

Jonathan Maus ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to the BikePortland podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. In this episode, I'll have you take a journey with me down to the state capitol in Salem where last Thursday, on April 13th, I joined a coalition of advocates from a group called the Just Crossing Alliance. This is several dozen nonprofits from throughout the state of Oregon. These are environmental groups, transportation groups, land use groups, social justice groups, just a really growing organization.

([00:30](#)):

They've got a new campaign called Right Size, Right Now, and it's all targeted toward trying to encourage lawmakers and the Oregon Department of Transportation to not spend so many billions of dollars on the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program Project. That project is actually much more than just a bridge replacement, although I feel like some of the powers that be want us to think it's just about a bridge. In reality, it's a five-mile expansion of I-5 between Portland and Vancouver with at least a half a dozen mega interchanges that they want to build to reach up to the new expanded freeway and new bridge, and it's estimated to cost anywhere from around 6 billion to 7.5 billion dollars.

([01:15](#)):

So members of this Just Crossing Alliance Coalition, they organized a transportation lobby day down in Salem. They invited advocates from all over Oregon, folks like you and I, who just took a day off work, took a day off school, got themselves down to Salem anyway they could. They met in the morning at the headquarters of the Oregon Department of Transportation, which I found to be fun and ironic in a way. They met there to organize with each other, get to know each other a little bit, have their baked goods and coffee, and then they separated into smaller groups and they crossed the capitol mall over into the state capitol where they spent the morning meeting with their elected officials.

([01:56](#)):

As they went about their day, I ran around and tried to corner as many folks as I could to ask them about their feelings on the project, what their hopes and dreams were for the day, and how some of their meetings with lawmakers went. I tried to talk to all types of different people from different backgrounds and ages, and I also managed to score some time with House representative Mark Gamba, who's a leading voice for climate change legislation and also a progressive voice for transportation. I also interviewed Representative Khanh Pham, several times, actually. First in the morning that you'll hear first, and then I was able to go on a walk with her later in the day and we talked while we walked.

([02:34](#)):

With that, here's the episode.

([02:40](#)):

Hi, Rep. Pham. Any thoughts as we start our day here?

Khanh Pham ([02:44](#)):

I am super excited. We have not had many opportunities for the public to speak out about this really important billion dollar proposal, so I'm really excited that the public is here determined to have their voice be heard. So I'm looking forward to the rest of the day.

Jonathan Maus ([03:06](#)):

As a lawmaker, how does it change an issue to have an actual group show up in Salem like this?

Khanh Pham ([03:08](#)):

Well, it's not just one group, right? I'm seeing so many groups. It's this intergenerational group with high school students, parents, seniors, engineers out here, public health advocates. It really does mean so much to have the community, the real system users come out to be able to have their voices heard.

Jonathan Maus ([03:29](#)):

If things go really well today what does that look like for you?

Khanh Pham ([03:31](#)):

My vision is that legislators understand the choice that's at stake here. Sometimes we're seeing this presented with this choice in isolation, it's either do this or we kill the bridge, and I hope they see that there's many more choices. We have a lot more power to have some oversight over this project to constrain the cost to make sure that we can invest in what our constituents are telling us they need, which is safety investments, climate action, and public health improvements.

Jacob Apenes ([04:00](#)):

My name's Jacob Apenes. I'm a resident in Portland, I've lived there my whole life. I'm coming to Salem to talk about the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program. My chief concerns are more about the funding of it. Well, there's a lot of concerns I have, but the biggest one is that if we build the bridge of this size we will be stuck into a lot of carbon emissions that will ruin my future. I'm 24, so a lot of my time is still left on this earth.

([04:23](#)):

Then outside of that, if we fund a bridge that is \$7.5 billion, we won't have funding for education, for other forms of transportation or public transportation. We won't have a lot of stuff that really works for people in the next three, four decades. I just don't see the state ever recovering from this kind of bridge replacement.

Jonathan Maus ([04:42](#)):

Now are you here with a group, are you a registered lobbyist, or are you just here on your own free time? What's up with that?

