

## PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR IBR EXECUTIVE STEERING GROUP

*Received between September 25, 2025 and March 13, 2026*

Comment Received: 10/7/2025

From: Bob Ortblad

Email Subject: ESG Public Comment

Attachment Included: Yes

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ESG Public Comment for Sept. 25, 2025 meeting.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA

Comment Received: 3/8/2026

From: Bob Ortblad

Email Subject: Public Comment for ESG March 13, 2026 Meeting

Attachment Included: No

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Public Comment for ESG March 13, 2026 Meeting

IBR's Gothic Finance Plan

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program recently present its finance plan to the Washington State Transportation Commission.

"Start construction now and pray for future funding."

Cologne's Cathedral took 600 years.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA

Seattle, WA



County Road Administration Board Room  
2404 Chandler Ct SW, Suite 240  
Olympia, WA 98502

Wednesday, February 18, 2026  
1:00 PM

Program Update

Carley Francis, Interim IBR Program Administrator  
Frank Green, IBR Assistant Program Administrator

### Next Steps in Developing the Cost Estimate

- ▶ Based on January 2026 U.S. Coast Guard decision, we are refining our Program cost and schedule, and expect to deliver an updated cost estimate in March.
- ▶ Identify the best path to start construction activities within the approximately \$5.5 billion in committed funding. **\$17.7 billion?**
- ▶ Update the construction sequencing and funding strategy to advance the first set of investments toward delivering the full Program, consistent with what is being studied within the federal review process. **Double Talk!**
- ▶ Continue our work to ensure a successful transition from environmental and planning to construction.

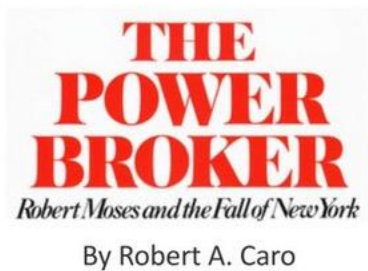


Feb. 2026



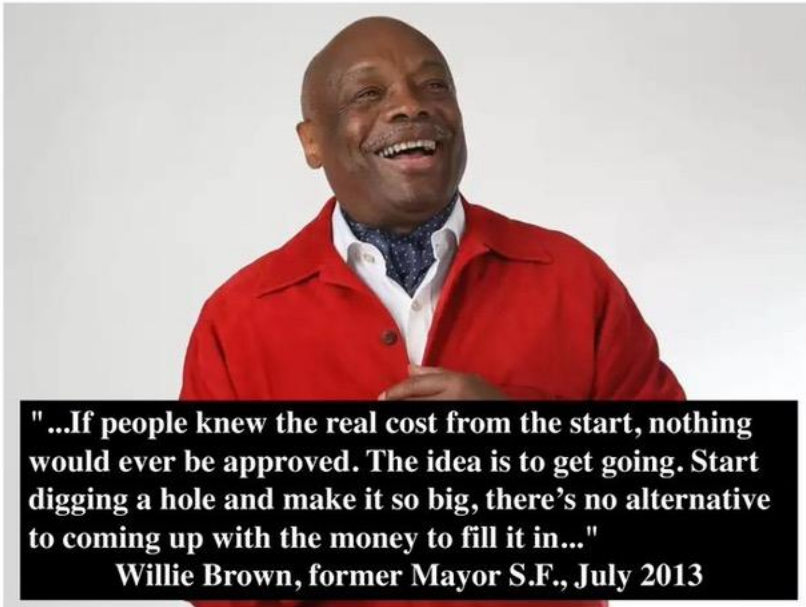


January 22, 2026



"But what if you didn't tell the officials how much the projects would cost? What if you let the legislators know about only a fraction of what you knew would be the projects' ultimate expense? Once they had authorized that small initial expenditure and you had spent it, they would not be able to avoid giving you the rest when you asked for it."

