

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5806

As Reported by House Committee On: Transportation

Title: An act relating to preliminary work to develop a process for planning for a new Interstate 5 bridge spanning the Columbia river.

Brief Description: Concerning preliminary work to develop a process for planning for a new Interstate 5 bridge spanning the Columbia river.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Cleveland, Rivers, Wilson, Hobbs, Chase and Nelson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 3/9/17, 3/22/17 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides an invitation to create a joint Oregon-Washington legislative action committee to address a variety of purposes, including beginning a process towards project development for a new Interstate 5 (I-5) bridge.
- Appropriates \$350,000 for the Washington State Department of Transportation to do an inventory of existing planning data related to the construction of a new I-5 bridge over the Columbia River.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Farrell, Vice Chair; Fey, Vice Chair; Wylie, Vice Chair; Chapman, Gregerson, Kloba, Lovick, McBride, Morris, Ortiz-Self, Pellicciotti, Riccelli and Tarleton.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Orcutt, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Harmsworth, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Irwin, Pike, Rodne, Shea, Stambaugh and Van Werven.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Hayes.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

The Interstate 5 (I-5) Bridge crosses the Columbia River and connects Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, with two identical bridge structures. One bridge structure carries traffic northbound to Vancouver, and the other bridge structure carries traffic southbound to Portland. The northbound bridge was built in 1917, and the southbound bridge was built in 1958.

The Columbia River Crossing (CRC) Project, as described in the record of decision, would have replaced the two I-5 bridges, extended light rail to Vancouver, improved closely spaced interchanges, and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle paths. The estimated project costs ranged from \$3.1 billion to \$3.5 billion. Between 2005 and 2013, \$196.6 million was spent on the project, with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) spending \$94.1 million and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) spending \$102.5 million. The project was officially discontinued in the spring of 2014.

In 1997 a process was enacted to expedite the development of industrial projects of statewide significance. To qualify for designation as a project of statewide significance, a project must meet capital investment or job creation requirements. Border-crossing projects, private projects investing in manufacturing or research and development, projects that will provide a net environmental benefit, and a project that will further commercialization of an innovation may all be designated as projects of statewide significance. An application for designation as a project of statewide significance must be submitted to the Department of Commerce. The application must include a letter of approval from jurisdictions where a project is located and must commit to providing the local staff necessary to expedite the completion of a project.

Counties and cities requesting a project's designation as one of statewide significance must ensure the participation of local officials on the public-private team expediting a project's completion. The Office of Regulatory Assistance must provide facilitation and coordination services to expedite completion of industrial projects of statewide significance. The project proponents may provide the funding necessary for the local jurisdiction to hire the staff required to expedite the process.

Summary of Bill:

The process for designating a project of statewide significance is modified to allow for a legislative designation. Projects of statewide significance that are designated by the Legislature are exempted from the application requirements.

An invitation is provided from the Washington Legislature to the Oregon Legislature to participate in a joint legislative action committee regarding the construction of a new I-5 bridge. The committee is tasked with achieving the following purposes:

- work with both states' departments of transportation, transportation commissions, and stakeholders to begin a process toward project development, with the first meeting occurring by December 15, 2017;
- review and confirm lead roles related to permitting, construction, operation, and maintenance of a future I-5 bridge project;
- establish a process to seek public comment on the I-5 bridge project development plan;
- work to ensure that there are sufficient resources available to the state departments of transportation to inventory and utilize existing data to allow for nonduplicative and efficient decision-making regarding a new project;
- examine all potential mass transit options available for a new I-5 bridge project;
- utilize design-build procurement or better innovative project delivery method and determine the least costly, most efficient project management and best practices tools;
- consider the creation of a Columbia River bridge authority to review bridge needs and make recommendations to both states regarding financing, timing of improvements, and operations of the bridges; and
- report to the Legislatures of each state the findings and recommendations of the legislative action committee by December 15, 2018.

The joint legislative action committee is comprised of 16 members, eight from each state. The majority leader and minority leader of the Senate must appoint four members, two from each of the two largest caucuses. The Speaker of the House of Representatives must appoint four members, two from each of the two largest caucuses. Staff support must be provided by the Senate Committee Services and the House Office of Program Research. Each meeting of the legislative action committee must allow an opportunity for public comment.

The WSDOT must conduct a planning inventory to document existing planning data related to the construction of a new I-5 bridge. The WSDOT must report back to the Legislature on the details of the planning inventory by December 1, 2017.

Appropriation: \$350,000 of the Motor Vehicle Fund is appropriated to the WSDOT for a planning inventory.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) We just celebrated the 100th anniversary of the northbound span of the I-5 bridge over the Columbia River. Interstate 5 is the main west coast highway between Mexico and Canada, but the I-5 bridge still retains a drawbridge that opens multiple times per day, which is the only remaining drawspan on I-5. The I-5 bridge also uses the same bridge design as the collapsed Skagit River Bridge.

Over the last several years, there has been a 50 percent increase in delays on the I-5 bridge, and this congestion negatively effects both Portland and Vancouver.

The effort to rebuild the I-5 bridge has been ongoing for more than a decade, but the Columbia River Crossing failed in 2013 because of, among other things, a lack of agreement. This bill is based on a consensus among local legislators, and is the beginning of a long journey to replace the bridge.

There are three reasons to support this bill: (1) regional economic vitality, because reliable infrastructure is necessary to attract business; (2) freight mobility, because I-5 is the main freight corridor and certain businesses that are looking to expand are unwilling to do so since they cannot count on mobility; and (3) aging infrastructure, because neither span is seismically sound and both are structurally deficient.

Clark College's main campus is a half a mile from the I-5 bridge, and students, professors, and trustees all use the bridge.

The most prudent thing to do is to fix the I-5 bridge first. We need to be proactive and fix problems before they occur, which means doing first things first. The I-5 bridge is the most important thing, so it needs to be done first. We need to do the harder right, rather than the easier wrong.

There may be problems in Oregon too, but a new bridge would provide leverage to get those fixed.

The Clark County Council has voted to support the bridge replacement. The legislative action committee will allow local governments to offer input on the project, and the committee is required to receive public comment, which will also help. The legislative designation of statewide significance will help locals by keeping them from having to pay, and the design-build designation will also help save money on the project.

There is no way to know what Oregon will do, but this is a good step to find out what Oregon will do. Safety is the most important thing, and Oregon will not act unless Washington does. This bill begins the process.

The Port of Vancouver supports 50,000 jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity. The port supports the replacement of the bridge. 136,000 cars per day travel on the corridor, and they can all be stopped by a bridge lift. Congestion, safety, and seismic issues all exist.

All the ports in Clark County support this legislation. There needs to be a clear, effective process for replacement. It is tough to recruit businesses because of the access issues to Clark County. Eighty percent of the large buildable lots in the Portland metro area are in Clark County.

This bridge contains two out of the three lift spans on the entire interstate system.

Real estate in the region is tied to Oregon. Bridge traffic is a livability issue. Homes and businesses in Vancouver are affected by gridlock from drivers that are trying to avoid bridge traffic. The bridge is not the only issue affecting traffic, but it is the most important.

This bill is an endorsement of a process and a conversation to achieve a consensus.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Cleveland, prime sponsor; John McDonagh, Vancouver Chamber of Commerce; Bob Knight, Clark College; Jon Blom, Clark County; Julianna Marler, Port of Vancouver; Nelson Holmberg, Port of Ridgefield; and Rian Davis, Clark County Association of Realtors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.