
PROJECT FAQs



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

The I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project (Project) is one of several large transportation improvement projects in the Portland metro area being managed by ODOT's Urban Mobility Office. The Project includes upgrades to I-5 between I-84 and I-405 in central Portland to reduce congestion and improve safety at Oregon's top traffic bottleneck. Highway improvements will include auxiliary lanes and full shoulders to smooth traffic flow by providing vehicles additional space to accelerate or decelerate safely when merging on or off I-5, as well as space for emergency responders and disabled vehicles to move out of the way of traffic.

Above I-5, the Project includes the construction of a highway cover to reconnect neighborhood streets. The connected streets improve travel for people walking, biking and driving through the Rose Quarter area, with upgrades to sidewalks and street crossings.

The highway cover also adds new developable land that can support buildings up to 3 stories tall, with an option for buildings up to 6 stories. ODOT will build and own the highway cover structures, creating an urban canvas for future development. The City of Portland will lead the community process to determine how the land will be used and developed.

2. Where is the Project located?

The project area is a stretch of I-5 that runs through the heart of Portland. Several major interstates come together here between I-84 and I-405. It is located in the historic Albina community in an area near the Willamette River passing through the Lloyd, Eliot and Boise neighborhoods.

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

3. Why is the project area so important for the traveling public?

I-5 is the main north-south highway moving people and goods and connecting cities and towns across the west coast of the U.S. from Mexico to Canada. I-5 between I-84 and I-405 is the top traffic bottleneck in Oregon and the 28th worst freight bottleneck in the nation. It also has:

- Some of the highest traffic volumes in the state of Oregon, with up to 12 hours of congestion each day.
- A crash rate 3.5 times higher than the statewide average.
- A lack of full shoulders in key areas for crashes to clear and emergency vehicles to access.

In addition, nearby local streets lack neighborhood connections and have undersized and incomplete sidewalks and street crossings for people walking, rolling and biking.

4. What are the project values?

Through the Project, ODOT is committed to supporting a safer, more inclusive Albina community and greater Portland region. The Project will enhance and improve community places, spaces and connections while supporting opportunities for economic development, including future land redevelopment opportunities.

Project 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 will be created by this Project?

A Safer and More Reliable I-5

- **New ramp-to-ramp connections (auxiliary lanes)** in each direction on I-5 between I-84 and I-405 to reduce vehicle weaving, creating safer merging and improved connections between interchanges.
- **Wider shoulders** in each direction on I-5 between I-84 and I-405, providing space for disabled vehicles to move out of traffic and allowing emergency vehicles to respond to emergencies more quickly.

Community Connections

- **A highway cover over I-5** that is earthquake-safe and reconnects divided streets, accommodates construction of buildings up to 3 stories tall, with an option to build up to 6 stories tall at additional cost, and creates opportunities for new community spaces that strengthen the connection between people and places.
- **A new east-west roadway crossing over I-5** reconnecting N. Hancock Street and N.E. Hancock Street.
- **Local street improvements** including wider paths for people walking, biking and rolling.
- **A key segment of the Green Loop**, along Broadway and Weidler Streets, a proposed multi-use pathway being built in central Portland by the City.

6. What are the Project's benefits?

Expected project benefits include:

- Providing smoother traffic flow on I-5 through ramp-to-ramp connections and wider shoulders, allowing emergency responders to move through more quickly.
- 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 I-5 more quickly.
- Restoring neighborhood street connections over I-5.
- Creating over \$250 million in Disadvantaged Business Enterprise opportunities with contracts that build long-term career prospects for small businesses.
- Designing and building an earthquake-safe highway cover that can accommodate buildings on the new land created (up to 3-story buildings, with an option for up to 6-story buildings at additional cost).
- Adding 8,500 feet (or more than 1.5 miles) of street improvements to make streets safer by offering greater visibility, protection and access to people walking, rolling and biking. Some of the existing conventional bike lanes will be replaced with buffered or protected bike lanes.

7. What is the highway cover?

A highway cover is a concrete or steel platform that is placed over a highway to accommodate community uses and structures above. As part of the Project, there is an opportunity to reconnect the street grid in the Albina area by replacing existing, aging bridges with one large, seismically resilient highway cover over I-5.

The Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept is the highway cover design that was recommended by the community after multiple highway cover options were evaluated through an Independent Cover Assessment review in 2020 and 2021. The Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept highway cover design will connect streets that are currently divided by I-5. It will also add new land over I-5, allowing for wider sidewalks and potential for future economic development opportunities. The Oregon Transportation Commission approved additional evaluation of the Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept in September 2021 following community and local agency recommendations.

Once built, the cover will be able to hold buildings up to 3 stories or possibly up to 6 stories for an additional cost. It will also meet current seismic (earthquake) standards, making this structure over I-5 more resilient in the event of an earthquake, and will provide critical transportation access for community members and first responders.

8. How is the Project expected to improve driver and vehicle safety on I-5?

New ramp-to-ramp connections (auxiliary lanes) are designed to separate slower vehicles entering and exiting the highway from higher-speed vehicles using the through lanes on the highway. 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 service vehicles safer and quicker access to emergencies within and beyond the Rose Quarter area.**

The benefits of adding auxiliary lanes have been proven around the U.S. and in other completed projects in Portland. The I-5 Southbound: Lower Boones Ferry Road to I-205 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 conflicts from merging movements and allowed for more direct connection for people travelling 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 of time annually.

In a similar project, the I-205 Southbound: I-84 Eastbound to Powell Boulevard project in east Portland added an auxiliary lane on I-205 southbound to connect the I-84 eastbound on-ramp to the Division Street/Powell Boulevard off-ramp. Because congestion extended far to the north, the benefits of the project are shown over an approximately 6-mile segment (approximately Foster Road to the Columbia River) to capture the full impact of improvements. Between 2017 and 2019, this project decreased congestion by 35% and saved drivers \$3 million of time annually.

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

Local street improvements will make streets safer by offering greater visibility, protection and access to people walking, rolling and biking. The Project includes improvements on local streets for all users, such as well-lit sidewalks and curb ramps compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The multi-use path on N. Williams Avenue will be separated from vehicles, better protected and more than 20 feet wide – equivalent to the width of two auto travel lanes. Bike facilities along the roads on the cover will be increased by over 10%, and many conventional bike lanes will be replaced with either buffered or protected lanes.

10. How will the Project impact Harriet Tubman Middle School?

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 impacts. Our design plans account for adjustments to limit impacts to PPS property to construct the Project. Construction immediately adjacent to the school site will take place only during the summer months, when school is not in session. To shield and reduce temporary construction noise, the Project proposes a new sound wall extending along the eastern

edge of I-5 right-of-way. With the sound wall in place and once the Project is constructed, the noise levels at the school site will be lower than existing noise levels. 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 both for the site and within the Project itself.

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.

A separate effort, distinct from the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project, is being led by PPS to relocate HTMS to a new location in the area and away from the I-5 corridor. Funding for relocating the school has been approved by the state legislature (\$120 million approved in the 2022 legislative session), and PPS is exploring possible new locations. While ODOT is not directly involved in this effort, we support PPS's process to address concerns related to a school being sited adjacent to a highway.

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

The Project will not add new through lanes. The Project will add new ramp-to-ramp connections (auxiliary lanes) along a 1-mile stretch of I-5 and expand the existing highway shoulders. While this will increase the paved width of the highway, the auxiliary lanes are designed to separate slower vehicles entering and exiting the highway from 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. Nearly 99% of southbound vehicles using the I-405 Fremont Bridge exit I-5 within 2 miles, either at Broadway, I-84, or the Morrison Bridge. These three exits are all within the project area. **With the proposed ramp-to-ramp connections, these vehicles 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. 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 additional through-travel lanes and will be built primarily within land already owned by ODOT.**

12. What is the status of the Project's environmental review process?

ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are conducting a supplemental Environmental Assessment process for the Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept. FHWA rescinded the November 2020 Finding of No Significant Impact decision document, and the updated Environmental Assessment process will lead to a new decision document by FHWA in early 2023.

Updating the Environmental Assessment is a step we anticipated to evaluate the Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept, which requires additional environmental review documentation. With this additional effort to respond to the community-recommended highway cover design, the project timeline is still on schedule for construction to begin by late 2023. ODOT will maintain our existing contracts for the project team and will remain focused on completing the necessary environmental documentation and early work package design development for the construction start next year.

We welcome this step in the process that will help solidify the implementation plan for the Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept and move the Project forward. This step is part of our responsiveness to community feedback on getting the project design right – including the direct feedback from the Historic Albina Advisory Board and Community Oversight Advisory Committee.

