

EQUITY ADVISORY GROUP (EAG) MEETING #39

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

Location: Zoom Webinar and YouTube Livestream

Number of concurrent YouTube viewers: 8

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 described it as a monumental time for the program, stating that the program will be publishing the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on Friday, which begins the 60-day public comment period. Greg stated that the program will be engaging the community to make sure people understand how to interact with the Draft SEIS. Greg shared that the program's efforts in engaging community members has attracted national attention and is part of why the IBR program has been awarded significant grant funding.

Greg further shared that the program has been engaging in virtual community briefings, hosting two in August. These briefings were to inform the public about the Draft SEIS public comment period and educate community members on how to participate in the public comment period. Greg reported that approximately 80 community members attended the two public briefings live.

Greg stated that the program is still providing presentations, including recently at the Oregon Transportation Commission, the City of Vancouver's Arts & Heritage Commission and the Parking Advisory Commission. Greg also stated that regional Federal Highway Administration officials came for a tour to learn more about the project.

Additionally, Greg shared that summer tabling events were recently hosted, including at the Downtown Vancouver Farmers Market, the Bridgeton Neighborhood Association Summer Picnic, Providence Bridge Pedal, Vancouver Waterfront Concert Series, Portland Summer Concert Series, and the Kenton Farmers Market. Greg stated that it remains important to the program to come out to meet with the community and provide information. Greg encouraged EAG members to share upcoming events within their communities with the IBR program so that the program can continue these engagement efforts.

Greg shared that the program was also recently invited as a Keynote Speaker at a small business event hosted by Governor Kotek on Hayden Island at the end of October. Greg described it as another opportunity to help people understand the program.

EAG member: I would love to hear about the kinds of interactions that have been happening at these events. What are people saying? What is the outreach team hearing?

Greg responded that the feedback he has heard is that most people are vastly in favor of building the bridge and that the most common question of when the construction will begin. Greg stated that people seem focused on the schedule and are anxious for the construction to get underway.

Greg provided an update to the schedule. He stated that the hope is that the program will get a Record of Decision around mid to late 2025, after the program submits an updated plan for construction based on the comments received during the Draft SEIS public comment period.

EQUITY ROUNDTABLE DEBRIEF

Fabiola Casas, Equity Team, provided an overview of the Equity Roundtable event. Fabiola explained that the Equity Roundtables are quarterly virtual sessions that include IBR staff and subject matter experts that are open for the public to view on YouTube and social media. Fabiola stated that the sessions highlight the ways the program is applying the definition of process and outcome equity. They encouraged EAG members to watch previous recordings and future sessions. Fabiola shared that February's session discussed equitable community engagement and that May's roundtable discussed pathways for active transportation, before sharing September's topic of "Leveraging the Draft SEIS Public Comment Process to Catalyze Community Change." Fabiola summarized that the roundtable discussed how public comments have enhanced planning and design, as well as strategies to engage equity priority communities to participate in the public comment process. Fabiola shared that they appreciated how much the Equity Roundtables have built on one another, repeatedly highlighting key takeaways throughout the year.

PROGRAM CONSTRUCTION DELIVERY AND WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES

Barbi Alexander, Equity Team, presented on Program Delivery and Workforce Opportunities. Barbi explained that the conceptual packaging and delivery plan considered several challenges and factors, including cost, Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation, sequencing, and constructability. She also explained that the packages are still subject to change as the program refines cost estimates and collects feedback.

Barbi shared that there was a large industry event on May 6, 2024 that the program hosted with the construction industry, including contractors, subcontractors, consultants, specialty service providers, suppliers, and small, women-, and minority-owned business enterprises (S/W/MBE). Barbi highlighted that the program launched a dedicated website for members of the construction industry to keep apprised of how they can be potentially be involved on the project (www.interstatebridge.org/opportunities).

Barbi presented the conceptual package sequence, explaining that a total of 28 packages have been proposed. Barbi displayed an image to help illustrate where these packages would take place within the program area. Barbi explained that the current project price ranges on the packages include design right-of-way and construction costs that are based on the program's 2023 financial plan, which will be refined as estimates and rates are updated. Barbi emphasized that changes are likely.

