on the original "Tunnel Concept Assessment", none checked the report for a professional engineer's stamp or reasonableness of wildly inflated excavation and dredging cubic yards.

Any fool can design a tunnel that will not work. The IBR evaluated an immersed tunnel that was too large and had impractical alignments.

Please read the attached email from the IBR and my article published 18 months ago in Clark County Today "Interstate Bridge Replacement Program incompetence and deception".

Respectfully
Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA, retired P.E., CPA

From: **Interstate Bridge Replacement Program Team** support@commentsensemanager.com
Subject: Interstate Bridge Replacement Program Communication Response
Date: September 8, 2023 at 2:12 PM
To: r.ortblad@comcast.net
Bcc:

Good afternoon,

Thank you for reaching out to the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) program and for sharing your questions about the Cross Section areas. We are responding back to address your specific questions but want to be clear that this does not change that the tunnel still does not best address the needs of the I-5 bridge and the corridor.

Our team of engineers uses a variety of software tools, such as InRoads that you referenced. We have investigated your inquiry and were able to confirm an issue with the model. Duplication occurred in the model where some excavation quantities were counted more than once. We are working on making the correction in the report and uploading an updated version.

However, upon reviewing what you provided, it appears your representative diagram and excavation calculations at 87+00 do not account the construction need for laying back slopes during excavation (and the resulting surface property impacts), or the alternative to have temporary structural walls which come with an extremely high cost. As you know, one of these options must be accounted for to prevent the sides of the trench from caving in during construction of an ITT.

We conduct continuous quality checks and assurances to catch any errors that may arise with third party software and appreciate you flagging this. Quantity errors like this are not uncommon during the development of conceptual work. In a situation where plans are being constructed, the increasing level of detail completed as work advances would address potential calculation errors before moving to future steps.

As we have extensively detailed and documented, a tunnel still results in out-of-direction travel, cannot tie into existing connections, potentially causes safety concerns for active transportation, has significant environmental impacts, and has a higher estimated cost. While this error does result in a change in the quantity of excavation of material, it does not change the decision, reached with agency partners, not to pursue a tunnel as a solution for the I-5 corridor as the multiple factors considered remain true.

We appreciate your understanding.

Sincerely,

Interstate Bridge Replacement program

Communications Team

Tunnel Concept Assessment

Revision 2

Prepared by WSP USA and Parametrix Cost $100,000

IBR's email explains their incompetence:

Translation:

"Our team of engineers uses a variety of software tools … errors that may arise with third party software .."

We don't know how our software works.

"Duplication occurred in the model where some excavation quantities were counted more than once."

We only doubled 4 million cubic yards to 8 million cubic yards.

"Quantity errors like this are not uncommon during the development of conceptual work."

We make errors all the time, no big deal.

"In a situation where plans are being constructed, the increasing level of detail completed as work advances would address potential calculation errors before moving to future steps."

We would have found the error in the distance future.

"While this error does result in a change in the quantity of excavation of material, it does not change the decision, reached.."

We are just going to ignore our massive error.

Clark County Today link:

https://www.clarkcountytoday.com/opinion/opinion-interstate-bridge-replacement-program-incompetence-and-deception/

