

Columbia River Crossing Oversight Subcommittee

ESSB 5024, Section 204(3) directs the Joint Transportation Committee to continue to convene a subcommittee for legislative oversight of the I-5/Columbia River Crossing Bridge Replacement Project. Membership is specified to include six members: two each from the House and Senate, a Governor's designee and a citizen member. Both the citizen member and at least two of the legislators must be from the area served by the bridge. The legislation also directs the Subcommittee to coordinate with Oregon's oversight committee for the Columbia River Crossing bridge.

Background

In 2012, the JTC convened an Oversight Subcommittee, which met four times in the Summer and Fall in Vancouver. The Subcommittee also had a private meeting in Seattle in October, with the head of the Federal Transit Administration. The Subcommittee chair held a private meeting in October with the Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard's Thirteenth District in Seattle.

During the meetings, the Subcommittee learned about the project's background and December, 2011 Record of Decision, project design including light rail, bridge height and clearance issues and associated mitigation discussions with affected users, the federal General Bridge Permit application to the U.S. Coast Guard, state and federal funding issues and concerns, and toll-related issues, among others. Public testimony was taken on October 9, 2012, during which 34 members of the public addressed the Subcommittee.

During the 2013 legislative session, the Oregon Legislature authorized a \$450 million state bond appropriation for their share of the bridge project costs, contingent on similar action by the Washington Legislature and federal commitment of \$850 million for light rail and the issuance of the U.S. Coast Guard's General Bridge Permit.

The 2013 Washington Legislature appropriated \$81 million dollars for the CRC project in the regular session. Governor Inslee vetoed that funding, saying it was insufficient to secure federal funding, among other reasons. The 2013 Washington Legislature adjourned sine die on June 29 without making any further appropriations for the new bridge.

On June 29 and 30, 2013, Governors Kitzhaber and Inslee called for the project to shut down. On July 12, 2013, Washington Secretary of Transportation Lynn Peterson outlined the shut-down process, which is expected to be essentially concluded by September 1, 2013.

Overall Study Approach

The Oversight Subcommittee will meet one time in the Greater Vancouver area. Columbia River Crossing project staff will describe the shut-down process, outline costs, implications for personnel, and contractual obligations. They will update the Subcommittee members on the status of the U.S. Coast Guard permit and mitigation agreements. They will also discuss how work already completed on the project may be available for use if and when the project is re-opened in the future.

Oregon legislators and staff may be invited to participate in the meeting.

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Appropriation: Within existing funds