Barbi shared that pre-completion tolling is currently anticipated to start at the start of construction, currently scheduled for late 2025. Barbi reviewed some of the packages with the group, including:

- Pre-completion tolling signage
- Evergreen Boulevard Bridge with SR-14 Package A under Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
- East Evergreen Boulevard Overpass that crosses I-5 to allow for ramp-to-ramp connections during construction, which is part of the bridge approaches package. Barbi explained this will be one of the first pieces the program will work on, anticipating to start in late 2025 or early 2026.
- Columbia River Bridge, which is expected to take 5 to 6 years at a cost of \$1 to \$1.5 billion, delivered as a design-build or progressive design-build project under WSDOT.
- Replacement of the I-5 Bridge Downstream of the existing bridge shore-to-shore over the Columbia River. This will include the construction of two new bridges to accommodate highway active transportation and transit modes that include light rail track systems and station packages, and also the widening the shoulders on I-5 to accommodate buses and improve safety.

Barbi then displayed a list of the types of work that are going to be needed to deliver the IBR program, including numerous trades and craft areas, which highlights the need for significant workforce development in those areas. Barbi stated that there is a current deficit of talent in many of the trades and crafts professions. Barbi also highlighted that, in addition to the construction trades, specialized work is also included on the list, including material testing, quality control, project management, public outreach, permit coordination, and real estate specialists. Barbi stated she endeavors to help people see the opportunities to participate in the work during her outreach efforts.

Barbi then discussed the outreach plan that helps reach DBEs, small businesses, and workforce communities outside of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. Barbi stated that the IBR program has a comprehensive outreach strategy that spans across Oregon, Washington, and Idaho that includes:

- Attending and hosting regional workshops and seminars.
- Collaborating with local Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations, small business advocacy and community-based organizations.

- Targeted campaigns through media, including newspapers, radio stations, and social media to bring awareness to the IBR program and its many contracting opportunities.

Barbi also discussed the IBR program's commitment to tribal employment, including the first ever bi-state Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO) program. Barbi stated that the bi-state nature of the program presents a unique challenge to managing off-reservation tribal workforce development. Barbi explained that work already done by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) in this area is being used as a template for how the IBR program approaches off-reservation tribal employment.

Barbi then presented recent workforce equity outreach efforts. Barbi shared that an Equity Roundtable in June with leaders from Oregon and Washington who had successfully worked on federally-funded infrastructure projects to share lessons learned from having and working with a priority hire ordinance on their projects. Barbi also shared that in August, the Workforce Equity Lead presented the recently approved Workforce Equity Program Plan to the Community Benefits Advisory Group (CBAG). Barbi further stated that a Childcare Roundtable was held, where several leaders working in workforce equity and childcare needs were invited to discuss strategies with IBR program leadership to help find way to collaborate on the important issue of childcare. Panelists included EAG member, Miriam Halliday of Workforce Southwest Washington, as well as Damaris Martinez of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, Mary King of UPNow Community Advocates, Raahi Reddy of Estolano Advisors, Emily Walton of Wonderschool, and Carmen Ellis of Worksystems, Inc.

Barbi discussed the IBR program's DBE participation goals, sharing that the program is currently exceeding its goal of 15% DBE participation. Barbi shared that each construction package she discussed earlier will have their own DBE goals, which are currently being developed with federal partners. Barbi stated that the IBR website continues to expand its information for DBEs, SBEs, and MBEs to support their capacity-building, business certification, and other areas that will be necessary to help strengthen businesses.

Barbi further discussed how the IBR program is supporting small businesses, sharing that the program recently signed a Strategic Alliance Memorandum with the Small Business Administration that establishes a cross-referral program to ensure small businesses are aware of all the opportunities, resources, and support from the Small Business Administration. It further provides that small businesses currently already working with the Small Business Administration will be directly connected to the IBR program. Barbi described this as a win-win referral program that is unique in that it seeks to bring in new small businesses. Barbi shared that just in the last year in Oregon, 30,000 new small business were registered with the Small Business Administration, which highlights the value of the referrals.

Barbi shared that the IBR program is also partnering with APEX, where they have begun a train-the-trainer series. Barbi explained that partners from the Joint Agency Task Force (JATF), comprised of WSDOT, ODOT, C-TRAN, and TriMet, developed a training series around how to work with each of the individual agencies. It was targeted for small business advocacy and community-based organizations so they can provide support in the community and are well-versed in ways that small businesses can take advantage of resources that are offered and understand compliance requirements.

