



Neighbors For A Better Crossing, Inc

BEWARE OF IBR'S TROJAN "GIFT" HORSE

Urgent Questions Demand Answers Before the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Project Proceeds

The Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) project, led by Greg Johnson, proposes a \$8–\$12 billion mega bridge to replace the historic Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River. However, critical concerns about cost, transparency, and design—coupled with TriMet's financial distress and questionable motives—raise serious doubts about its viability. Residents of Oregon and Washington deserve clarity before this project moves forward.

What's Inside IBR's \$8–\$12 Billion Trojan Gift Horse?

The proposed mega bridge comes with significant drawbacks:

- **Massive Public Debt and Taxes:** The project's escalating costs could burden Oregon and Washington residents with unprecedented financial obligations, exacerbated by TriMet's dire financial situation.
- **Prohibitive Tolls:** Commuters may face \$10–\$15 tolls each way or \$20–\$30 round trip, impacting affordability, especially for low-income communities.
- **Minimal Traffic Relief:** The design offers only four lanes each way, matching the congested Glenn Jackson I-205 Bridge. One lane is designated for HOV/bus use, leaving just three lanes for general traffic--identical to the 3-lane Interstate Bridge.
- **Prematurely Destroying a Historic Landmark:** the [Interstate Bridge](#) is listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and that's still very structurally strong with an estimated 70 years or more of service life remaining, will be destroyed!
- **Environmental and Aesthetic Harm:** The IBR intends to pave a huge scar of [18-lanes & 1-lightrail track](#) across the middle of Hayden Island, disrupting its unique ecosystem and community ambiance.
- **Illegal Camping Magnet:** The bridge structure's design will attract [illegal encampments](#), increasing trash, graffiti, theft & vandalism, and increased threats to public safety in Vancouver and on Hayden Island.

TriMet's Financial Crisis and the IBR's True Motive

- **TriMet's Bankruptcy Risk:** TriMet is in severe financial distress, having lost approximately \$900 million last year. Even a proposed five-fold increase in Oregon's statewide jobs tax would not resolve their deficit, as documented by John Charles and the Cascade Policy Institute for over a decade.
- **Light Rail Over Bridge:** The IBR's \$2 billion transit component, costing over \$1 billion per mile, prioritizes extending TriMet's MAX Yellow Line into Vancouver, suggesting the project is a light rail expansion in search of a bridge.
- **Burden on Washington Taxpayers:** TriMet is seeking to offset its financial woes by imposing costs on Washington residents. The C-TRAN Board recently voted to commit Clark County taxpayers to potentially millions in annual taxes to cover light rail operations, despite earlier resistance. A proposed 0.1–0.2% sales tax increase for Clark County residents is under consideration.
- **Service Cuts Amid Expansion:** In July, TriMet announced \$300 million in cost cuts, including an 18% reduction in MAX services (notably affecting the low-ridership Yellow and Orange Lines) and an 8% reduction in bus services—one of the largest cuts in its history. Weekday ridership data shows the Yellow Line (8,166 riders) and Orange Line (5,025 riders) significantly trail the Blue (27,182) and Red (17,408) Lines, suggesting elimination of these lines could achieve the needed reductions responsibly.

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Examining IBR's Claims

Greg Johnson's justifications for the mega bridge challenge evidence and expert analysis:

- Traffic Congestion Misrepresentation:**
 - **Claim:** Johnson asserts the new bridge will relieve I-5 congestion.
 - **Reality:** IBR's proposed 4-lane bridge mirrors the Glenn Jackson 4-lane I-205 Bridge, which suffers daily congestion. Worse yet is IBR's plan to designate one lane as a HOV/bus lane, making their bridge even less capable. With only three (3) full traffic lanes during peak hours (as the 3-lane I-5 bridge has now), IBR's mega bridge will not solve I-5 congestion. Ominously, the IBR predicts southbound AM travel times will double by 2045-- from 29 minutes today to at least 60 minutes, and while 46% of vehicles travel at freeway speeds today, only 27 percent will travel at freeway speeds in 2045. Traffic congestion will be far worse after the expenditure of \$8 to \$12 billion.
- Seismic Concerns Overstated:**
 - **Claim:** Johnson states the Interstate Bridge does not meet earthquake standards and requires replacement.
 - **Reality:** A 2006 Columbia River Crossing (CRC) engineering evaluation confirmed the bridge's structural integrity and seismic retrofit feasibility. No recent evidence supports immediate replacement, necessitating an updated independent evaluation. Seismic experts at the M9 Project in Seattle predict only a 10-14 percent chance of a mega quake happening in the next 50 years, so there's an 86% to 90% chance that an 8.0 + [Cascadia Subduction Zone](#) earthquake will not happen in the next 50 years.
- Dismissal of Immersed Tube Tunnel (ITT):**
 - **Claim:** Johnson labels an ITT a "myth" due to connectivity issues with I-5 and SR-14.
 - **Reality:** ITT experts confirm its viability, with designs that connect seamlessly to I-5 and SR-14 while supporting light rail, bike, and pedestrian paths. Unlike a 4-lane mega bridge, an ITT is expandable for additional lanes, and is cost-effective (\$3-\$3.5 billion) and quicker to build (4 years vs. 15 years).
- Flawed Tunnel Assessment:**
 - IBR's "Tunnel Concept Assessment" used to dismiss building an ITT, contains errors including a 400% overestimation of dredging costs and flawed connectivity assumptions. It was certified by Robert Turton, who's bio describes Turton as a bridge engineer with no tunnel experience, raising questions about the assessment's credibility.
- Environmental and Economic Risks:**
 - The mega bridge requires 160 steel support shafts, drilled over four years, risking significant fish and marine life loss due to high-vibration drilling. A [2013 Malcolm Drilling Co.](#) report highlights similar challenging riverbed conditions as seen in the Abernathy Bridge's cost overruns (3-4 times over budget). An ITT avoids these issues by resting in a dredged riverbed channel, making it more earthquake resistant and environmentally friendly.
- U.S. Coast Guard Rejection:**
 - In 2023, the [U.S. Coast Guard rejected IBR's bridge designs](#) that provided only 116 feet of vessel clearance, compared to the existing bridge's 178 feet. That 62ft less clearance causes considerable expense for marine operators to retrofit or change craft. An ITT eliminates clearance issues and gains immediate Coast Guard approval. To date, no new permit request has been submitted to the Coast Guard, and a Record of Decision from the DOT required for federal approval is months if not a year or more away, contradicting Johnson's early 2026 timeline.
- Impact on Hayden Island:**
 - Hayden Island's unique lifestyle and ecological significance are threatened by a mega bridge, which would disrupt recreational access, wildlife habitats, and the Jantzen Beach Shopping Center's 10,000 daily visitors. An ITT preserves the island's character. It also avoids [significant property displacements](#) in Vancouver and on Hayden Island (43-76 residential units, 36-39 businesses, potential displacement of 35 floating homes, and one public site).