Jacob Apenes ([04:50](#)):

I just volunteer. So I'm pretty involved with stuff with 350 PDX and with Strong Towns Portland and I do some work with other climate groups, but for the most part I'm here on my own will. Yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([05:01](#)):

What about specifically are you hoping to do today in the capitol building?

Jacob Apenes ([05:05](#)):

So my senator is Lou Frederick and my representative is Tanya Sanchez. Both are on the Ways and Means Committee. I think Frederick is actually on the Transportation Subcommittee and then Sanchez is the co-chair of the Ways and Means. So two very important people dealing with the budget this year. I think because I have that and their constituent, it's very important for me to have time to talk to them and hopefully at least weigh their opinion on funding a smaller bridge.

Jonathan Maus ([05:35](#)):

Then what do you hope to get out of today? On your drive or on your bus ride back to Portland, what are you hoping happens today?

Jacob Apenes ([05:43](#)):

Well, I guess the dream is that they agree to not fund a bridge. I think more realistically, meeting people that are like-minded and have an innate desire to help and are really strong-willed to actually see change. So if nothing, just to meet people that also want to see change from Portland.

Jonathan Maus ([06:02](#)):

Walking toward the capitol. Can you say your name and what you're doing here today?

Steph Roth ([06:06](#)):

Steph Roth. I'm walking towards the capitol with you, Jonathan.

Jonathan Maus ([06:11](#)):

What capacity are you here in today?

Steph Roth ([06:13](#)):

Oh, that's a good question. I am here in a personal capacity because we've spent a lot of time talking about this one bridge and we're going to talk about it a little more.

Jonathan Maus ([06:25](#)):

What are you going to do today? What do you have planned specifically?

Steph Roth ([06:26](#)):

Well, I'm really looking forward to supporting Rep. Pham, who's been such a wonderful champion for looking at how do we build a bridge that meets everyone's needs without indenturing future generations to investments that we can't afford. So I think that that's the number one, how can we support Rep. Pham and other champions of a better project on a shorter timeline?

Jonathan Maus ([06:52](#)):

When you're headed home today, what will you hope to have in your heart if all things go well?

Steph Roth ([06:56](#)):

Sidewalks in East Portland, we can finally fund them. That's what I got.

Jonathan Maus ([07:02](#)):

I love that you made a direct connection between fighting for a right size bridge to the East Portland sidewalks, which is something you've been talking about for years.

Steph Roth ([07:09](#)):

Yes. Well, thank you, Jonathan, and we're going to get there.

Jonathan Maus ([07:13](#)):

Thanks, Steph.

([07:13](#)):

Okay, can you say your name and who you're here with and what you-

Aaron Brown ([07:17](#)):

I am Aaron Brown and I'm here today on behalf of Representative Khanh Pham. I'm working with her in the legislature. She's on the transportation committee and just really excited to have this many community advocates coming to Salem to talk about the Interstate Bridge Replacement.

Jonathan Maus ([07:33](#)):

What do you hope to accomplish today?

Aaron Brown ([07:35](#)):

I hope we can establish that there is genuine enthusiasm for supporting building a bridge that's the right size so we have the resources for all the other transportation investments across the state that we want to see. I think it's really wonderful to work for a representative that understands the importance of bringing community voices to the capitol. As someone that works in the capitol, but I'm remote, I'm not in this building that often, it feels very empowering to bring people into the government building where all these decisions are made and to just have us all have a presence and to be actively getting to talk to the people that every other year for a couple weeks decide how the state transportation funding is going to go down.

Jonathan Maus ([08:16](#)):

Since you had a role in organizing some of this stuff today, can you help explain to folks what actually will happen? You've got a bunch of advocates here, but what will they be doing in the capitol today?

Aaron Brown ([08:27](#)):

We're going to be talking to as many legislators as we possibly can, and then later at the afternoon we're going to hear the informational hearing from ODOT is going to be presenting to the Joint Committee on Transportation and then just hearing their dog and pony show about the project.

Jonathan Maus ([08:42](#)):

Anything else you want people to know?