Opinion: Interstate Bridge Replacement Program incompetence and deception

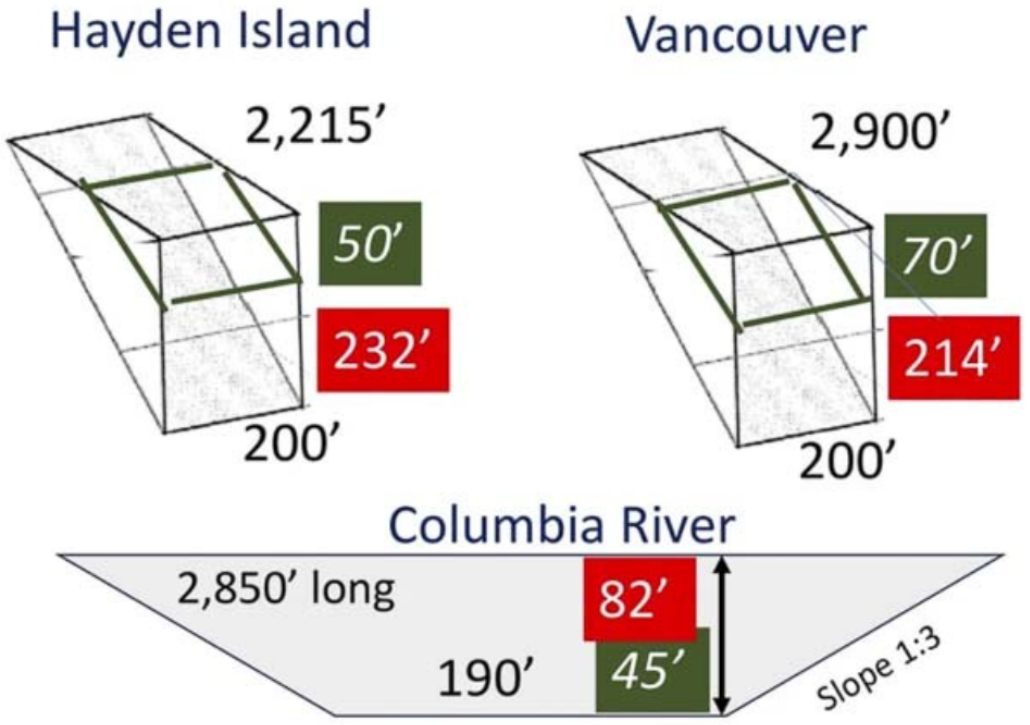
Ridiculous and misleading quantities that require 200′ excavations & dredge depths of 80′. Realistic quantities are 1/4 as large and costly.

Table 1. Preliminary Tunnel Excavation Quantities

Location	Upstream Alignment	Realistic
Hayden Island (on land)	1,800,000 yd^3	*200,000 cy*
Columbia River (in water)	3,800,000 yd^3	*1,400,000 cy*
Vancouver (on land)	2,300,000 yd^3	*500,000 cy*
Total	**7,900,000 yd^3**	*2,100,000 cy*
	100%	**27%**

Misleading

Interstate BRIDGE Replacement Program



On Mar 28, 2025, at 1:27 PM, Info <info@interstatebridge.org> wrote:

Hello,

The states have committed a combined $2 billion and the federal government has committed more than $2 billion to the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program, which underscores its regional and national significance. With this level of investment and ongoing collaboration from local, state and federal partners, the IBR Program is focused on delivering a project that meets the needs of our region for generations to come.

The IBR Program entered the first phase of the multi-step process for the Capital Investment Grant New Starts program in September 2023. This approval was an important first step in securing FTA grant funding but does not guarantee an award. Completing each step of the CIG process helps increase confidence that we will successfully receive funding at the end of the process. The Program currently anticipates requesting entry into the next step later this year. If the Program is successful in completing the remaining steps, the grant could be awarded in 2028.

We know that transportation projects nationwide and regionally are experiencing inflation, higher construction bids and changing market conditions. While we do not yet know how this will impact IBR's cost estimate, we do know that we will manage to the budget we have and deliver within the available funding. We are continuing to manage the identified risks to program costs and budget. The cost estimate will continue to be refined as we move through the environmental process and design becomes more detailed.

As we have shared during past meetings and responses, both bored and immersed tube tunnel design concepts have already been analyzed during previous efforts to replace the bridge, or by the IBR Program, and showed that they would result in multiple challenges with the present conditions in the Program area. Tunnel options were removed from consideration since they are not viable to address the constraints and requirements of the IBR Program.

A tunnel was eliminated from consideration due to multiple challenges that would make it infeasible to address the issues identified in the I-5 corridor surrounding the bridge, including:

- Significant out-of-direction travel for drivers, freight, transit users, bicyclists, and pedestrians
- The inability to tie into existing connections such as SR 14, Vancouver City Center, and Hayden Island
- Potential safety concerns for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Significant archeological, cultural, and environmental impacts

- Cost estimates for a tunnel are estimated to be approximately two times higher than cost estimates for a replacement bridge and approaches. This estimate does not include other highway, interchange, or high-capacity transit improvements that would be necessary.

As we've stated, the variety of challenges detailed in past analysis resulted in deciding, in conjunction with agency partners, to not advance the tunnel option and confirm a replacement bridge as the Modified Locally Preferred Alternative.

Respectfully,
IBR Communications Team

Comment Received: 4/11/2025
From: Sean Philbrook
Email Subject: ICC IBR Letter of Affirmation
Attachment Included: Yes (Attachment 3)

IBR Executive Steering Group –

On behalf of Identity Clark County's leadership, here is a letter of affirmation provided to IBR Program Administrator Greg Johnson as we complete the final months of planning ahead of a final supplemental EIS and a Record of Decision for replacing the interstate bridge and improving its influence area.

