

EQUITY ADVISORY GROUP (EAG) MEETING #42

Date and Time: Monday, December 16, 2024, 5:30pm to 7:00pm

Location: Zoom Webinar and YouTube Livestream

Number of concurrent YouTube viewers: 4

WELCOME

Dr. Roberta Hunte, EAG Facilitator, welcomed EAG members to the meeting, explained how to view closed captions, gave instructions for public input, and previewed the meeting agenda.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Greg Johnson, Program Administrator, provided Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) program updates. Greg shared that the public comment period for the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) has concluded with over 3,400 submissions and each submission may have more than one comment. He stated that the IBR team is in the process of categorizing comments and intends to release a summary in early 2025 of all the comments, questions, and answers that were received, which will be featured in the Final SEIS. The Final SEIS is expected to release in late summer or early fall 2025.

Greg shared that the program continues to meet with Neighborhood Associations, where a lot of concerns are related to real estate and property acquisition, so the program is meeting with them to explain that process. The program has also met with the Metropolitan Mayors Consortium in the Portland area, the Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute to discuss building materials, and did a presentation to an organization called Leadership Clark County. Greg stated that outreach will not stop simply because the public comment period is over. Greg also shared that the Bi-State Tolling Subcommittee continues to meet and that there is a Bi-State Legislative Committee meeting tomorrow, December 17th, and he encouraged EAG members to listen if they can. Greg shared that the meeting should be very informational, as it will be attended by legislators from both Oregon and Washington.

Greg stated that the team is focused on preparing for the Final SEIS process. He shared that he anticipates that process to last 9 to 10 months, culminating in the Final SEIS document being completed. After the Final SEIS is submitted, the program anticipates a Record of Decision being issued about a month later. The Record of Decision is the final step before construction begins. Greg stated that shovels are anticipated to go into the ground at the end of next year.

TOLLING UPDATE AND DISCUSSION

Meghan Hodges, IBR Community and Government Relations Manager, presented an update on tolling to the group. Meghan shared that the goal of the tolling is to pay back a \$1.24 billion loan for construction and

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provide funding for operations and maintenance costs. It is also expected to improve traffic flow and reliability in the corridor, as tolling is expected to influence how some people choose to travel. Meghan reviewed the total cost estimate for the project, which is \$5 to \$7.5 billion, so the \$1.24 billion is only one piece of the total finance plan.

Meghan reminded the group of the Bi-State Tolling Subcommittee's authority and scope of work. The Subcommittee recommends toll rates and policies to their respective full Commissions for rate-setting and review, including any discounts and exemptions. The Subcommittee also makes sure that the toll rates comply with state laws and requirements of the loan that will partially fund construction.

Meghan shared the other considerations the Subcommittee developed, including safe and efficient mobility, equity, environmental quality, and economic vitality. Meghan explained that these considerations were created to help the Subcommittee be mindful of what is needed beyond the regulatory requirements. Meghan reminded the group of their feedback that was provided in a previous meeting on the topic, showing sentiment across the Community and Equity Advisory Groups. The takeaways from that outreach informed the Subcommittee's development of those considerations. Meghan expressed that some of the feedback from the advisory groups, such as a preference for a consistent rate for pre- and post-construction, surprised the Subcommittee and that it informed the decisions moving forward.

Meghan explained that the Level 3 investment-grade toll traffic and revenue analysis is required to qualify for a loan. It is also necessary for the Transportation Commissions to set the toll rates. Meghan explained that the Level 1 step is a high-level examination of possible ways to use toll rates, but it is not very specific. Meghan stated that Level 1 was completed during the Columbia River Crossing project, and did not need to be repeated for the IBR program. Meghan explained that the IBR program started at the Level 2 analysis, which was completed last year, and it analyzed 11 different toll rate options. Those options were narrowed to 4 options for deeper analysis.

Meghan provided an overview of the Level 3 analysis completed so far, including: a review of the Level 2 analysis results in March-April 2024, identifying preliminary Level 3 scenario recommendations in May-June 2024, then advancing the recommendations to the Transportation Commissions in July, which they approved on October 1st for further analysis. At the time, the Commissions also directed the Subcommittee to identify an approach to analyzing a tribal discount or exemption.

Meghan reiterated the importance of the Level 3 analysis. She explained that it provides detailed information that is sufficient to inform the toll rate-setting, determine whether the program qualifies for a loan, understand traffic patterns and forecasts, determine whether the toll rate will meet financial obligations, and obtain an "investment-grade" credit rating to secure funding.

