



City of
Portland



Metro



Multnomah
County

August 5, 2021

The Honorable Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
900 Court St NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Governor Brown:

Thank you for working to develop a consensus solution for the highway cover design on the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project. As local and regional leaders, we are committed to working with state and community partners to advance our shared goals. It has been our long-standing belief that a major infrastructure investment in Albina could be transformative – to not only move people and goods more safely and efficiently, but also to reconnect the local street grid and chart our resolute journey toward restorative justice.

As early as 2017 we made it clear to the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) that we were concerned with the project and Environmental Assessment process the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) was conducting. We thank you for listening and responding. We appreciate that you supported the chartering of multiple public committees, hiring an Independent Cover Assessment (ICA) team, and most recently convening us to discuss those findings. We owe a great deal of gratitude to community members participating on the Historic Albina Advisory Board, Community Opportunity Advisory Committee, and the Executive Steering Committee. Throughout the ICA process, committee members have engaged in thoughtful discussion and we seek to honor their time and words.

This process has not been easy, and it is far from complete. But it has produced an outcome that brings us together around greater community benefit; a project concept that includes a more comprehensive highway cover with more and better local street options for people walking, rolling, biking, and taking transit. The new concept retains the N Flint connection, reconnects N Flint and NE Hancock St., and moves the I-5 southbound off-ramp out of the historic center of Albina (off NE Broadway at N Vancouver). It restores the grid over I-5 for better connectivity and multi-modal operations overall, while expanding the highway cover area to provide up to 7.97 acres of developable land. This concept creates a shift ***from a freeway space, to a restored neighborhood placeⁱ***.

At your request, on July 22 technical teams from our agencies met with ODOT. We reached an agreement that Hybrid 3 is in alignment with our shared values, community feedback from ICA workshops, and technically feasible with the following conditions:

- ODOT to begin the southbound off-ramp farther north (i.e., where it begins today) than shown in the current design, to reduce the impact of highway traffic on city streets
- ODOT to shift the I-5 centerline east and reduce the inner shoulders from 12' to 4' to improve the approach geometry for the preferred alignment and turning movements at the intersection of Winning Way/Ramsay, Wheeler, Williams, and the ramp termini

- PBOT to re-evaluate local circulation impacts and the possible need to make Wheeler or Winning Way/Ramsay 2-way to accommodate truck and/or highway traffic
- PBOT to evaluate potential signal phasing and timing changes at the intersection of Winning Way/Ramsay, Wheeler, Williams, and the ramp termini to best accommodate all modes of traffic
- PBOT to re-evaluate pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit facilities, as well as potential operational improvements to transit, through the Rose Quarter area
- Rose Quarter event access and traffic management to be taken into consideration as all the above options are evaluated

**Project design team supports above; named ODOT or PBOT based on jurisdictional responsibility*

While reaching consensus on the project highway cover concept is a step in the right direction, there are several major elements still to resolve. **We are writing to request your support for immediate action on the below next steps:**

1. **Framework Agreement.** We believe that to honor what Albina can become, we need to be honest about what transpired there. The construction of I-5 tore through the historic center of Portland’s Black community. To ensure that the new developable land created by the Rose Quarter project will *support the Black community’s desire for self-determination; and structure the project so the Black Community can build it, own it, and benefit from it into the future* ^[i] ODOT needs to transfer governance of development on the covers. ODOT is responsible for creating the *space* for new development by covering I-5, but the Black community needs to be empowered to determine what type of *place* should arise on top of the covers. ODOT, with support from our agencies, and in partnership with the Albina Vision Trust, should develop a Framework Agreement that identifies actions, roles, and responsibilities for developing the covers. This agreement should address issues including, but not limited to: funding for planning and public engagement for highway cover development, land ownership and development rights, development financing, and funding for public space and other local enhancements. The package of commitments and investments made as part of the agreement should be independently monitored and reported.
2. **Congestion Pricing.** With the passage of HB 3055, the State of Oregon has a unique opportunity to use congestion pricing, also known as tolling, as a tool to manage traffic and reduce greenhouse gases in the region. We urge you to expedite the tolling program, while reduce impacts to low-income users. ODOT stated that congestion pricing on I-5 in the Rose Quarter will be implemented, but it has not provided any details on how the program will be designed. An equitable, well-designed congestion pricing program must include pricing that varies throughout the day to manage traffic congestion by reducing vehicle miles travelled, providing additional revenue to support local alternatives to driving, and providing low-income discounts or exemptions. Such a program would transform how I-5 functions, yet ODOT is assuming that traffic on I-5 in the future will be much the same as in the past – potentially not accurately reflecting the level of demand and distribution of traffic on freeway and surface streets. Many of the Hybrid 3 design conditions described above aim to balance the need to create a vibrant community on the covers with the need to move vehicles along I-5. ODOT should work with local and regional partners to take immediate steps to design and implement equitably designed congestion pricing on the I-5 corridor and ensure that it is operational prior to the I-5RQ project opening.

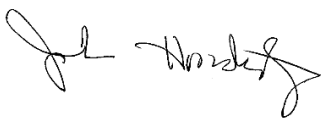
3. **Intergovernmental Agreements.** ODOT needs to develop and adopt Intergovernmental Agreements with local jurisdictional partners, including the City of Portland, Multnomah County and Metro. A lack of transparency in ODOT’s cost assumptions has continued to hamper partner decision-making ability. For example, ODOT has not provided an updated cost estimate for its current project design, which has made it impossible to understand how the ICA’s cover designs or any further changes to the project design (including the Hybrid 3 design conditions listed above) affect project costs. Like any major regional transportation project, an agreement must be in place to describe partners’ respective roles and responsibilities in planning and implementing the project and pay for technical staff time to support the environmental, design, construction, and close-out phases of the project. The agreements will need to clearly outline the project governance structure, approach to ensure cost transparency, regulatory requirements, and project decision-making.

4. **Buildable Highway Covers.** It is our understanding that there is still disagreement between ODOT and ICA findings on the structural capacity of the highway covers as conceptualized in Hybrid 3 that would impact future building height on covers. We need written assurance from you and the OTC that the nearly 8 acres of new land will accommodate the building heights envisioned by the ICA team. This buildable space is essential for the businesses, services, and housing the Black community needs to restore and heal the neighborhood that was pushed out by the original construction of I-5. As you know, this is the kind of investment in restorative justice the nation, the Biden Administration, and our local community are calling for.

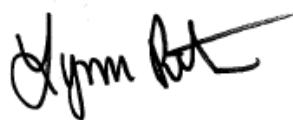
5. **Harriet Tubman School.** Tubman students have been forced to breathe unhealthy air for far too long. I-5 should never have been built directly adjacent to Portland’s historically Black middle school. This major project needs to have a plan to mitigate pollution near the school or move the school to a new location where it is safe to breathe.

We believe that Hybrid 3 (with the above conditions) provides the opportunity we’ve been seeking for the past many years. A reimagined project concept that is responsive to our values and community voices. This concept creates the opportunity for a new type of major project in our region – one that builds, heals, brings community together, and provides benefits to those who pass through the Rose Quarter and those who call it home. We look forward to working with you and our partners on the above next steps and are grateful for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,



Jo Ann Hardesty
City of Portland Commissioner



Lynn Peterson
Metro Council President



Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Commissioner

¹ <https://www.i5rosequarter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/210607-ESCWS3-508.pdf>
¹¹ <https://www.i5rosequarter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/210607-ESCWS3-508.pdf>