A Costly Betrayal?

The IBR's lack of transparency and questionable decisions suggest a potential misuse of public funds:

- **Cost Escalation:** Initially estimated at \$3.2 - \$4.8 billion, then \$5-\$7.5 billion, the project could reach \$8-\$12 billion, rivaling the cost of the world's largest ITT-- the 11-mile [Fehmarnbelt ITT](#) (\$9 billion), or the [U.S. Navy's Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier](#) (\$13 billion). Through June, IBR has spent \$235 million, with \$196 million paid to consultant WSP, raising concerns about financial oversight.
- **Hidden Agendas:** Critics suspect the IBR uses congestion as a pretext to justify tolls and fund TriMet's failing light rail by extending it to Vancouver. Johnson told the C-TRAN Board in June that the project would proceed regardless of C-TRAN's funding, hinting at alternative funding sources, possibly higher taxes or tolls.
- **Federal Funding Uncertainty:** Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnerny-Ogle recently lobbied the Trump Administration for \$3.1 billion in federal funding, critical for the project's survival. Without it, the light rail-focused bridge is unfeasible.
- **Lack of Oversight:** The IBR has resisted transparency, delaying budget updates, denying public records requests, and limiting expert testimony. A C-TRAN board member was pressured to resign for questioning the project.

A Better Solution: Immersed Tube Tunnel (ITT)

An ITT offers a superior alternative:

- **Cost Savings:** Estimated at \$3–\$3.5 billion, saving billions compared to the mega bridge.
- **Traffic Efficiency:** An [Immersed Tube Tunnel \(ITT\)](#) can solve I-5 traffic congestion with 4-lanes by directing thru-traffic through the ITT while continuing to use the I-5 bridge to provide local traffic and bike/pedestrian access to and between Hayden Island & Vancouver. Since an ITT is expandable with extra modules, additional traffic lanes can be added as needed.
- **Preservation:** Saves the historic Interstate Bridge which continues to support local traffic, bike, & pedestrian access between Vancouver & Hayden Island, reducing the traffic through the ITT. [Saving the I-5 bridge will also provide a vital fourth \(4th\) crossing for emergency evacuations](#) should a major earthquake impact [Portland's Critical Infrastructure](#), as detailed in Multnomah Co's [Risk of Earthquake-Induced Hazardous Materials Release](#) report.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Minimizes ecological disruption and avoids years of fish & marine life kill from intensive drilling.
- **Accessibility:** Keeps transit stations at ground level, eliminating the mega bridge's 95-foot-high Vancouver station and steep half-mile bike & pedestrian access ramps.
- **Minimizes or eliminates the need for tolling on I-5:** [Tolls on I-5](#) will place an extreme financial burden on local residents, businesses, commuters, and others depending on the crossing for work, shopping, medical treatment, and restaurants. A 2-way toll of \$20 for a commuter each day who's a job is located across the river, will cost \$100/week or \$5,200/yr, and possibly their job. Tolling on I-5 will also likely push traffic toward the already traffic congested I-205/ Glen Jackson Bridge.
- **Proven Success:** ITTs are used globally, including Vancouver, Canada's [Fraser River Project](#) (\$3 billion USD), which is very comparable to our own Columbia River I-5 crossing. The Fraser River Project is toll free.

Call to Action

The IBR's mega bridge threatens fiscal irresponsibility, environmental harm, and the loss of a historic landmark. Oregon and Washington residents deserve better:

1. **Demand an Independent Review:** An impartial committee of engineering and financial experts must scrutinize IBR's management, cost estimates, and transparency.
2. **Conduct a New Seismic Evaluation:** An updated, independent assessment of the Interstate Bridge's structural and seismic condition is essential before any demolition.
3. **Investigate ITT Viability:** Engage tunnel experts to reassess an ITT's feasibility, addressing IBR's flawed assessment.
4. **Protect Communities:** Mitigate the mega bridge's impact on Hayden Island and Vancouver, preserving their unique character and avoiding displacements.
5. **Engage the Media:** Investigative reporters must "follow the money" to ensure accountability and prevent fraud in this multi-billion-dollar project.

Conclusion

IBR's mega bridge, driven by TriMet's financial desperation and questionable claims, risks becoming the Pacific Northwest's most costly mistake that will offer little added traffic capacity to that available today by the existing Interstate Bridge. An Immersed Tube Tunnel offers a cost-effective, sustainable, and community-friendly solution that preserves the historic Interstate Bridge and addresses traffic needs. Elected officials and residents must demand accountability from Greg Johnson and the IBR to protect public funds and our region's heritage.

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