Aaron Brown ([08:43](#)):

Just in my years of advocacy, I don't think until I had worked in the state legislature that I fully understood how much Salem, in this building right here we're walking by, has enormous clout and power over the direction of ODOT. I'm certainly, as an advocate, I've spent plenty of time heckling the state agency ODOT, as well as the Oregon Transportation Commission, and both of those entities are important and relevant. But the state legislature and the joint Committee on transportation play an enormous role and the more that we as advocates continue to build these relationships, the better.

Zachary Lauritzen ([09:19](#)):

Zachary Lauritzen, Oregon Walks interim director, here with the Just Crossing Alliance. What we're here to do is to say, let's not put all our eggs in one basket of the monies in the state of Oregon and let's right size the bridge so that we aren't over building a freeway expansion.

Jonathan Maus ([09:36](#)):

Tell me who you've met with so far and sort of how those meetings went.

Zachary Lauritzen ([09:39](#)):

Yeah. So we've had our first meeting. Well, we're broken up into a bunch of different groups, so my team had our first meeting with Senator Dembrow. He was great because he was actually present for us, a lot of the representatives and senators have not been. So he showed up with part of our meeting and what he shared was interesting. He shared that because tolling is so controversial and that this bridge funding mechanism is based so heavily on tolling as part of that revenue generation that we have to have that conversation before we can talk about the whole project. That felt new to me, which was interesting. Openness to really talking about right-sizing the bridge, which is also exciting.

Jonathan Maus ([10:11](#)):

I mean, those are important conversations. Is there something else in particular you're hoping to take away with you from this event today?

Zachary Lauritzen ([10:18](#)):

Really what I'd like to know is who all the allies are in the building who understand that we have to do this differently than just a massive ODOT driven freeway expansion. Once we get a sense of who those folks are and who we need to support and who we need to bring along with us, then that will help us guide our next steps.

Jonathan Maus ([10:34](#)):

Any sense of if that coalition is growing or any grade of optimism or pessimism in your view of that?

Zachary Lauritzen ([10:41](#)):

Totally. Look, man, I think that people are recognizing if you start spending literally hundreds of millions, likely billions, of dollars of general fund money on one project so that people from Washington can skip down to shop tax-free in Oregon, that that does not meet the needs of their constituents. So I feel like once they hear that and that they understand that that's what the trade-offs are, that we are going to build this coalition.

Jonathan Maus ([11:03](#)):

Is part of what you're doing down here trying to maybe counter what some of these electeds have heard so far about the project?

Zachary Lauritzen ([11:12](#)):

Oh yeah, no doubt. There has not been a robust public conversation about the tradeoffs, and so if we can bring them along to understand what they are trading off from meeting the needs of their constituents, the diverse needs of their constituents, then we're going to get them to move along in this direction.

Naomi Markel ([11:28](#)):

So my name is Naomi Markel. I'm 18. I'm a senior in high school in Portland, Oregon. I'm here, well, primarily because my friends care a lot about this, and so I do too, and also because I guess growing up in Portland my two biggest worries have been, number one, the earthquake, so obviously I really want this bridge replacement done, and then number two, climate change, because it is the most pressing issue of my generation. I remember driving down the highway one day and I just saw this fog descend, and so as soon as I got home I stepped out of my car and I was like, oh, this is going to be awesome, a nice fall fog ambience, and I breathed in and it was wildfire smoke and I was choking trying to get into my house. That just really shook me and made me realize that it's only going to get worse from here. So I've been organizing with Portland Youth Climate Strike for the last three years. Yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([12:29](#)):

How do you connect some of those concerns to being at the Transportation Lobby Day here in Salem?

Naomi Markel ([12:35](#)):

Transportation is such a huge issue because vehicle emissions are one of the top drivers of climate change and the only solution is to transition away from cars and to mass transit.

Jonathan Maus ([12:48](#)):

What have you done here so far today?

Naomi Markel ([12:51](#)):

So my group has visited two representatives, or actually their staffers. We've talked to Rep. Helfrich, who's a Republican, and also Rep. Sanchez, who's a Democrat.

Jonathan Maus ([13:04](#)):

Any takeaways from those meetings you want to share?

