



## PROJECT FAQs

### 1. What is the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project?

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The purpose of the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (Project) is to improve safety and congestion where three major interstates converge and to reconnect the Albina neighborhood through the construction of a highway cover over a portion of I-5. Project benefits include improving safety and mobility on local streets, creating new space for community development and developing a diverse and skilled workforce.

This 1.8-mile stretch of highway is the only two-lane section of I-5 in a major urban area between Canada and Mexico. It has the highest crash rate on any urban interstate in Oregon and is the state's top traffic bottleneck. The project addresses the critical need to keep Oregon's people and economy moving.

### 2. Where is the Project located?

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The project area centers around a stretch of I-5 just east of the Willamette River. Three major interstates come together here: I-5, I-84 and I-405. The project area sits within the Eliot and Lloyd District neighborhoods.

The project area also sits in the heart of the historic Albina neighborhood. Albina was a thriving community and business district for Black Portlanders until several major urban renewal and development projects, including the construction of I-5, severed and displaced the community. Because past public and private development decisions in the historic Albina neighborhood so negatively impacted Black Portlanders, ODOT is committed to engaging with and prioritizing the voices of the historic Albina community.

### 3. Why is improving the project area so important to the traveling public?

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I-5 is the main north-south highway along the west coast of the United States and is critical for moving people and goods and connecting cities and towns from Mexico to Canada. The surrounding local streets provide access to services and transportation options, such as the Moda Center, Oregon Convention Center, Rose Quarter Transit Center and the Broadway/Weidler bike corridor, and are essential to how local residents get around. The Project addresses the following concerns:

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- The top traffic bottleneck in Oregon and the 28th worst freight bottleneck in the nation.
  - Some of the highest traffic volumes in the state of Oregon, with up to 12 hours of congestion each day.
  - A key contributor to Portland’s 2022 ranking as the 12th most congested U.S. city and 37th most congested city worldwide.
  - A crash rate 3.5 times higher than the statewide average on I-5.
  - A lack of full shoulders in key areas of I-5 to clear crashes and to provide emergency vehicles access or movement through traffic.
  - A lack of neighborhood connections and undersized, incomplete and inaccessible sidewalks and crossings for people walking, biking and rolling through the surrounding local streets.

#### 4. What are the Project’s values?

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ODOT acknowledges the impact and harm caused to the historic Albina community and is therefore committed to supporting a safer and more equitable project for Albina. It will enhance and improve travel, community spaces and community connections while supporting opportunities for economic development, including future land redevelopment opportunities. The Project’s values include:

- **Restorative Justice for the Albina Community** to accelerate social, racial and economic equity sustaining positive, tangible change specifically for Portland's Black community.
- **Community Input and Transparent Decision-Making** to have community-informed and involved decision-making through a community-connected, transparent and inclusionary process.
- **Mobility Focus** to increase connectivity for the traveling public and local community.
- **Climate Action and Improved Public Health** to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet local, regional and statewide climate action goals.

#### 5. What are the key elements of the project design?

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- **New ramp-to-ramp connections (auxiliary lanes)** in each direction of I-5 between I-84 and I-405 to reduce vehicle weaving, create safer merging and improve connections between interchanges.
- **Wider shoulders in each direction of I-5** between I-84 and I-405, providing space for stalled vehicles to move out of traffic and for emergency vehicles to respond to emergencies more quickly.
- **A highway cover over I-5** that reconnects local streets and creates new community spaces on top for future development and economic opportunities.
- **A new east-west roadway crossing over I-5** that reconnects Hancock Street across the highway, adding another crossing north of Broadway/Weidler.

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- **A proposed segment of the Green Loop** along Broadway/Weidler, a planned 6-mile bike and pedestrian path that allows people to travel safely through the heart of the city.
  - **Multimodal local street improvements** including wider paths, curb ramps that are accessible in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and better lighting for people walking, biking and rolling.
  - **Relocation of the I-5 southbound off-ramp** to maximize space for new developable land on the highway cover.

## 6. What are the project benefits?

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Expected project benefits include:

- Providing smoother traffic flow on I-5 through ramp-to-ramp connections and wider shoulders.
- Faster emergency response times as responders use wider shoulders to move through traffic.
- Reducing crashes on I-5 by up to 50%.
- Saving travelers on I-5 nearly 2.5 million hours of travel time each year, getting people, goods and freight through this section of I-5 more quickly.
- Restoring neighborhood street connections over I-5.
- Creating opportunities for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises through contracts that build long-term career prospects for small businesses.
- Designing and building a highway cover that can accommodate new community development.
- Adding more than 1.5 miles of local street improvements to make streets safer by offering greater visibility, protection and access to people walking, biking and rolling.