Barbi also shared the community engagement efforts, including the establishment of the IBR & Small Business Organization Working Group that meets monthly to discuss how the program can incorporate meaningful change in contract language to help support those small businesses. Barbi further shared a list of recent outreach events including network events, tradeshow, and contracting forums.

Barbi then shared information on how to do business with ODOT, WSDOT, TriMet, and C-TRAN, including providing links to their respective webpages. Barbi stated that the program will be building out additional resources throughout the year while simultaneously working with small businesses and small business organizations so that no business is left behind. Barbi stated that the overall goal is that all businesses know about the program, how to connect, and where to find the resources necessary to support them to bid should they choose to do so.

EAG member: Can I have information about the small businesses and contractor support? I have some small contractors, and I want to make sure they get the information you've shared.

Barbi affirmed that the slides sent out to the EAG earlier that day include those links to resources and that she can provide additional lists of resources as needed.

EAG member: Was the Workforce Equity Program Plan shared? Where can we find that?

Aidan Gronauer, WSDOT, stated that it is available on the website.

DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PUBLIC HEARINGS

David Gitlin, Community Engagement Team, stated that Friday is going to be an exciting day for the program and that a lot of community engagement activity is going to support it. The Draft SEIS is going to be released on Friday, September 20, 2024, which begins a 60-day public comment period. David provided a link to where the Draft SEIS will be published (www.interstatebridge.org/DraftSEIS) and clarified that the public comment period will go from September 20th through November 18th.

David shared that the program hosted a few pre-publication briefings, where community members were invited to ask the program about the Draft SEIS and public comment period. David identified several themes to the questions brought by the public, including tolling, planning and design, the planned westward shift design option, funding, delivery method, permitting, advisory group participation, public comment participation, traffic and earthquake safety, sustainability, and traffic analysis and local impacts.

David explained that there are several options to participate in the public comment period, including an online comment form, attending a public hearing, sending an email, leaving a voicemail on a dedicated voicemail line that includes multilingual options, or sending physical mail.

David stated that there are currently numerous engagement opportunities already scheduled and being developed:

- Two virtual Draft SEIS briefings on October 1st and October 9th. David stated that the purpose of these briefings is to provide an overview of the Draft SEIS and answer questions, but that the program will not accept official Draft SEIS comments at the briefings.
- Two in-person public hearings in an open house format, one in Vancouver on October 15th and one in Portland on October 17th. These hearings will include stations, display boards, maps, and official comments will be recorded by a court reporter or form.
- Additional virtual public hearings will be held on October 26th and October 30th, where the purpose is to collect public comments that will be recorded via court reporter.
- Ongoing tabling events to remind the public about the opportunities to provide comments.
- Ongoing office hours, details about which can be found on the IBR website.
- In-language presentations and comment opportunities for non-English speakers, the dates of which are still being determined.

David provided additional information about the public “open house” hearings. The Vancouver event on October 15th will be in Gaiser Hall at Clark College from 5:30pm to 8:30pm. The Portland event will be held in Hall E at the Portland Expo Center, also from 5:30pm to 8:30pm. Both events will feature display boards, videos on monitors, court reporters, and a separate space for initial property owner discussion. The open houses will be in drop-in format to ask questions, meaning there will not be a formal presentation.

David shared how notifications about the Draft SEIS publication will occur. He stated that there will be an email to the program’s broad distribution list and advisory groups, 95,000 printed mailers to the entire program area, a billboard on Hayden Island, the IBR website will be updated, social media across multiple networks, a toolkit to be shared with program partners, and media outreach.

David described the toolkit, saying that it will include sample social media posts with graphics and photos, content for newsletters, background information about the program, and talking points.

David presented the postcard that is being mailed to the program area, highlighting that the aim is to communicate the timeframe for the public comment period for both the Draft SEIS and Section 106 review. David also presented the Draft SEIS website preview that will provide a copy of the Draft SEIS, educational materials, and the ability to provide public comment.

EAG member: The dates and places for the engagement opportunities are not currently on the IBR website’s “Meetings and Events” Page. When will that be added for easy reference to the community?

David responded that they will be updated on Friday at the launch of the website.