Meghan then showed the four different scenarios that were adopted for Level 3 analysis. The scenarios included information about tolling cost for standard vehicles, trucks, weekend tolls, escalation rate, and a Low-Income Toll Program. Meghan explained that a low-income toll program is not in the current tolling structure, so the implementation timeline is still being determined. Meghan added that all four scenarios assume a variable rate toll, meaning rates that change according to peak travel times.

EAG member: Thank you for this breakdown. You mentioned that WSDOT will implement the customer service and that's the reason why the timeline is unclear, or did I misunderstand?

Meghan responded that last year, the initial plan was that ODOT would be the tolling administrator. At that time, ODOT was already planning a low-income tolling program. She explained that when the tolling administration switched to WSDOT, the timeline for implementation became unclear because WSDOT needs more time to assess how to implement it. Meghan explained that the desire is to do so as soon as possible but understanding that changing the administration to WSDOT created a need for more time to plan.

EAG member: How do these rates compare to comparable projects in the country?

Meghan responded that the bi-state nature of the project makes it difficult to compare it to other projects. Meghan shared that the Takoma Narrows Bridge owned by WSDOT has a toll rate of \$5.50, which covers both ways.

Meghan shared that the Subcommittee is also analyzing a Tribal Toll Exemption/Discount. The Subcommittee is engaging in formal government-to-government consultation, and the tribes have expressed interest in a toll exemption or discount. The Subcommittee's analysis will include two options, which differ by the scope of what tribes to include as eligible. The analysis will study both a 50% discount and full exemption.

Meghan shared information on the upcoming rate-setting process. The Oregon and Washington State Transportation Commissions will go through separate rate-setting processes, with the goal to hold decision-making meetings jointly. The commissions will also coordinate community engagement through the Bi-State Subcommittee, who will also lead the tribal consultation. The IBR team will work with the Commissions and continue to provide updates to the IBR advisory groups.

Meghan provided links to receive updates on the Subcommittee's work and links to their websites where recordings of their previous meetings can be found. Meghan stated that Level 3 analysis is anticipated to conclude in Spring 2025, and that a proposed toll rate will be released for public input at that time. Tribal consultation and community engagement will continue through Summer 2025, with toll rates and policies expected to be adopted in Fall 2025.

EAG member: There's been a lot of reporting on ODOT's budget deficit, and it sounds serious. I think a lot of people fear that the toll may escalate not because of the cost of the bridge, but because of that deficit. Is there anything by way of statute or implementation plan that would provide assurance or protection that the tolls are dedicated to the bridge and the bridge alone?

Meghan responded that in Washington, the law states that toll revenue collected on a facility must be reinvested on the facility that it is collecting it. She stated that the Oregon Transportation Commission has committed to saying that the tolls collected in Oregon would go back to the facility that collects them. She also explained that there is federal statute that states that if you are rehabilitating or replacing a bridge, and implementing a tolling program to fund that project, then that tolling revenue must be applied only to that project.

EAG member: That is helpful. There seems to be a lot of misinformation about this right now on social media.

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Meghan thanked the member for bringing that to the program's attention. She shared that she was aware of ODOT's budget deficit but reiterated that tolling is being used for the bridge as a reliable funding stream to support the facility.

EAG member: The next legislative session in Oregon is in January. If something were to be done at that level, that is the next opportunity, and I believe the next wouldn't be for quite a while.

Meghan responded that over the years since Oregon first introduced tolling legislation, there have been modifications to that legislation. Meghan stated that she knows that the ODOT deficit will be a topic of conversation at the next legislative session, but that she could not speak to any other plans around tolling legislation. Meghan shared that the team can review existing Oregon laws, and any developments over the years, that could provide assurance to the public that toll revenue collected on the bridge would fund only the bridge.

EAG member: This could also be an opportunity to highlight equity issues around pricing.

Meghan responded that the Oregon legislature and Transportation Commission have made clear that a low-income program should be implemented, but more work is needed to identify the timeframe for implementation. Meghan shared that the Transportation Commissioners, who are the decision-makers, have vocalized strong sentiment in support of a low-income program. She said more than one Commissioner has stated they will not set a toll rate if it does not include a low-income toll program.

EAG member: You said there are tolling programs that only charge one-way. Is that being studied as an option for this bridge?

Meghan responded that that scenario is not being studied for the I-5 Bridge. Meghan explained that in scenarios where people are charged one-way, it is because it is a single point of entry and exit, such as an island, so it is a roundtrip price charged once. Meghan shared that the program area as a lot of one way through trips, and has multiple bridges and routes around the area, so it would not be fair to charge a two-way toll for people who may use a different means of leaving the area after they enter.