A deeper look into the environmental review process

What is the National Environmental Policy Act?

The National Environmental Policy Act is a federal law requiring agencies to assess the environmental impacts that potential projects may cause. ODOT and FHWA initiated this process for the Project in 2017. In 2019, ODOT and FHWA published an Environmental Assessment and held a 45-day public comment period. In 2020, ODOT and FHWA published a Finding of No Significant Impact and Revised Environmental Assessment.

What is an Environmental Assessment?

An Environmental Assessment is a study that looks at impacts a project can have on the natural, built and human environment. It has several main features:

- A plan for coordinating with partner agencies.
- An approach for collecting community feedback.
- A purpose and need of the project.
- An understanding of the current and future project area with or without the project.
- A review of the short- and long-term environmental impacts.

The Environmental Assessment identifies ways to reduce adverse effects to people and the environment. The FHWA reviews it. There are two outcomes from the review:

1. The FHWA issues a Finding of No Significant Impact if there are no significant impacts. This ends the environmental step for the project.
2. An Environmental Impact Statement is needed if there are significant impacts.

What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

An Environmental Impact Statement is an additional study required if significant impacts could come from the project to people or the environment. The FHWA determines this outcome. The Environmental Impact Statement studies more items than the Environmental Assessment by:

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- Evaluating the Environmental Assessment.
 - Discussing alternatives to the project.
 - Reviewing future development in the project area.
 - Discussing benefits of avoiding project impacts.

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

With the Proposed Hybrid 3 Cover Concept, the cost of the Project has increased. As of September 2020, the estimated cost of the Project, including the Proposed Hybrid 3 Concept, is \$1.18 billion to \$1.25 billion with highway covers that can support up to 3-story buildings on top. A highway cover supporting buildings up to 6 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.

Oregon State Legislature House Bill 2017, which is the current dedicated funding source for the Project, provides about \$500 million to \$700 million of funding, depending on interest rates at the time of bonding. ODOT is working on a finance plan to seek additional funding sources, including new federal funds and competitive grant opportunities from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

14. How is ODOT addressing the concerns and needs of the historic Albina community?

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

The Project presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to advance Portland's Black community – to acknowledge the past harms of the destruction of the Albina community, and to deliver a restorative project through intentionally investing in Black and minority-owned companies and workers. From consultants to vendors to community groups and non-profits, ODOT is prioritizing equity and ensuring these voices have a seat at the table and can participate in project decision-making and wealth creation through the Project's contracting opportunities.

We can't replace what once was in Albina, but we can be a national model for restorative justice in a transportation project by investing in people. That means economic empowerment, self-sufficiency and wealth creation opportunities for the Black community through good-paying jobs and pathways to entrepreneurship.

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

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 [Diversity and Subcontracting Plan](#) includes strategies to boost contracting opportunities for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) and expand the availability of diverse workers on the Project. With support and development from the Community Oversight Advisory Committee, this diversity plan was adopted in February 2022.

With more than \$250 million in DBE contracting opportunities available as a result of the Project, new businesses with small cash flow and little to no experience working with ODOT will soon build capacity and strengthen their sustainability by training and employing local journeyman and journeymen. There are 3 to 5 Mini Construction Manager/General Contractor prime, mentoring and capacity-building opportunities for DBEs. Long-term projects like the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project offer career stability and opportunities to learn new skills.

16. Who is involved in shaping the Project?

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 with a wide array 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 their community directly benefits from the investments of this Project. The board brings community perspectives into 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.

To learn more about these advisory committees, visit our website [here](#).

17. How can you get involved with the Project?

The Project is in the early stages of design, and there is still a lot of work to be done. We need the community to help shape the Project. Throughout the design process, we want to hear from you. There are ongoing opportunities for feedback through community events, open houses, online surveys, public committee meetings and urban design stakeholder meetings at which you can provide input.

We aim to foster a two-way dialogue that demonstrates how productive conversations can contribute to collaborative project decision-making. You will continue to see us engaging in active and meaningful conversations with people, focusing on engagement with everyone and especially the Black community.

Through our outreach, we commit to collaborating with the community, with the support of local, regional and state government, by bringing people with diverse backgrounds and expertise together to expand community understanding. We will ensure the project values strive to meet the needs of the community.

We invite you to become involved by visiting the events page on the project website, signing up for the project email updates, and contacting the project team at...

18. Project team contact information

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