## 7. What is the highway cover?

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A highway cover is a structure built over a highway, similar to a very wide bridge. By replacing existing bridges with one continuous highway cover, new land over I-5 that doesn't currently exist will be available for community development. In addition, the new cover will include seismic upgrades, making it more resilient in the event of an earthquake.

The Proposed Hybrid 3 Cover Concept is the highway cover design that the community recommended after the evaluation of multiple highway cover options through an Independent Cover Assessment review in 2020 and 2021. The proposed design will connect streets that are currently divided by I-5. The new land created over I-5 will allow for wider sidewalks and the potential for future land development opportunities.

Future development of the highway cover will be determined through a separate public process led by the City of Portland, which has land use authority over cover uses. ODOT will be a partner in that effort.

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## 8. How will auxiliary lanes and wider shoulders improve safety on I-5?

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New ramp-to-ramp connections (auxiliary lanes) are designed to separate slower vehicles entering and exiting I-5 from higher-speed vehicles using the through lanes. Auxiliary lanes are proven to increase safety by providing drivers more time to merge, which reduces rear-end and sideswipe crashes. Studies show the new ramp-to-ramp connections are expected to reduce the frequency of crashes by up to 50%.

The Project will also build wider shoulders along I-5 between I-84 and I-405, which will provide space for vehicles to get safely off the roadway and give emergency vehicles safer and quicker access to emergencies within and beyond the Rose Quarter area.

Projects around the United States and other completed projects in the Portland area have proven the benefits of adding auxiliary lanes. A project in Tualatin added a single southbound auxiliary lane on I-5 from north of Lower Boones Ferry Road to I-205 to relieve congestion and reduce crashes. Results have shown that the auxiliary lane has reduced merging conflicts and allowed a more direct connection for people traveling from OR 217 to I-205. It has improved trip reliability during evening peak traffic by 16 minutes, decreased crashes per year by 29% and saved drivers \$13.8 million worth of time<sup>1</sup> annually.

A similar project in east Portland added an auxiliary lane on I-205 southbound, connecting the I-84 eastbound on-ramp to the SE Division Street/SE Powell Boulevard off-ramp. Between 2017 and 2019, this project decreased congestion over a 6-mile stretch by 35% and saved drivers \$3 million worth of time annually.

## 9. How will the Project improve safety for non-motorists?

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Local street improvements will make streets safer by offering greater visibility, protection and access to people walking, biking and rolling. The Project includes improvements on local streets for all users, such as better lighting and ADA-compliant curb ramps. The Project will improve bike facilities and replace existing bike lanes with either buffered or protected lanes.

## 10. Will the Project increase the number of lanes? Will it expand the highway?

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The Project is not a massive highway expansion project. It does not add new through lanes. At specific areas along the state's worst highway bottleneck, the Project will add new auxiliary lanes, which serve as ramp-to-ramp connections, and expand the existing highway shoulders along I-5. While this will increase the paved width of the highway, the auxiliary lanes are designed to separate

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<sup>1</sup> Driver time saved is calculated in the following way: Daily Cost of Delay = (total daily vehicle delay in hours \* passenger vehicle % \* \$26.44 per hour) + (total daily vehicle delay in hours \* heavy truck % \* \$33.24 per hour).

The daily cost of travel time for each vehicle type is based on a published ODOT report on the value of travel time, which can be found here: <https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Data/Documents/2017-The-Value-of-Travel-Time.pdf>

Annual Cost of Delay = Daily Cost of Delay \* 250 days (250 days represent the average non-holiday weekdays in a year).

To learn more, read the 2020 Traffic Performance Report: <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Projects/Project%20Documents/TPR-2020.pdf>.

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slower vehicles entering and exiting the highway from the higher speed through traffic using the existing through lanes.

The new auxiliary lanes are projected to reduce congestion and improve safety on I-5 in our growing community. As an example for how they will function, let's look at how the traffic is currently moving during morning and evening rush hour. During peak morning and evening traffic, over 95% of vehicles that enter I-5 southbound from the I-405 Fremont Bridge go on to exit the interstate within 2 miles, either at Broadway, I-84 or the Morrison Bridge<sup>2</sup>. These three exits are all within the project area. With the proposed ramp-to-ramp connections, vehicles coming from the I-405 Fremont Bridge and going to one of these three exits can use the new auxiliary lane and will not have to merge in and out of through traffic on I-5. The Project is projected to save travelers on I-5 about 2.5 million hours of travel time each year.

