



City of  
Portland



March 27, 2020

Bob Van Brocklin, Chair  
Oregon Transportation Commission  
355 Capitol St NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

## **RE: I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project**

Dear Chair Van Brocklin and Members of the Oregon Transportation Commission:

Thank you for your continued engagement of local and regional partners on the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (project). As partners in serving the community and building our city and state's future, we appreciate the steps that you have taken to stand up a project governance structure. Recent progress made in accordance with actions adopted by the OTC on 1/23/2020 is encouraging. **However, in this joint letter we are calling on the OTC to develop an alternative outcomes-based process and partner agreement that clearly demonstrates a path forward and/or proceed with a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The alternative process must be inclusive of solutions to address the project cost overrun (i.e., tolling revenue on the I-5 corridor), and realize climate benefits and community development opportunities.**

As you know, this land is special. It was the heart of Oregon's African-American community. The project area encompasses Harriet Tubman Middle School, which preceded the construction of Interstate-5, and is within the historic Albina neighborhood. The forced displacement and associated disinvestment in the decades following I-5 construction is our shared history. This project provides an opportunity to tell stories from Albina's rich history, create new transportation systems that help heal and connect us, and demonstrate responsibility for the past and commitment to a shared future. These are matters of statewide significance. Governor Brown and the state legislature have demonstrated leadership in their words and actions to ensure that significant public resources will be invested to address these common state and local priorities.

The action before the OTC directing ODOT to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) or EIS is significant. Let us be clear – we share your interest in delivering the right project in a timely manner that maximizes limited transportation resources. However, it is critical to ensure alignment on project outcomes in order to support a successful path forward.

As previously stated in various forms of testimony, some of our project concerns have not been sufficiently addressed. The January directives from the OTC began to lay the groundwork to address core community concerns. However, the current progress on individual action items since then falls short of providing the comprehensive framework necessary to gain stakeholder buy-in and move us forward. The specific timing of actions, Steering Committee decision-making authority and overall commitments remains unclear and must be laid out to build trust with key stakeholders.

Given the continued level of uncertainty in project scope and outcomes, as well as the significant cost increase as presented in ODOT's January Cost to Complete Report, there must be a process in place that is strong enough to address these challenges. Questions relating to scope, cost, and design alternatives would typically be done through an EIS. Without the structure of an expanded EIS, a process and partner agreement should be provided that demonstrates a clear path to determine the right project for this special place in our state history.

Since January 2020, we have been consistent in collectively requesting the following:

- 1) Historical acknowledgement and leadership commitment to restorative justice
- 2) Governance and cost transparency
- 3) Project scope consensus (surface improvements, highway covers, congestion pricing)
- 4) Commitment to environmental justice (reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality in N/NE Portland by maximizing opportunities for demand management, reducing congestion by designing for all transportation modes)

Specifically, steps to address missing elements from the above include:

- The OTC's guidance to ODOT reflected 11 significant actions identified on various timelines and with various implications. **We request clarity on the structure, tool or process that will be used to reconcile these timelines and ensure the required transparency and accountability to gain stakeholder support.**
- ODOT has yet to demonstrate how project principles and values will be supported by institutional commitments and policy. Project principles and values should focus on restorative justice and environmental outcomes, including:
  - Setting a new standard for disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE) contracting by the State, prime-contractor development programs, workforce development opportunities, anti-displacement and restorative community building investments, and long-term wealth creation and land ownership opportunities.
  - Environmental outcomes that seek to align the project scope and schedule with plans to study congestion pricing and TDM options in the I-5 Corridor to manage project costs and improve climate and equity outcomes in time to inform Project design and delivery; improving air quality in N/NE Portland, which is disproportionately impacted by air toxins; and working with Portland Public Schools to mitigate project impact on Harriet Tubman students.While we understand the intent to have the Steering Committee finalize project principles and values, **this is an important moment for the OTC and ODOT to demonstrate institutional leadership with an explicit commitment to restorative justice and environmental outcomes.**
- We acknowledge the steps taken to assemble the Community Advisory Committee and the Steering Committee. We thank ODOT for implementing a robust CAC recruitment with intentional outreach to community members who have historically been excluded from the decision-making process. ODOT has also engaged professional facilitators to help guide an inclusive and transparent committee process. However, these advisory bodies cannot constitute a meaningful governance structure without further clarity about their roles, expected deliverables, and greater transparency on how their feedback will be incorporated into project timeline and milestones. **Further, the decision-making structure should clearly define how feedback mechanisms will function between these committees,**

**OTC, participating agencies, and ODOT staff. We request ODOT develop a partner agency agreement that outlines how collaboration will continue to take place as part of this governance structure and an outcome-based process.**

- ODOT should reaffirm the scope of the project and commit to a complete project that reflects local, regional and community priorities while meeting the needs of the state system. **We request an inclusive highway cover design process that supports the active and safe spaces envisioned by the Albina community. This process should link I5RQ project governance with larger I-5 corridor planning efforts and be made clear in the scope and timeline of project delivery.**

These are particularly challenging times that require us to move forward using creative methods to engage our community with innovative action plans to invest in community building. We renew our request for a clearly defined framework for an alternative process, one which addresses the concerns outlined above in order to ensure the project will successfully address outcomes around equity, climate, and multi-modal infrastructure delivery.

Sincerely,

Rukaiyah Adams, Albina Vision Trust Chair

Portland Public Schools Board of Education

Lynn Peterson, Metro Council President

Ted Wheeler, City of Portland Mayor

Chloe Eudaly, City of Portland Commissioner

Jessica Vega Pederson, Multnomah County Commissioner