Naomi Markel ([13:06](#)):

Yeah. So the staffer from Helfrich, we really tried to hammer home financial points, and one of his concerns was that the light rail is going to be one of the more expensive aspects of this proposal, and we just really wanted to emphasize that that is the most important part, that is what we care about. Additionally, this is such a huge project that it's going to take away money from other counties. So his county will be defunded if this passes. Then, yeah, the representative from-

Jonathan Maus ([13:45](#)):

Wait, wait, wait. So Helfrich was saying that light rail would be an expensive part of the project. Was he saying that in a negative sense, so that's a big expense he wasn't super supportive of?

Naomi Markel ([13:55](#)):

Yeah, exactly. So that was really interesting. That was very controversial. It was his staffer, by the way, not him.

Jonathan Maus ([14:02](#)):

Okay. So you met with a staffer. But you got your points out there. So okay, tell me about the other meeting.

Naomi Markel ([14:08](#)):

Yeah, the other meeting was a lot smoother. We met with the staffer for Rep. Sanchez and he was very receptive. He did say that she would side with moving away from cars towards more mass transit, but then again, we'll see how she votes when the bill gets on the floor.

Jonathan Maus ([14:28](#)):

Anything else you want to share?

Naomi Markel ([14:29](#)):

This is awesome, and everyone should come to the Climate Strike on Friday, April 21st. Meet at Convention Center at 10:00 AM.

Jonathan Maus ([14:36](#)):

Thank you.

Naomi Markel ([14:37](#)):

Thank you.

Ada Crandall ([14:43](#)):

My name is Ada Crandall. I'm 17. I'm here today with the Just Crossing Alliance lobbying our legislators to support an interstate bridge replacement project that is fiscally responsible and will ensure a reduction in emissions instead of an increase.

Jonathan Maus ([14:58](#)):

You've been in some meetings already today. Who have you met with?

Ada Crandall ([15:01](#)):

We met with Representative Helfrich's staff person and Representative Sanchez's staff person.

Jonathan Maus ([15:07](#)):

Can you share anything about how those conversations went?

Ada Crandall ([15:09](#)):

Yeah. The first meeting there was a lot of resistance to support the Just Crossing Alliance's proposal. He had a lot of technical questions about how it would work to do something different. Overall, I think that it was pretty neutral. But yeah, again, Republican representative and so mainly leaning into the points about fiscal responsibility and really highlighting the fact that every dollar that goes to the interstate bridge replacement is a dollar that's not going to fixing roads in other parts of the state or having access to basic transportation for people who don't drive.

Jonathan Maus ([15:53](#)):

So you tried to use the fiscal conservative thing with the fiscal conservative.

Ada Crandall ([15:56](#)):

Yes. It's like a don't say climate sort of meeting.

Jonathan Maus ([15:59](#)):

So he heard you, and I mean, can you put into context what just doing that means to the stuff you care about, just having those conversations?

Ada Crandall ([16:08](#)):

Yeah. I think it's really important that we're engaging legislators from all sides of the political spectrum because this is an investment that is being made by the full state and affects the whole state. There are a lot of different reasons that we need a right sized interstate bridge, and not all of them are the really lefty climate reasons. There are a lot of points that do appeal to these Republican lawmakers who care about fiscal responsibility.

([16:36](#)):

So it was interesting the contrast of those two meetings because in the first with the Republican staffer, it was very focused on the fiscal side of things, but then with Representative Sanchez's staffer, we were able to talk more about climate emergency and the need for emissions reduction. So there are a lot of different angles that we can attack this project from in a way that will hopefully be able to get bipartisan support for a bridge that will ultimately be better for the whole state.

Josh Laurente ([17:08](#)):

My name is Josh Laurente. I'm with OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, and we're a member of the Just Crossing Alliance. When I reflect on the history of this bridge, specifically the indigenous people who were uprooted to build this bridge, Black neighborhoods paved over to connect it to the highway, and frontline communities who are surviving toxic air pollution from the freeway, and when I think about that history and the need to replace this bridge now I am reminded of our collective responsibility to be good stewards of this land and of public dollars. To me, this bridge is either going to be just another overpriced freeway polluting, community harming bridge, or it's going to be the safer bridge that the region needs now and that future generations deserve.