March 13, 2026



Comment Received: 3/9/2026

From: Bob Ortblad

Email Subject: Public Comment for ESG March 13, 2026 Meeting

Attachment Included: Yes

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Public Comment for ESG March 13, 2026 Meeting

Please accept the attached Public Comments.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA

Seattle, WA

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**Letter: The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program must solicit a design-build bid**

Date: Monday, October 6, 2025

## **KENNEDY TUNNEL**

*Antwerp 1969*

- **160,000 vehicles a day**
- **6 lanes**
- **1,936 feet long**

**Bob Ortblad believes an immersed tunnel alternative will be safer, have environmental benefits, be faster to build, be more earthquake resilient, and save billions of dollars**

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) plans to solicit design-build bids for a bridge and approaches. The Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Oversight Committee should require the IBR to also solicit design-build bids for an immersed tunnel. An immersed tunnel alternative will be safer, have environmental benefits, be faster to build, be more earthquake resilient, and save billions of dollars.

In July 2021, the IBR fraudulently disqualified an immersed tunnel with an error-filled “Tunnel Concept Assessment” report. One year later, in June 2022, the U.S. Coast Guard informed the IBR that the vertical navigation clearance must be 178 feet, and a tunnel or lift bridge must be evaluated. The IBR is ignoring the Coast Guard’s tunnel directive and continues to cite its fraudulent tunnel evaluation.

The IBR, Vancouver, and Portland should study Antwerp’s immersed tunnels. Twice, Antwerp rejected a bridge and selected an immersed tunnel. Vancouver, B.C., has also rejected a bridge design and is now building an eight-lane immersed tunnel under the Fraser River.

On a recent vacation to Belgium, I drove through Antwerp’s Kennedy Tunnel, a six-lane immersed tunnel. It was opened in 1969 and has 160,000 vehicles crossing a day. In 1963, an invitation to tender was issued for the construction of a bridge or a tunnel; technical experts decided in favor of a tunnel.

In 2009, the citizens of Antwerp approved a referendum, the first in the city’s history, that rejected a massive bridge design in favor of an immersed tunnel. Antwerp’s Scheldt Tunnel is currently under construction, and four of its eight segments have been placed. It will have six lanes with eight immersed segments, totaling 4,200 feet, which is 50% longer than the 2,700 feet needed for an I-5 Columbia River immersed tunnel. This tunnel is being built for \$670 million, a fraction of IBR’s \$3 billion for bridge and approaches.

The IBR's massive bridge design has a long list of problems that can be avoided with an immersed tunnel.

- Too low for the U.S. Coast Guard 116', required 178'
- Dangerously steep 3%, north-facing, elevated S-curve
- Rebuilt antiquated cloverleaves
- Steep 7% curved off ramp to SR-14
- A dozen 50-foot-wide bridge piers that alter river currents and harbor predatory fish
- 160 costly 10-foot diameter drilled shafts into an unpredictable river bottom
- 20 acres of massive, elevated bridge approaches that will devastate Fort Vancouver, downtown, and Hayden Island
- Icy elevated bridge approaches
- Elevated bridge approaches with earthquake risk.
- Noise and toxic pollution from approaches and the bridge
- Crosswinds on a high bridge
- Dangerous in river construction
- Unnecessary demolition of current bridges
- Demolition of the six-story Hurley Building
- Demolition of 43 homes
- Demolition of 35 businesses
- Half-mile-long spiral bike ramp
- 90-foot-high transit station
- 6 acres of Vancouver for parking for 1,270 vehicles

**Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA**  
*Seattle*

160,000 vehicles a day.