Our thanks extends to you for your active involvement in delivering this critical project as quickly as possible.

Please reply with questions.

Sean Philbrook, *Vice President of Programs*
Identity Clark County

Comment Received: 4/18/2025
From: Mark Miller
Email Subject: ESG Public Comment
Attachment Included: No

To whom it may concern/ individuals in responsible charge,
Based on the most recent designs for the Interstate Bridge replacement, it appears that it will require the removal of the Hurley building. The Hurley Building stands as a cornerstone of Vancouver's skyline, not only as a striking architectural landmark but also as a vital hub of economic activity and sustainability. Housing over 100 living wage jobs, it serves as a beacon of employment stability and prosperity within the community. Renowned for its modern design, the building integrates sustainable and efficient energy systems, exemplifying a commitment to environmental responsibility. With six diverse tenants, including a dynamic corporate events center hosting numerous gatherings, the Hurley Building is not only a symbol of progress but also a vibrant center of activity within the city.
Thank you.

Mark Miller

ATTACHMENT 1

CLARK COUNTY TODAY.com
Your News Source with Integrity

February 5, 2025

Letter: ‘IBR’s seismic lie’

Engineer Bob Ortblad claims the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program is misrepresenting the risk of the current I-5 bridges collapsing during an earthquake

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) is misrepresenting the risk of the current I-5 bridges collapsing during an earthquake.

The IBR claims that liquefaction will cause the I-5 bridges to fail, similar to the Niigata Bridge in Japan, which had only nine 52-foot-long, widely spaced piles per pier. In contrast, the I-5 bridges have 100-foot-long, tightly spaced wood piles (90 per pier) that compact the soil, making them resistant to liquefaction.

Bob Ortblad

A Japanese study has demonstrated that closely spaced wood piles enhance soil compaction and serve as a “fail-safe against liquefaction damage.” The IBR plans to use only six drilled shafts per pier, which will not effectively improve soil compaction. Additionally, the IBR’s bridge design may be less resilient to earthquakes than the current I-5 bridges. The IBR’s bridge trusses will be twice as long, twice as wide, fifty feet higher, and five times heavier. Its 120-foot piers will rest on only six drilled shafts (up to 250 feet long) in uncompacted soil.

The increased weight and height of the IBR bridge, combined with its support on uncompacted soil, may make it less resilient than the current bridges during an earthquake. Resilience is defined as the capacity to withstand or quickly recover from damage. Consequently, repairing any earthquake-induced damage to the existing bridges would be much faster than repairing a significantly larger and heavier IBR bridge.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA
Seattle

Bob Ortblad suggests elected officials and community leaders should take a field trip to Seattle's Chinatown

Editor's note: *Opinions expressed in this letter to the editor are those of the author alone and do not reflect the editorial position of ClarkCountyToday.com*

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) has intentionally concealed the impact of its bridge approaches by providing misleading graphics. The 16 legislators on the Joint Committee on the I-5 Bridge, the Vancouver City Council, and the Hayden Island Neighborhood Network should take a joint field trip to Seattle's Chinatown. This will help them visualize the IBR's devastating plans for Vancouver and Hayden Island.

Bob Ortblad

They should take Amtrak to Seattle's Union Station and walk five blocks up South Jackson St., then walk another 100 yards under an elevated I-5 freeway. Walk one more block to 12th Avenue South to visit Seattle's largest drug market.

In 1968, WSDOT cut I-5 through Seattle's historic Chinatown. For six decades the impacts of this concrete nightmare have been inflicted on Chinatown with no relief in sight.

The South Jackson St. underpass is about 100 yards long. The IBR plans a Columbia Way 130-yard underpass. Vancouver's $21 million "Main Street Promise" will end at an ugly underpass, and it will be a dark 200-yard walk under the freeway to get to the riverfront. The IBR plans three separate 100-yard underpasses for Hayden Island covering a dozen acres with a forest of concrete pillars.

The IBR fraudulently disqualified an immersed tunnel alternative design with no underpasses and that would enhance both riverbanks with waterfront parks.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA
Seattle, WA

ATTACHMENT 2

CLARK COUNTY TODAY.com
Your News Source with Integrity

February 5, 2025

Letter: ‘IBR’s seismic lie’

Engineer Bob Ortblad claims the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program is misrepresenting the risk of the current I-5 bridges collapsing during an earthquake

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) is misrepresenting the risk of the current I-5 bridges collapsing during an earthquake.