Jonathan Maus ([17:55](#)):

Can you share anything about how that kind of conversation went while you're in the meetings with legislators?

Josh Laurente ([18:01](#)):

Yeah. Well, I reminded folks that the politics of the day can oftentimes obscure our fundamental responsibilities to this land and to this place. So I offered that perspective as a grounding for our conversations with legislators today so that they understand the values that are guiding not only the Just Crossing Alliance, but with OPAL Environmental Justice specifically. These are the communities and the people that we're looking out for, and this bridge not only needs to serve the needs of the region now, but it needs to meet the needs of future generations as well.

([18:34](#)):



Oftentimes, I was the youngest person in the room talking with these legislators, and I had to make sure that they knew that younger people are wise to the climate crisis and are making choices like choosing public and active transit, and so we really want to make sure that this bridge respects and honors that by making sure that that is front and center in the design of this bridge and not just a side piece that can be discarded later.

Jonathan Maus ([19:00](#)):

And you felt like that message was received well among the folks you talked to today?

Josh Laurente ([19:05](#)):

I do believe that message was received well. I think legislators are interested in learning more and are looking for community voices to guide them as decisions come up around this bridge, so I really hope the voice of the Just Crossing Alliance was resonating in the halls of the Capitol today.

([19:21](#)):

I want legislators to know that we are here as a coalition of communities. We're speaking up about what values we want to see reflected in this bridge, in the construction and design and planning of this bridge and we want to be a resource to legislators. If they want to learn more and want to hear where community is at on this project, all they have to do is pick up the phone and call us, and we're happy to be a resource.

Brett Morgan ([19:42](#)):

Hi, my name's Brett Morgan. I work for 1000 Friends of Oregon as their transportation and great communities policy manager. I'm here today on behalf of the Just Crossing Alliance, which 1000 Friends is a member of. 1000 Friends is a land use and planning non-profit that does statewide work for 50 years, ensuring that Oregonians can live in great communities urban, and also protect our wild and urban places.

([20:04](#)):

But a lot of why we're here today had to do with the history of 1000 Friends and our concern about what growth we're setting our region up for in the sense of are we making the necessary investments in transit and safety and other things that we know we need, and are we having an honest conversation about the trade-offs of investing in this bridge and what that means for other statewide priorities.

Jonathan Maus ([20:28](#)):

Can you say anything about how you think the message of Right Size, Right Now was received in the capitol today?

Brett Morgan ([20:36](#)):

Yeah, I think legislators were interested and ready to talk about the I-5 Bridge. I also think that they're very receptive of the Right Size, Right Now package. I think most of what we're talking about on paper is very reasonable about wanting to make sure we have multiple cards for legislators to play, making sure that they can be a conscious investor with what kinds of investments they're making and not just bundle everything together into one big project. I think a lot of them also heard our concerns about what is the impact of the local communities, what's the impact to air quality and the environment and so on. So I think there's a lot of angles for folks to approach this issue, and I think a lot of it was very well received.

Jonathan Maus ([21:16](#)):

Do you mind sharing what you think is the path forward for this initiative in terms I think a lot of people just are thinking is it possible to change the course of this massive ship that's going down the river?

Brett Morgan ([21:30](#)):

Yeah, sure. So I think today was about demonstrating to legislators that there's a lot of people paying attention and that this isn't on, quote-unquote, cruise control. It's about making sure that there are members of the public who are really engaged and paying attention. So I think we were really successful in doing that and creating a presence in the building. We had almost 60 people show up here in Salem late in session, which is a really big achievement in and of itself, I think, to show that level of power.

([21:56](#)):

As far as the path forward, I think we have a lot more detail about what we're asking for but that wasn't really appropriate for a lobby day meeting, because most of these people are either hearing about the I-5 bridge for the first time as members or as members of the public and so on so we didn't want to get there. So the next steps are we're taking the information and the meetings we had today, doing a lot of follow up, and also reaching out specifically to people on Ways and Means, people on the Joint Committee on Transportation, Senate and House leadership, and start to engage on a more deep level about what we think are some of the specific ways we can right size this project right now. Because our goal is to offer a wide array of thoughts, opinions, language to legislators so they can pick out what they need in order to find that security and that trust in this project.