6 lanes

1,936 feet long

# Kennedy Tunnel

Antwerp 1969



# Antwerp Scheldt Tunnel 2025

**\$670 million**



8 elements x each 525 feet = **4,200** feet immersed



6 concrete elements x each 450 feet = **2,700** feet immersed



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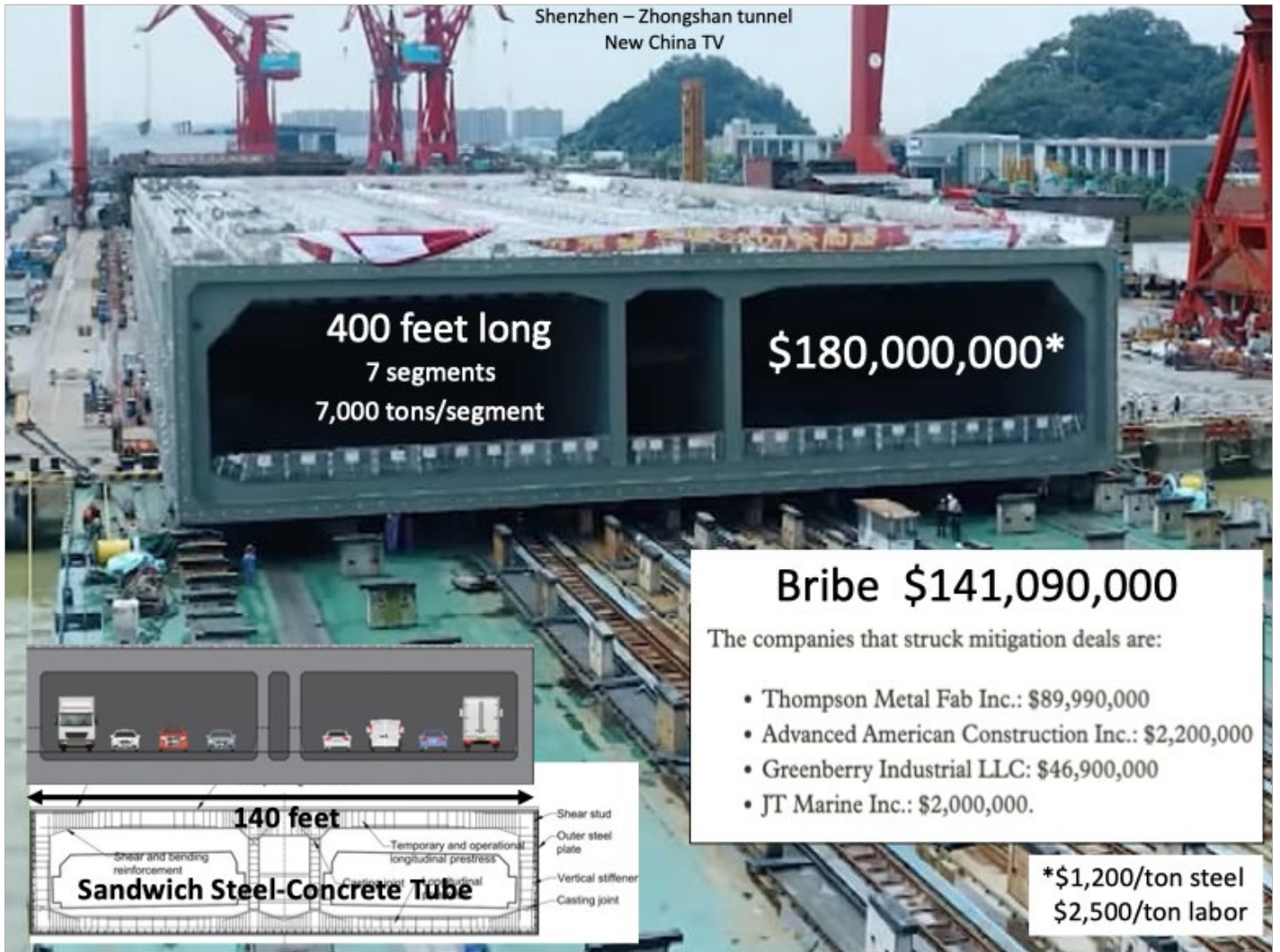
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February 5, 2026

## The Interstate Bridge Replacement's (IBR) [\\$141 million Bribe](#) can be better spent on **Sandwich Steel-Concrete Tubes**.

The Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) is bribing (\$141 million) upstream marine and metal fabrication firms for bridge clearance mitigation, reduced from 178 feet to 116 feet. Taxpayer money would be better spent on hiring the four upstream firms to fabricate seven 400-foot-long sandwich steel-concrete tubes for an immersed tunnel. Seven tubes could be fabricated for about \$180 million and could span 2,800 feet across the Columbia River.