The wider highway shoulders will provide space for vehicles to safely exit the roadway in an emergency. There are areas on I-5 within the project footprint that currently lack these shoulders. The wider shoulders will also give emergency service vehicles safer and quicker access to emergencies. These improvements will widen the physical footprint of I-5 without adding more through-travel lanes and will be built primarily within existing ODOT right-of-way.

## 11. How will the Project impact Harriet Tubman Middle School?

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The project team is committed to prioritizing the health and safety of the students at Harriet Tubman Middle School (HTMS) by working with Portland Public Schools (PPS) and other partners to explore ways to minimize construction impacts. Construction immediately adjacent to the school site will be limited to non-school hours. To shield and reduce temporary construction noise, a new sound wall will extend along the eastern edge of the I-5 right of way. With the sound wall in place, the noise levels at the school site will be lower than existing noise levels after the Project is completed. Minor, temporary air quality impacts may occur in the immediate vicinity of construction activity. The project team is working to identify and implement air quality best management practices.

ODOT stands by its commitment to work collaboratively with PPS on minimizing disruptions created by construction to staff and students, and will continue to keep PPS apprised of the latest data and developments regarding the Project.

PPS is leading a separate effort to relocate HTMS to a new location in the area and away from the I-5 corridor. This move is not as a result of the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project and came about because \$120 million in funding for relocating the school was approved by the state legislature. PPS is exploring possible new locations and has the latest information. While ODOT is not directly involved in this effort, we support PPS's process to address concerns related to the school being adjacent to I-5.

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<sup>2</sup> Metro Regional Travel Demand Models, 2015. Learn more about Metro's modeling services: <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/modeling-services>.

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## 12. What is the status of the Project's environmental review process and what are next steps for the Project?

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The National Environmental Policy Act is a federal law requiring agencies seeking federal funding or approval to assess potential impacts of their projects on the natural, human and built environments. This includes impacts on things such as air quality, traffic, historic resources, communities and more. Depending on the level of expected impact from a project, agencies must document a Categorical Exclusion, Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, ODOT prepared and published an EA in 2019, and a Supplemental EA in 2022. Both times, the process included an opportunity for the public to review the findings and comment on the analysis. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reviews all findings and public comments before making an environmental decision on a project.

The 2022 Supplemental EA and the recently completed 50-day public comment period will lead to a decision by the FHWA, which is expected in early 2023. Pending the FHWA's decision, construction of the Project could begin by late 2023.

We'll be leaning into existing partnerships to leverage the most success in reconnecting communities. ODOT is committed to building the space and highway cover across I-5. We'll work with the community, stakeholders and community-based organizations, the City of Portland, and other partners. When it comes to urban design components, we'll be asking what the place should be and how we can show up as partners.

This is just the beginning. We're only at 5-10% design of the main package, which includes the highway cover. There will be a lot of opportunities to provide feedback. We'll continue updating the community and our partners as we move forward.

## 13. How is the Project addressing climate change?

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Transportation emissions are Oregon's largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions. Other top sources of emissions are: heating our homes and businesses, residential and commercial construction and agriculture. Not in isolation, but together with other projects overseen by ODOT's Urban Mobility Office and other partners, the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project supports a region-wide Urban Mobility Strategy<sup>3</sup> and regional policy that addresses statewide emission reduction goals. As such, project-specific greenhouse gas levels should be considered in the context of the state's overall emission reduction plan.

Federal, state and local strategies are expected to reduce transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions through better fuel economy standards, inspection and maintenance programs, and transition to cleaner, low-carbon fuels for motor vehicles, including the electrification of vehicle fleets. Oregon is also investing millions of dollars to support electric vehicle charging infrastructure

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<sup>3</sup> The Urban Mobility Office oversees ODOT's Urban Mobility Strategy – a cohesive approach to make everyday travel safer, easier and more predictable in the Portland metropolitan area.

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along the West Coast Electric Highway<sup>4</sup>. On December 19, 2022, Oregon policymakers approved a rule that will ban the sale of new gasoline-powered passenger vehicles by 2035, joining California and Washington. The effort comes as Oregon aims to cut climate-warming emissions by 50% by 2035 and by 90% by 2050. As a result of these regulatory efforts, large decreases in emissions are expected.