Jonathan Maus ([22:41](#)):

I see what you're saying. Okay, so do you think it's correct for me to assume that a lot of these lawmakers, even at this stage of how long we've been talking about this project, correct for me to assume that they have maybe not been hearing a large diversity of ideas about the project and maybe are just going along to get along or just only hearing from ODOT or WashDOT?

Brett Morgan ([23:02](#)):

Yeah, I mean, I can't speak to what level members are doing outreach and research on their own, but I think the fact that we're having an informational hearing tonight, not a public hearing, says a lot about how the public is allowed to engage on this project. I'll also add that we're only getting bill languages on this now and a maybe a week ago and we're talking about voting on this potentially by the end of May, so it's been really hard for us to figure out those opportunities for a meaningful engagement as well.

Jonathan Maus ([23:28](#)):

Okay. Thanks, Brett.

Brett Morgan ([23:28](#)):

Yeah, of course. Thank you.

Crowd ([23:29](#)):

Right size.

([23:29](#)):

Right now.

[\(23:29\)](#):

Right size.

[\(23:29\)](#):

Right now.

Jonathan Maus [\(23:33\)](#):

Get to chat with Mark Gamba here, former Milwaukee, city of Milwaukee, mayor. First of all, let's just tell me, I've talked to you about climate change in the past and transportation issues, how has that hit as you've transitioned back down in here to being a representative in Salem?

Mark Gamba [\(23:52\)](#):

It's interesting to me that so many folks working in this building don't have a clear understanding of how we fund transportation in this state and how limited and lopsided it is and that it really is going to be a big hurdle to begin to reduce our climate impacts from a transportation standpoint. This highway trust fund has to be used on the right of ways, so that really reduces a lot of options right there.

Jonathan Maus [\(24:37\)](#):

How do you think that maybe their lack of understanding about how transportation funding works, how do you think that plays into this late in the session ask for a billion dollars to fund one project and also how they're talking about raising that revenue through bonding and stuff like that? Do you think those two things are connected?

Mark Gamba [\(24:57\)](#):

Yes, and I think it's even a bigger picture than that, right? It's not just the IBR. The IBR, the Rose Quarter, the 205, the Abernathy, 217, the Boom Bridge, right? That's \$16 billion worth of stuff that we are just sleepwalking into. I mean, really. That's setting the state up for a whole lot of debt and it's going to suck the guts out of what money we have for transportation, and none of that really reduces our climate impact. So I mean, the bridge, you could argue it's got good light rail, it's got a bike path, but until the system matches up with what's going across that bridge, it's not quite there.

[\(25:45\)](#):

I'm looking forward to 2025 because we're supposed to have a bigger transportation conversation. We are really going to have to think as a state about shifting the way we think about transportation.

Jonathan Maus [\(25:56\)](#):

You're in these committee meetings, I've seen you testify, and I know that you have a certain amount of interaction with ODOT staff, right? So they're really good at answering in the positive when you talk about how, let's say, some statement all their projects are widening freeways and they're not doing enough. Because they can answer in the affirmative, right? They can say we're spending record amounts on... You've probably heard this, right? We're spending record amounts on safe routes. We have a whole public transit division we've building in multimodal. So how do you as a representative respond to that and really drill down into, yeah, but? Or do you say that? How does that-

Mark Gamba [\(26:33\)](#):

I don't, yeah, but them, because that turns into a circular argument, but I point out that we have more people dying on our streets than ever before. I point out that while we may be spending more in raw dollars on those things as a proportion of the transportation money that we're spending out there, I'm not seeing that we're spending significantly more money than we've ever spent before on those kinds of things.

Jonathan Maus ([27:04](#)):

Do you think that, just to try to think of the state of mind of why we're in this place where we are, it does look like we're pumping out these freeway expansion projects and we are, doesn't look like it, we are, do you think that in the building right across from us here, at the ODOT building as well, so also in the capitol, is it because of people thinking that EV fleet transition is going to make it all better? I think there are some high level staff at ODOT that just think... I mean, the director has said that if a freeway's moving well in terms of no traffic, that it actually reduces climate impacts. What are some of the arguments you're hearing that you think are driving these kind of decisions?