The IBR's "[Tunnel Concept Assessment](#)" (July 14, 2021), prepared by WSP engineers, [fraudulently disqualified](#) an immersed tunnel alternative. The report completely ignored a "Sandwich Steel-Concrete Immersed Tunnel" design alternative that can save hundreds of millions. Using existing yards, steel tubes can be fabricated by firms like [Thompson Metal Fab](#), [Greenberry Industrial](#), and [Vigor Marine](#). WSP engineers claimed construction of a new [casting basin](#) costing hundreds of millions would be needed for the casting of concrete tunnel tubes. WSP also more than doubled the necessary cubic yards of excavation and dredging. WSP falsely claims a tunnel will be twice the cost of a bridge. Public disclosure requests forced two revisions that cut the cubic yards estimate in half and added a professional engineer stamp that is required by law. The IBR never announced or circulated revised reports. Eight agencies approved IBR's locally preferred alternative design based the incorrect report. WSP is the IBR's General Engineering Consultant (GEC) and has been overpaid \$90 million for poor design and management that has increased IBR's consultant budget from [\\$44 million to \\$295 million](#). WSP should be terminated.



WBS #	Program Component Description	Base Costs (less risk allowances)	2025 Costs with Risk and Contingency	Year of Expenditure Costs (YOE)
4	Approaches	\$1,773,749,000	\$2,077,461,000	\$2,775,437,000
5	Columbia River Bridge	\$1,862,195,060	\$2,177,271,071	\$2,571,234,084
6	Columbia River Bridge Removal	\$295,670,000	\$340,939,000	\$488,389,000

The IBR estimates \$2.8 billion for bridge approaches, \$2.6 billion for a bridge, and \$488 million to remove the current bridges. Building an immersed tunnel upstream of the current bridges and preserving the current bridges for local traffic and shared use path has the potential to cut a new I-5 crossing's cost in half.

The IBR has exaggerated the [seismic risk](#) of the current bridges.

Examples of Sandwich Steel-Concrete Immersed Tunnels:

- The Chinese [Shenzhen – Zhongshan immersed tunnel](#) was completed in 2024 using a steel-concrete sandwich design. It is nine miles long, with 32 tubes, and has eight traffic lanes.
- The [Uminomori Tunnel](#) in Tokyo Port was completed in 2020 using a steel-concrete sandwich design. It has four traffic lanes and was built with seven 440-foot tubes totaling 3,080.

A [Nippon Steel report](#) titled “Development of Sandwich-Structure Submerged Tunnel Tube Production Method” explains in detail the history of several Japanese immersed tunnels.

An I-5 immersed tunnel using a sandwich design with eight traffic lanes will need seven 400-foot tubes requiring about 50,000 tons of steel. These tubes can be fabricated by local companies with local labor for about \$180 million. Deduct IBR’s \$140 bribe, and the net cost is \$40 million. It will take a few \$100 millions more to fill these tubes with concrete, transport them two miles, sink & connect in a dredged trench, connect to approaches, install ventilation, and fire protection. The total cost an immersed tunnel could half the IBR’s \$2,571,224,084 bridge.

Saving

- No demolition of current bridges
- Preserve current approaches and bridges for local traffic & shared use path
- No drilled shafts (96) and temporary piles (1,775)
- No in river construction of bridge piers, columns, and truss spans

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA

January 17, 2026

## Interstate Bridge Replacement \$13.6 billion estimate is too low!

The [Willamette Weekly](#) recently reported that for six months, the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) hid an estimate that doubled the project cost from \$6 billion to \$13.6 billion. This shocking \$13.6 billion estimate is probably too low by billions.

The [SR 520 Portage Bay Bridge and Lid](#) project was bid in November 2023 at \$1.4 billion and was 70% above the engineers' estimate. [Skanska](#), the design-build contractor, attributes about 80% of this cost — approximately \$1.1 billion — to the new bridge itself. Notably, the Portage Bay Bridge is nearly the same length as the proposed I-5 Bridge design and is supported by similar large-diameter drilled shafts. Furthermore, this bridge is being constructed in a shallow, weather-protected cove that is only 10 feet deep.

In contrast, the design for the I-5 Bridge is twice as large and situated in a more challenging location affected by tides, currents, and strong winds. The IBR bridge design is more than twice as wide (239' vs. 114'), with piers four times higher. (100' vs. 25') The bridge also has twice the number of drilled shafts. (96 vs. 50) The IBR shafts are also longer (250' vs. 200') and have a higher probability of hitting cobbles and boulders as they are drilled.

The IBR needs a 200,000 pounds oscillator to drill 10-foot diameter shafts 250 feet through unpredictable Columbia River sand, cobbles, and boulders. Skanska is using a more mobile, less expensive vibratory hammer that is ten times lighter than IBR's oscillator. The bottom of Portage Bay is a predictable soft sediment; over a hundred shafts have been completed just east in Montlake and Lake Washington.

