

To: Oregon State Legislature - Joint Committee on Transportation
From: Ian B. Cannon, PE, County Engineer/Transportation Director
Subject: Support for House Bill 2112
Date: May 1, 2019

In 2015, Multnomah County completed a major update of our 20 year Capital Improvement Plan for our Willamette River Bridges. This plan recognized the increased knowledge of regional seismicity highlighted in documents such as the 2013 Oregon Resilience Plan. A major piece of our 20 year Capital Improvement Plan is the rehabilitation or replacement of the over 90 year old Burnside Bridge in downtown Portland. Additional information, such as the 2015 New Yorker article “The Really Big One” and the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries “Open File Report O-18-02 Earthquake Regional Impact Analysis for Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties, Oregon” point to the devastation expected as a result of a magnitude 8 or 9 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

In 2016, Multnomah County began what we are calling our Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge project. The purpose of this project is to provide a seismically resilient crossing over the Willamette River in downtown Portland that will support use by multiple modes: pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles, heavy trucks, river traffic, and be streetcar ready. In addition, we are planning for a 100 year lifespan. Metro identified Burnside Street as a regional lifeline route in 1996. The project will be designed to be immediately operational after a magnitude 8 or 9 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake to allow for emergency services and the reuniting of families, and to support the economic recovery of the region.

Since 2016, we have completed a Feasibility Study to narrow down over 100 options to four options. We are now starting our Environmental Review phase to further narrow down the four options to just one. We expect to complete this process by fall of 2021. As part of this process, we have a robust outreach program. Our agency partners include the City of Portland, the Oregon Department of Transportation, Metro, TriMet, the Federal Highway Administration, Washington and Clackamas Counties, and the cities of Beaverton and Gresham. We are also involving numerous stakeholder groups and the general public. One of the comments that we hear frequently is to move forward as quickly as possible.

Multnomah County has funded the Feasibility and Environmental Review Phases from our existing Vehicle Registration Fee. The County’s VRF was originally authorized in 2009 legislation that was amended in 2011. The 2009 legislation gave broad authority to the County to charge a vehicle registration fee “for the purpose of designing, replacing, acquiring necessary property for, engineering and constructing a bridge and its approach that crosses the Willamette River the City of Portland.” The authorizing statutes were again amended last year (2018) to make it clear that Multnomah County’s existing VRF was not subject to the 40 percent /60 percent City/County split in ORS 801.041.

Multnomah County is now working to put together a funding plan to allow the necessary and large Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge project to move forward without unnecessary delay. The currently proposed legislation would allow the County to increase the MC VRF within ORS 803.420 limitations and dedicate all of the proceeds to the Willamette River Bridges. For sake of clarity, this is not a new VRF, the County is planning to increase the amounts of the VRF to coincide with the VRF ceilings in ORS 803.420. The County intends to use the proceeds to fund the Earthquake Ready Burnside Bridge project for the foreseeable future and other Willamette River Bridge needs in the more distant future.

Multnomah County has support from our partners at the City of Portland and acceptance of the importance of this project from our East County cities. The scientists tell us about this earthquake that it's not a matter of if, but when. We are working with urgency to make our community more resilient. Multnomah County asks for your support of this legislation to help us invest in the future of our community as we plan for the major Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.