Mark Gamba ([27:43](#)):

Yeah, that is a classic argument. Chris has never actually said that to me. I find him to be relatively knowledgeable on climate, and I think he understands induced demand. I don't think that's a mystery to him. But I will tell you that that's a big old ship to turn and it's not just what the director thinks or wants. I mean, there's a lot of people in that building and the decisions they're making down the line are actually...

([28:13](#)):

So we are going to really have to set the direction for the Department of Transportation from the capitol. We're going to have to say, look, we need to think about transportation in a different way. We need to think about the way we fund it, we need to think about what we spend it on once we have funded it, and we need to think about what are our goals with transportation. Not just getting automobiles from point A to point B as fast as possible, but getting humans from point A to point B and getting goods from point A to point B. Those are different conversations and we've always treated them as the same conversation. That's what we've got to start picking apart and really start thinking about transportation for this century, not transportation for the last century.

Jonathan Maus ([29:00](#)):

Things like this lobby day, having people down here, you think is a big part of that?

Mark Gamba ([29:04](#)):

It helps. It absolutely helps. I mean, the more legislators hear from constituents that transportation, the way it's working for them is not working, that's important. The more they can point to the whys of it not working, that's really helpful. It helps Khanh and myself and Pam and the handful of people who are in the building that get it, that are trying to make these changes, it helps us when we go back and we're having that conversation with them. But it's going to be a lot of work over the next several years.

Jonathan Maus ([29:39](#)):

Thanks, Rep. Gamba, appreciate it.

([29:40](#)):

Talking to Rep. Khanh Pham here, and this is your third session here, right?

Khanh Pham ([29:45](#)):

This is my third session. My second term.

Jonathan Maus ([29:48](#)):

You're on the Joint Committee on Transportation, right? So you have-

Khanh Pham ([29:52](#)):

Yes, and on the Bi-State. I'm on the Joint Committee on Transportation and the Bi-State I-5 Bridge Committee. We have not met once this session.

Jonathan Maus ([30:00](#)):

Also, the meeting, I won't call it a hearing, the meeting that we're going to later is not a public hearing, and I've heard some talk around here with this lobby day that folks are a little disappointed that people won't have a chance to speak up.

Khanh Pham ([30:13](#)):

Yeah. To be honest. I understand that frustration. This is, it's what's called an informational hearing, and there's only invited testimony. They're not allowing any public testimony on this bill. I think the meeting materials were posted just a few hours ago. I think that we really need to make sure that this is a really transparent and democratic process. This is a billion dollar once in a generation investment we're making and we need to have robust public engagement to make sure that this investment is really aligning with the priorities of the people of Oregon.

Jonathan Maus ([30:48](#)):

Can you help frame what you think are some of the narratives or some of the assumptions being made by some of your colleagues that are causing us to be pouring so many billions of dollars into what feel like a lot of people here today the same old kind of projects? What are some of the narratives they're hearing or arguments that they're making?

Khanh Pham ([31:11](#)):

Underlying a lot of it is this idea that there is no alternative and that they're being forced into basically just one choice, you either say yes or you forego billions of dollars in federal grants and you never build a bridge. The truth is, we have so much more power. It's ironic that the 90 most powerful people in the state would feel powerless to actually hold their state transportation agency accountable to be creative, to envision new alternatives, both build a new crossing that we need that's seismically resilient and has high capacity public transit and still have enough money left over to build safe routes to schools, to maintain our roads, fix our potholes, and stop the epidemic of traffic violence that we're currently experiencing.

Jonathan Maus ([31:56](#)):

So on the flip side of that is, I mean, I guess you just listed them, but I guess bringing it more specifically to this interstate bridge freeway project, what are some of the compelling messaging you think that will maybe help start to sway some of these conversations? What kind of messaging do you think will get

through to some of your colleagues in terms of maybe having them think that there are some other options?