David added that after each engagement event, an evaluation form will be sent out to the participants to see how the community is responding to the events that are being offered. David explained that the program will make adjustments as needed during the process to ensure the team is delivering what people need and what they are asking for.

EAG member: Is the website available in other languages?

David responded that the IBR website is equipped with an automatic translator and that the 80-page Executive Summary of the Draft SEIS is being translated into multiple languages.

EAG member: There's a minority-focused media scanner, The Observer, and also many organizations have an electronic newsletter. It would be a good link to help direct people to the website to get more information. I also think many of us EAG members who are involved in various community organizations can update our signatures to include links to direct people to more information.

David thanked the member for her idea and shared that they are already engaging the Skanner, as well as multilingual radio stations. David offered to provide a list of which media outlets have already been engaged to help identify other potential outlets. David also offered to assist in drafting a signature that people can use and reiterated that the current distribution list includes about 100 community-based organizations and neighborhood associations. David encouraged the group to share the information broadly with their networks once they receive it on Friday.

EAG member: Where can I get caught up on previous meeting materials?

Johnell Bell, Chief Equity Officer, stated that the team will reach out to provide those materials. Johnell then asked David whether the postcards underwent any literacy testing as part of the program's commitment to accessibility.

David responded that all public materials are deliberately written to be as simple and understandable as possible. David described it as an ongoing goal to make content accessible. He stated that the materials did indeed undergo that review to ensure readability, but that there are some complexities given the technical nature of the material.

Johnell underscored the importance of process equity, which aligns with the overall definition of equity that the EAG created. He stated that the work the EAG has done over the last several years has been working towards this moment and that it is important to ensure that the program can reach equity priority communities. He encouraged the group to provide thoughts and suggestions on how to reach these groups.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Smith with the No More Freeways Campaign: I want to talk about the comment policy of not accepting attachments. You’ve talked about supporting diverse voices in the comment process. We’ll be doing an extensive analysis of the traffic modeling because it is one of our chief concerns from the climate perspective. We want to submit data tables and charts, and your no attachments policy would prevent us from doing so. That seems like it is stifling our voices and other voices that want to provide comments in something other than text format. We’ll make sure the comment gets in even if we have to send it by registered mail to the program office, which means that somebody at IBR is going to have to scan it and get it in with a lower fidelity copy. It just doesn’t make any sense to use that you’ve enacted this policy. Most of the organizations that I know of that comment will write their comment on letterhead, PDF it, then send it in, and you’re making sure that doesn’t work. We’ve been involved in lots of different NEPA processes with ODOT and Metro for transit projects. I’ve never heard of a comment process that didn’t allow attachments. It just doesn’t make any sense and I hope you will consider doing the equitable thing, which is to meet the community where they are in the processes that they want to use and reverse this policy.

MEETING EVALUATION POLL

Due to technical error, the meeting poll was not recorded.

ADJOURN

- Next EAG meeting: October 21, 2024, 5:30pm-7:30pm
- Following EAG meeting: November 18, 2024, 5:30pm-7:30pm

ATTENDEES

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
EAG Members	
Aidan Gronauer	WSDOT
Vicki Nakashima	Community member
Meg Johnson	Community Member
Jennifer Campos	SW Washington Regional Transportation Council

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
John Gardner	TriMet
Nicole Chen	City of Vancouver
Pat Daniels	Constructing Hope
CeCe Ridder	Metro DEI Team
Shawnea Posey	PBOT
Serena Stoudamire Wesley	ODOT
Chandra Washington	C-TRAN
Shona Carter	Washington State Black Future Co-op
June Reyes	Port of Portland
Miriam Halliday	Workforce Southwest Washington
IBR Staff	
Greg Johnson	Program Administrator
Johnell Bell	Principal Equity Officer
Barbi Alexander	Equity Team
Lucy Hamer	Equity Team
Fabiola Casas	Equity Team
David Gitlin	Community Engagement Team
Tanya Adams	WSP Inclusion and Diversity
Dr. Roberta Suzette Hunte	Facilitator
Amanda and Andrea	ASL Interpreters
Tracy Ukura	Captioner

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
Amanda Hart	Tech Support

MEETING RECORDING AND MATERIALS

Meeting Recording

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

Meeting Materials

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