The IBR claims that liquefaction will cause the I-5 bridges to fail, similar to the Niigata Bridge in Japan, which had only nine 52-foot-long, widely spaced piles per pier. In contrast, the I-5 bridges have 100-foot-long, tightly spaced wood piles (90 per pier) that compact the soil, making them resistant to liquefaction.

Bob Ortblad

A Japanese study has demonstrated that closely spaced wood piles enhance soil compaction and serve as a “fail-safe against liquefaction damage.” The IBR plans to use only six drilled shafts per pier, which will not effectively improve soil compaction. Additionally, the IBR’s bridge design may be less resilient to earthquakes than the current I-5 bridges. The IBR’s bridge trusses will be twice as long, twice as wide, fifty feet higher, and five times heavier. Its 120-foot piers will rest on only six drilled shafts (up to 250 feet long) in uncompacted soil.

The increased weight and height of the IBR bridge, combined with its support on uncompacted soil, may make it less resilient than the current bridges during an earthquake. Resilience is defined as the capacity to withstand or quickly recover from damage. Consequently, repairing any earthquake-induced damage to the existing bridges would be much faster than repairing a significantly larger and heavier IBR bridge.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA
Seattle

Bob Ortblad suggests elected officials and community leaders should take a field trip to Seattle's Chinatown

Editor's note: *Opinions expressed in this letter to the editor are those of the author alone and do not reflect the editorial position of ClarkCountyToday.com*

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) has intentionally concealed the impact of its bridge approaches by providing misleading graphics. The 16 legislators on the Joint Committee on the I-5 Bridge, the Vancouver City Council, and the Hayden Island Neighborhood Network should take a joint field trip to Seattle's Chinatown. This will help them visualize the IBR's devastating plans for Vancouver and Hayden Island.

Bob Ortblad

They should take Amtrak to Seattle's Union Station and walk five blocks up South Jackson St., then walk another 100 yards under an elevated I-5 freeway. Walk one more block to 12th Avenue South to visit Seattle's largest drug market.

In 1968, WSDOT cut I-5 through Seattle's historic Chinatown. For six decades the impacts of this concrete nightmare have been inflicted on Chinatown with no relief in sight.

The South Jackson St. underpass is about 100 yards long. The IBR plans a Columbia Way 130-yard underpass. Vancouver's $21 million "Main Street Promise" will end at an ugly underpass, and it will be a dark 200-yard walk under the freeway to get to the riverfront. The IBR plans three separate 100-yard underpasses for Hayden Island covering a dozen acres with a forest of concrete pillars.

The IBR fraudulently disqualified an immersed tunnel alternative design with no underpasses and that would enhance both riverbanks with waterfront parks.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA
Seattle, WA

ATTACHMENT 3

IDENTITY CLARK COUNTY

Business Leaders Building Community

April 9, 2025

Mr. Greg Johnson
Program Administrator
Interstate Bridge Replacement Program
500 Broadway, Ste 200
Vancouver, WA 98660

Dear Administrator Johnson:

The business leaders group Identity Clark County wishes to express its appreciation to you and the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program team for your progress in advancing the planning effort to replace the outdated and unfit interstate bridge and improve its highly complex five-mile influence area. You have guided the IBR effort with a unique spirit of persistence and openness necessary to arrive at reasonable outcomes.

This program was restarted nine years ago thanks to four courageous legislators from southwest Washington, whose efforts gave way to a bi-state legislative committee, governors' commitments and formation of the IBR program. Through your leadership, this program has navigated a modified locally preferred alternative, funding commitments from federal, state and local sources, and a draft supplemental EIS.

Replacing an interstate bridge and seven interchanges in an already-built environment is highly challenging under the best of circumstances. This program is even more challenging because it involves two states, two DOTs, two cities, two planning agencies, two transit agencies, two ports, a national historic site and park, a mighty river, and a critical freight and commerce network that involves roads, rails, rivers, and runway airspace. It involves unusually complicated historic, environmental and seismic considerations. It also endured and adapted to a highly disruptive global pandemic.

Despite these challenges, you have brought the IBR program to the point where it is likely just months away from a final supplemental EIS submission and updated federal Record of Decision. We applaud your efforts to date and encourage your perseverance as more critical decisions are negotiated in these final months of pre-construction planning.

We remain fully supportive of this program and your leadership. Thank you for keeping us informed and involved along the way.

Sincerely,

***Mark Mantei**, Chair*

***Ron Arp**, President*

cc: ICC Board of Directors