In 2012, the Columbia River Crossing's total estimated cost was [\\$3.5 billion](#). The 250-foot, 10-foot diameter shafts were estimated to cost \$1.25 million each, \$5,000 per foot. A \$4.2 million test shaft was drilled on Hayden Island by [Malcolm Drilling](#), and it failed on the first attempt.

**Boulders**



**Oscillator 200,000 pounds**

**\$1.1billion**



**SE COLUMBIA WAY**

**239' wide  
2,860' long**

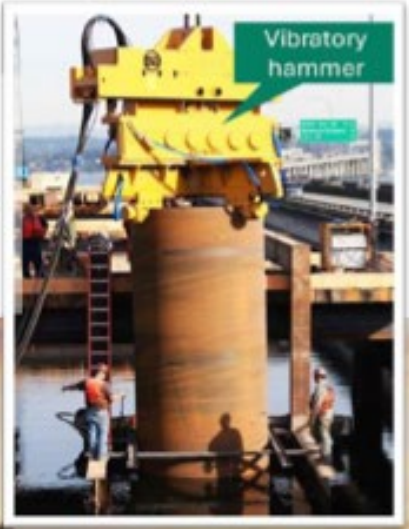
96 drilled shafts  
10' dia. 250' long  
100' average pier

**Wind Tide & Current**

IBR graphic

**114' wide  
2,740' long**

50 drilled shafts  
12' dia. 200 long  
25' average pier



Vibratory hammer



**\$1.1billion**

*Portage Bay - protected*

WSDOT graphic

The current IBR estimated cost of \$13.6 billion is a 288% increase from the CRC's \$3.5 billion, but the IBR estimated cost of drilled shafts (\$129,586,650) has only increase 17% from \$5,000 to \$5,845 per foot. If a 288% increase is applied to drilled shafts, their cost will balloon from about \$129 million to \$632 million.

How many items in IBR's current \$13.6 estimate need to be doubled or tripled?

The SR 520 Portage Bay's Bridge cost is \$1.1 billion. By every measure, the IBR bridge design is twice as large and is a much more difficult construction site, therefore it should cost about twice as much, \$2.2 billion. (\$3.3 billion risk-adjusted). However, IBR's base cost bridge estimate is only \$1.1 billion. (not including approaches).

An [Immersed Tunnel](#) alternative was [fraudulently disqualified](#) by the IBR. An Immersed Tunnel needs no drilled shafts; it is supported by buoyancy. A tunnel could save about \$600 million without shafts, [\\$140 million](#) by not bribing upstream businesses, and \$300 million by not demolishing current bridges. The tunnel can also be built faster with less environmental impact.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA

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February 2, 2026

## British Columbia's new immersed tunnel can solve Interstate Bridge Replacement's (IBR) \$17.7 billion problem.

British Columbia's "[Highway 99 Tunnel Program](#)" is building a new eight-lane immersed tunnel under the Fraser River to replace the 68-year-old four-lane Massey Immersed Tunnel. The B.C. tunnel and approaches is estimated to cost \$2.8 billion (US). A similar I-5 immersed tunnel and approaches should cost no more than \$2.8 billion. An I-5 Columbia River immersed tunnel would be 600 feet shorter, 35 feet shallower, and about 40% smaller overall.