#### **14. How much is the Project expected to cost and how will it be funded?**

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With the Proposed Hybrid 3 Cover Concept, the cost of the Project has increased from the original design. The most recent project cost estimate, including the Proposed Hybrid 3 Cover Concept, is \$1.18 billion to \$1.25 billion for a highway cover that can support up to three-story buildings on top. A highway cover supporting buildings up to six stories, which is being explored, would cost approximately an additional \$172 million to \$200 million, bringing the total project cost to about \$1.35 billion to \$1.45 billion. These figures will be updated in the future.

Multiple sources of funding are anticipated for project construction, including funds from:

- Programs related to the 2021 federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- Oregon House Bill 2017.
- Net revenues from the Oregon Toll Program, including the Regional Mobility Pricing Project.
- Other federal, state, regional and local funding sources.

#### **15. How is ODOT addressing the concerns and needs of the historic Albina community?**

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In Portland, generations of Black families are still being impacted by the lasting harm caused by the original construction of I-5 in the 1950s and 1960s, which resulted in the loss of homes, businesses, community places and generational wealth creation. It's important to acknowledge this painful history as ODOT puts a renewed focus on the historic Albina community through the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project.

The Project presents a significant opportunity to contribute to Portland's Black community. First by acknowledging these past harms and delivering a project that was not only influenced by Black voices but intentionally invests in Black and minority-owned companies and workers. From consultants and vendors, community groups and non-profits, to new operational and institutional practices ODOT is prioritizing equity and ensuring Black voices have a seat at the center of the table.

We can't replace what once was in Albina, but we can ensure we do not repeat past harms and also be a national model for how a transportation project can invest in people. That means fostering

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<sup>4</sup> The West Coast Electric Highway is an extensive network of public electric vehicle DC fast charging and Level 2 charging stations along the West Coast, from British Columbia to the California-Mexico border. Charging stations are located every 25 – 50 miles along Interstate 5, U.S. Highway 101 and other major roadways in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California.

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economic empowerment, self-sufficiency and wealth creation opportunities for the Black community through good-paying jobs and pathways to entrepreneurship.

## 16. How is ODOT ensuring that contract and workforce opportunities are equitable?

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For the first time in ODOT's history, the agency is applying a diversity plan to a mega-project. From capacity building to a mentor-protege program and anti-harassment policies, the Project's [Diversity and Subcontracting Plan](#) includes strategies to boost contracting opportunities for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) and expand a diverse workforce. With guidance from the Community Oversight Advisory Committee, this diversity plan was adopted in February 2022.

With more than 2 million labor hours and up to \$150 million in payroll and benefits, the Project offers career pathways and employment opportunities within the trades and in construction-related fields. It also presents capacity-building opportunities and large project experience for businesses with small cash flow and/or little to no experience working on major infrastructure projects. There are three to five Mini Construction Manager/General Contractor (Mini CM/GC) work packages for DBEs, where they will receive mentorship, training and business development support. Long-term projects like the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project offer career stability and opportunities to learn new skills. Learn more about the CM/GC process by viewing this [fact sheet](#).

## 17. How are the advisory committees shaping the Project?

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Advisory committees oversee and provide direction for the Project. Committee members' expertise reflects diverse professional backgrounds, including minority-owned firms, advocacy groups, workforce development organizations, industry associations and community-based organizations. Members are leaders and volunteers with strong ties to the historic Albina community and have a wide variety of civic and community interests. All members are recognized for advocating for people, particularly people of color and other diverse groups.

The [Community Oversight Advisory Committee](#) works to ensure the construction contractor meets its community and project goals and expectations for contracting with disadvantaged businesses and employing minorities and women. The Community Oversight Advisory Committee brings a broad perspective on community, social, economic and workforce issues in the project area.

The [Historic Albina Advisory Board's](#) purpose is to elevate voices in the Black community to ensure that project outcomes reflect community interests and values, and that the community directly benefits from the investments of this Project. The Board brings community perspectives to the Project's decision-making process concerning elements that most directly support community connections, urban design and wealth generation in the Black and historic Albina community.

## 18. Want to learn more?

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If you'd like to learn more about the Project, you can send your questions to the project team (see contact options below). The project team is available to present briefings to nonprofits and other community organizations upon request.

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Project staff is also available for tabling at community events. We are still in the early stages of design for the Main Construction Package, which includes the highway cover. As we finalize the design for the cover's interim and final uses, we will be seeking community input. Stay informed about opportunities to provide input by signing up for our mailing list and checking the Project's Events & Meetings page for updates.

More questions? We invite you to reach out to the project team at:

Email: [i5rosequarter@odot.oregon.gov](mailto:i5rosequarter@odot.oregon.gov)

Phone: 503-470-3127