

JAIME HERRERA BEUTLER
3RD DISTRICT, SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES, EDUCATION
AND RELATED AGENCIES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BRANCH
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND
WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES

U.S. JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1602

□ 2352 RAYBURN HOB
WASHINGTON D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3536

□ GENERAL O.O. HOWARD HOUSE
750 ANDERSON STREET, SUITE B
VANCOUVER, WA 98661
(360) 695-6292

WWW.JHB.HOUSE.GOV

April 19th, 2022

Mr. Greg Johnson
Program Administrator
Interstate Bridge Replacement Program Office
11018 NE 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682

Dear Administrator Johnson,

In light of the troubling recent reports that transportation officials within the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program (IBR) have already selected light rail as their preferred transit option in the I-5 bridge replacement process, I find it necessary to reiterate my strong opposition to light rail based on both the merits and on the clear preferences expressed by the people I represent.

Light rail has been rejected – repeatedly -- by voters in Southwest Washington by overwhelming margins^[1]. Whatever IBR officials see as the merits of light rail, they must be able to demonstrate that the transit component of the project is supported by the citizens who will use and pay for it. There is no such evidence that supersedes multiple votes of the people, which are the most fundamental demonstrations of community will.

The reasons for Southwest Washington's opposition to light rail are numerous, not the least of which is a concern over public safety. A recent news report cites a 2017 study showing a majority of crime in Portland's TriMet transit system occurred on light rail^[2]. Since that time, public safety has become a top-of-mind issue given the spike in murders in Portland and rising crime in our local communities. Many citizens have expressed outrage to me that in a March IBR steering committee meeting, officials appeared poised to select the more dangerous mass transit option with no concrete details for how it would address the associated crime. If IBR officials are truly committed to data-driven decisions, then crime-related data associated with Portland's light rail system must also be a factor. I recognize the challenge in doing so considering TriMet's imprudent decision to stop tracking these statistics, but it remains necessary.

And I won't overlook another flaw of light rail; the limitation it places on bridge height. Unfortunately, IBR officials have communicated that they are unable to design a bridge with light rail that is high enough to accommodate present and, equally important, future economic activity on the Columbia River. I won't support a bridge that chokes off jobs upriver just to accommodate a transit system that the people I represent don't even want.

As you know, bus and Bus Rapid Transit are alternative forms of mass transit that already serve commuters in this region. BRT would also qualify for federal transit funding, offers more flexibility than a fixed-rail system, and is a viable option for the I-5 project.

I serve as a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, and I work hard to secure the funding for projects supported by the citizens of Southwest Washington. Conversely, if major components of a project are designed in conflict with the will of Southwest Washington citizens, I will work just as hard to make sure such a project is brought into harmony with the desires of the people I represent before it moves forward.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress

^[1] November 5, 2013: Clark County Advisory Vote No. 1 (68%-32%); November 6, 2012 (57%-42%): C-TRAN Proposition No.1; February 7, 1995

^[2] "If light rail comes to Vancouver, security will be a concern." *Columbian*. April 9, 2022