Khanh Pham ([32:22](#)):

I mean, I love this Right size, Right Now campaign. I think it is intersecting and saying, "Yes, you can build a bridge, but there are some choices." It can be overbuilt, overblown, and way too expensive that will bankrupt our transportation system, or we can build a right sized bridge that meets our needs, but no more.

([32:38](#)):

So I think those are the messages that I think people are compelling, and also just the message about accountability I think is really resonating with legislators that ODOT is an agency that has an over \$5.5 billion biannual budget and it's our responsibility to make sure that we're providing effective oversight into how those taxpayer dollars are being spent.

Jonathan Maus ([33:02](#)):

So fiscal responsibility being a good way to get some leverage in there.

Khanh Pham ([33:06](#)):

Yeah, it's one of those interesting things where the climate movement and the folks advocating for fiscal responsibility are really finding a lot of shared values.

Jonathan Maus ([33:17](#)):

Well, I think if you talked to people that were around last time with the CRC, I mean, I think a lot of people remember that failing because of the fiscal argument.

([33:24](#)):

So can you share how your work down here in the capitol around transportation has changed in the successive sessions you've been here? It seems to me that this session you're doing more transportation work than you've done. Tell me about how you've evolved in terms of this issue of transportation.

Khanh Pham ([33:47](#)):

Sure. Well, this is actually the first long session I've had where I have been on the transportation committee. In 2021, I was on the climate committee and I was focused on passing HB 2021, our clean electricity for all bill. But in 2022, I really lobbied hard to get appointed. Actually, I lobbied in 2021 as soon as my first session was over to get appointed to the Joint Transportation Committee.

([34:11](#)):

I've always just been really a passionate transit rider and passionate about public transit. It's been a real journey for me for sure, I think mostly in building confidence for myself. I didn't think I was an expert on transportation. I thought other people knew more and it was something that I needed to defer more to others. It has been really eye-opening for me to realize that actually compared to other legislators, I actually do know a lot about transportation, and really to just own my own expertise as somebody who has been dependent on public transit in the past and does know what it's like to have to try to navigate the bus system and really depend on it.

([34:47](#)):

This transcript was exported on Apr 19, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

I think that my voice and the voices of people, the one in four Oregonians who don't drive or can't drive, the people who the transportation system doesn't currently serve, do have really important experiences in that and our voices need to be reflected in the policies and the funding of our transportation system.

Jonathan Maus ([35:07](#)):

Now that you've seen the sort of inner workings of how transportation policies being made here, can you share your thoughts about what you see as a possible different path forward for this interstate project?

Khanh Pham ([35:21](#)):

I think that we can invest in a seismically resilient bridge, we can make sure that there's really state-of-the-art public transit on the bridge, and still have enough money left over by making the bridge a height that it can connect to the existing freeway interchanges so we don't have to rebuild miles and miles of freeways and mega ramps, and have money left over for the safety improvements, the public transit service, the just basic road maintenance that my constituents are asking for.

Jonathan Maus ([35:53](#)):

Okay. Thank you, Rep. Pham. Appreciate it.

Khanh Pham ([35:54](#)):

Of course.

Jonathan Maus ([35:55](#)):

Thank you. Bye-Bye. You too, I've got to run back. See you.

Crowd ([36:02](#)):

Right size.

([36:02](#)):

Right now.

([36:02](#)):

Right size.

([36:02](#)):

Right now.

Jonathan Maus ([36:02](#)):

That'll do it for this episode. You've listening to interviews from the Transportation Future Lobby Day, organized by Just Crossing Alliance and the Right Size, Right Now campaign, on April 13th at the state capitol in Salem.

([36:18](#)):

The BikePortland Podcast is a production of Petal Town Media Incorporated. If you liked this episode, please subscribe and browse our archives for past shows. Leave us a review and tell your friends about it. BikePortland is a community media source that relies on the community and individual subscribers to stay in business. Please sign up today if you aren't a subscriber already.

This transcript was exported on Apr 19, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

[\(36:41\)](#):

I'm your host, Jonathan Maus. Until next time, I'll see you in the streets.