INFORM/CONSULT SESSION ON IBR COMMUNITY BENEFITS: MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Emilee Thomas-Peralta, Equity Team, led the discussion. Emilee explained that the Community Benefits Advisory Group (CBAG) is meeting later this week to refine this set of recommendations and EAG's input will be provided during that discussion. Emilee encouraged members to send feedback after the meeting if they need more time to consider the recommendations. Emilee explained that this is related to Tranche 3 of the recommendations, as EAG has already provided feedback for Tranches 1 and 2.

Emilee shared the recommendations for Mobility and Accessibility, including:

- Explore creative solutions to ensure accessibility in the connections from multimodal trail to transit stations at the elevated station and Hayden Island, including elevator, ramp, and stairs.

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- Enhance multimodal connectivity to trails, including but not limited to, the 40-mile loop, Vancouver waterfront, and the North Marine Drive interchange, making them intuitive to traverse for all users.
- Enhance safety for multimodal users crossing the bridge by incorporating protective features into the design, with special considerations for medical issues and suicide prevention.
- Design Team to consider integration of acoustic enhancements in designs to better accommodate individuals with visual impairments ensuring path support.
- Provide shelters, water, and bathrooms for different users of the multi-use paths, with a focus on those using paths for both recreation and essential travel.

Emilee also shared the recommendations for Physical Design, including:

- Consider the inclusion of additional connectors such as Fourth Plain, 23rd Avenue, and 49th Avenue to ensure all areas are connected.
- Create a community garden near the waterfront as part of the bridge design to serve as a resource for local residents.
- Design Team to consider advanced signage on the bridge, including digital displays along the shared-use path displaying relevant information and real-time updates, enhancing the sense of place.

Emilee then opened the space for discussion, asking the EAG members if the recommendations are aligned with the Equity Framework Principles.

EAG member: I think these discussions are very helpful. When you see these recommendations distilled, it's hard to encompass all the things that are important to equity, to the CBAG, and to the community. The accessibility issues are critical. Really thinking about how to get from the ground to the bridge is going to be challenging to a lot of people with limited mobility. I think some of that is unresolved.

Emilee replied that this is indeed very important and that the CBAG is trying to apply empathy in having these rich discussions to consider accessibility.

EAG member: I went through the recommendations with my team, and we have a lot of feedback. Can you elaborate on how this is going above and beyond?

Emilee responded that a lot of research has gone into understanding standard and best practices, including ADA compliance. She stated that the team is committed to going above those minimum standards. Emilee highlighted the recommendation for acoustic materials as one that is more creative.

EAG member: When you're talking about exploring creative solutions for the elevated stations, are you talking about the Waterfront one? Can we just say that?

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Emilee responded that she believed so, but that the language highlighting its elevated status was deliberate, as that is a specific consideration the CBAG members wanted to emphasize. She stated that she can explore adding the word “Waterfront” for clarity.

EAG member: When talking about enhancing multimodal connectivity to trails, and naming those other projects, and making them intuitive to traverse for all users, what is the actual benefit? That feels vague.

Emilee responded that it is centered around folks wanted to have connectivity between areas and communities, including trails that already exist but are not connected throughout the whole area. She explained that CBAG members highlighted those specific projects to make sure that they were clear and specific in wanting to connect the area.

EAG member: Regarding the recommendation for elevators accommodating multimodal passengers, such as those with mobility assistance tools or bikes, how is that elevated support? That sounds like what should already be happening.

Emilee responded that she can’t speak on behalf of the DOTs, but that elevators tend to be expensive, and that stairs and ramps might not be accessible to all. She explained that the consideration is around the size of the elevator, making sure it is large enough to accommodate multimodal users.

EAG member: The verbiage makes it sound rather weak. Can we refine it to highlight that the elevator is better than a typical one?

Emilee responded that the final product for the recommendations will include both the technical elements, but also a narrative piece that will address that missing element. Emilee again encouraged EAG members to submit feedback by email to the team.

EAG member: I appreciate all the work going into this. I appreciate the callouts on the multimodal pieces, connecting paths and bridges. I have a question about the advanced signage. Is this for motorized vehicles or non-motorized?

Emilee responded that this was a piece that the CBAG will be digging into specifically at their next meeting to determine the purpose and maintenance of the signs. She stated that currently the signage would be more for non-motorized multimodal users than vehicular users.

EAG member: The Para-transit services operated by C-TRAN and TriMet, I’m thinking about that. A lot of places people want to go are across the bridge, like specialists. They can’t take passengers across the river to get them there, so they will have to take a train or bus across the river. I don’t know if that’s being considered in the planning to make that connection easier for people with limited access to transportation and limited mobility.