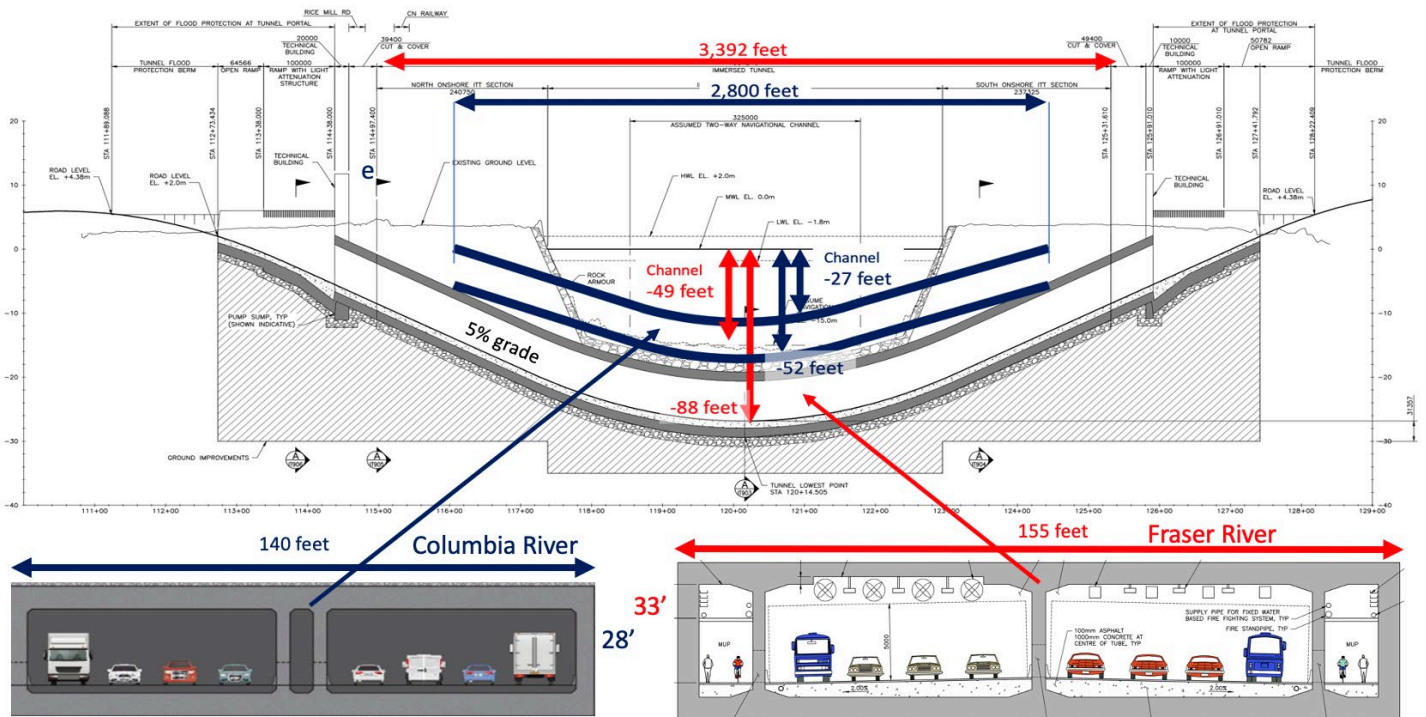


transportation  
investment  
corporation

**\$2.8 billion (US)  
Tunnel & Approaches**



17,350,080 CF 100% Fraser River Tunnel  
 10,976,000 CF 63% Columbia River Tunnel



The IBR Program has a costly \$17.7 billion design that requires five miles of freeway widening, the demolition of the current bridges and seven interchanges, and then their replacement. WA & OR can save billions and increase traffic capacity by keeping the current bridges and interchanges for local traffic and diverting interstate traffic through a new eight-lane Columbia River I-5 immersed tunnel with dedicated bus lanes. The IBR has lied about the [seismic risk](#) to the current bridges.

WSP is IBR's General Engineering Consultant. WSP prepared the "[Tunnel Concept Assessment](#)" (July 14, 2021) that fraudulently disqualified an immerse tunnel by doubling the require dredging and excavation cubic yards (8 million), and ignoring a cost saving [sandwich steel-concrete](#) design alternative that can be fabricated in local shipyards. The report listed 13 professional engineers, but none stamped the report as required by state law. WSP should have retracted this report and refunded its \$100,000 fee. Public disclosure requests forced two revisions that cut the cubic yards estimate in half (4 million) and added a professional engineer stamp. WSP never evaluated a sandwich steel-concrete design or circulated revised reports. Eight agencies approved IBR's locally preferred alternative bridge design based on the original incorrect report.

Preserving the current bridges for local traffic and a shared use path, plus the construction of an I-5 immersed tunnel, will protect Fort Vancouver, Vancouver's downtown and riverfront public market, and Hayden Island from the impacts of IBR's massive, elevated freeway.

British Columbia plans to construct an immersed tunnel in five years. The IBR Project is projected to take 15 years.

Bob Ortblad MSCE, MBA