Emilee responded that this consideration will be more closely examined in January, as Tranche 4 is discussed.

EQUITY PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Fabiola Casas, Equity Team, provided an update on the Equity Performance Measures. Fabiola recapped the development process of the Equity Performance Measures, and reminded the group that this information was shared in more detail at the last meeting. Fabiola acknowledged the EAG members' thought and care that went into developing the measures. Fabiola summarized that there were four main points of concern raised at the previous meeting:

- 1) Inconsistencies in timeline for measurement, especially relating to mobility and accessibility. Fabiola stated that these measures have been updated to be consistent in tracking data points during the planning and design phase, as well as post-construction to check for success.
- 2) Workforce and economic opportunity, especially retention and advancement opportunities beyond apprentices journeying out. Fabiola stated that the measure was changed to track retention and advancement rates for equity priority communities and women throughout the life of the project.
- 3) For avoiding further harm, a few members expressed the desire to track and record displacement. Fabiola explained that this information will already be publicly available, but that there is a lot of important context that won't be well-suited to include on the program's Accountability Dashboard.
- 4) Concerning air quality, there may be gaps in the data collected by local agencies. Fabiola shared that it would be outside of the program's scope to implement new data collection processes for air quality, so the program will instead rely on local partnerships to obtain that data.

EAG member: For retention and advancement, I think that should include people from diverse backgrounds being supported to own their own businesses.

Fabiola responded that there are measures related to supporting Disadvantaged and Small Business Enterprises (D/SBEs). Johnell stated that he agrees that this goal of supporting new businesses is captured in other performance measures.

EAG member: I imagine that an apprentice on the IBR program may want to open a business.

Johnell responded that tracking that will be difficult as it would largely be reliant on anecdotal information, whereas tracking advancement is much more direct. Johnell stated that it is indeed something to think about as anecdotal information supports the fact that many S/DBEs are owned by those who started as workers in the trades. Fabiola affirmed that the team is taking note of these specific interests and shared there is a team dedicated to working with DBEs who will appreciate this interest. Johnell reiterated that the Performance Measures are designed to operationalize the Equity Framework that the EAG created. The measures provide accountability to follow that Framework.

Fabiola expressed gratitude to the EAG for their contributions to the work. Johnell asked for the EAG to confirm their support using thumbs-up, which several members provided.

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EAG member: I appreciate the follow-up on the Performance Measures.

EAG member: I'm really impressed how all of this work started with sheets and sheets of paper. It was almost overwhelming. The fine-tuning being done by staff is really extraordinary.

EAG member: Distilling these big ideas into something tangible is great. I also appreciate the conversation around equitable tolling. It means a lot that our focus on equity is being considered.

Fabiola reiterated their appreciation for EAG's continued and thoughtful engagement. Emilee also expressed her appreciation to the group for coming prepared and engaging in deep and challenging conversation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

MEETING EVALUATION POLL

EAG Survey

 00:01:03 | 1 question | 6 of 12 (50%) participated

1. How would you rate tonight's meeting, on a scale of 1-5 (Single choice) *

6/6 (100%) answered

5 - Great (3/6) 50%

4 -Pretty Good (3/6) 50%

3 - Neither good nor bad (0/6) 0%

2 - Needs some improvement (0/6) 0%

1 - Needs significant improvement (0/6) 0%

ADJOURN

ATTENDEES

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
EAG Members	
Aidan Gronauer	WSDOT
Chandra Washington	C-TRAN
CeCe Ridder	Metro DEI
John Gardner	TriMet
June Reyes	Port of Portland
Meg Johnson	Community Member
Nicole Chen	City of Vancouver
Sokho Eath	IRCO
Vicki Nakashima	Community Member
IBR Staff	
Dr. Roberta Suzette Hunte	Facilitator
Greg Johnson	Program Administrator
Johnell Bell	Principal Equity Officer
Emilee Thomas-Peralta	Equity Team
Lucy Hamer	Equity Team
Fabiola Casas	Equity Team
Meghan Hodges	Community and Government Relations Manager
Jai and Mary	ASL Interpreters

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Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
Tracy Ukura	Captioner
Amanda Hart	Tech Support

MEETING RECORDING AND MATERIALS

Meeting Recording

A recording of the meeting is available here: [Equity Advisory Group \(EAG\) December 16, 2024 5:30PM PST \(youtube.com\)](#)

Meeting Materials

The meeting materials are available here: [EAG December 16, 2024 Meeting | Interstate Bridge Replacement Program](#)