



# Comment Summary

March 16, 2020 – March 27, 2020

April 1, 2020

**Total Comments: 469**

- **Electronic (comment form or email): 468**
- **Mail: 0**
- **Video recordings: 1**

## Summary

In response to Governor Kate Brown’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” directive to cancel large group meetings and events in order to slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) announced that it would postpone its March 20, 2020 meeting until April 2, 2020 and hold the meeting via teleconference rather than in person.

Due to the changes in timing and format of the OTC meeting, and to ensure access for public testimony on the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project and other agenda items, the OTC opened a two-week public comment period beginning Monday, March 16, 2020 and closing at 5 p.m. PDT on Friday, March 27, 2020.

The OTC offered multiple options to provide public testimony in advance of the April 2 meeting:

- (1) electronically via the OTC comment form or email;
- (2) written comments via standard mail; and
- (3) videotaped comments at ODOT Region 1 Headquarters in Portland.

All comments were submitted electronically except for one videotaped comment.

Most commenters requested that ODOT prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project. Many expressed concerns for the health of students and faculty at Harriet Tubman Middle School, and raised equity and social justice concerns due to the project’s location in a historically black and African American neighborhood. Many expressed concerns for climate change and asserted that the project conflicts with the State’s climate action goals. Many offered alternatives to highway expansion such as transit and tolling and felt that the funds would be better spent this way. Many expressed disbelief in the findings and outcomes of the environmental assessment (EA).

This comment period also included many references to the current public health emergency due to COVID-19. Some expressed concern for the transparency of the public process with the OTC

meeting moving to an online format. Some comments also cited that the stay home order could make the project unnecessary.

Appendix A includes a background of public engagement history. Appendix B includes a comment summary from December 1, 2019 – January 6, 2020 and captures all comments submitted regarding the December 17, 2019 OTC meeting.

## Comment Themes

Comments submitted to the OTC from March 16 to March 27, 2020 are categorized by their key themes, outlined below. Categories are listed in order by most mentioned.

### Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

- Urging the OTC to direct ODOT to conduct an EIS, with the statement “Say Yes to the EIS”
- Disbelief in the accuracy of the Environmental Assessment

### Harriet Tubman Middle School / Environmental Justice

- Concern for students’ health, current and post-project completion
- Sense of injustice that highway is impacting a minority population school

### Climate Change

- Concern for lack of climate action by prioritizing highway users
- Concern for current and potentially worse air quality post-project completion
- Concern the project is in conflict with Governor Kate Brown’s State climate goals

### Air Quality / Health

- Concern for the health of residents in the project area due to vehicle emissions, brake pad toxins, etc.

### Cost

- Concern about the project cost
- Belief that there are more cost-effective alternatives to address congestion
- Concern for increased project costs if an EIS delays the project

### Range of Alternatives / Transit

- Ideas for project alternatives; such as tolling and high-speed rail
- Belief that alternatives need to be re-evaluated
- Belief that expanded transit could be a more cost-effective alternative

### Induced Demand / Project Effectiveness

- Disbelief in the efficacy of the project in solving congestion

## Comment Summary 3/16/20-3/27/20

- Belief that solving Rose Quarter congestion will push the bottleneck north to the I-5 bridge

## Current Public Health Emergency (COVID-19 pandemic)

- Concern that major project decisions are being masked by a global pandemic
- Belief that with most people telecommuting due to COVID-19, there is even less need for the project
- Frustration that the OTC meeting will be held via teleconference
- Recommendations for the OTC to delay the environmental process vote until a meeting can be held in person

## Accuracy of Current Study

- Belief that the Environmental Assessment is based on faulty data, makes invalid assumptions about traffic patterns
- Belief that too much is unknown for a project of this size

## Appendices

Appendix A: Public Engagement Summary

Appendix B: Comment Summary: December 1, 2019 – January 6, 2020

**Appendix A: Public Engagement Summary**



# Public Engagement Summary

March 26, 2020

## Overview

Over the past three decades, planning and development of the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project have included an active public engagement component. This summary provides a high-level overview of public engagement activities through March 2020.

## Environmental Review Phase Engagement

### 2017 – April 2019

During development of the draft Environmental Assessment, key public engagement activities included:

- Project presentations at over 100 community gatherings
- Nine (9) hosted community events with more than 280 attendees
- Two (2) in-person open houses
- One (1) online open house for duration of 45-day Environmental Assessment public comment period
- One (1) public hearing on the Environmental Assessment during public comment period
- Interviews and direct outreach with Black Portlanders and communities of color
- Work with a 14-member Community Liaisons Group to inform outreach
- Community walking and biking tours
- Door-to-door outreach with over 60 businesses
- Two (2) Pastors Breakfasts with N/NE faith-based community leaders
- Updates via the project website and newsletters (seven (7) e-newsletters focused specifically on the Environmental Assessment)
- Tabling at community events
- Project information mailer sent to over 6,700 project area households
- Project information advertised in English and Spanish in several local newspapers
- Social media content (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Nextdoor)
- Development of a project video (included in online open house)
- A 45-day public review and comment period on the draft Environmental Assessment (February 15 - April 1, 2019)

The City of Portland and Metro also provided additional public testimony opportunities when the project was incorporated into the following local and regional transportation and land use plans:

- City of Portland 2035 Transportation System Plan and the Portland Central City 2035 Plan, adopted by City Council in June 2018
- Metro's 2018 Regional Transportation Plan, adopted by Metro Council in December 2018

## April 2019 – March 2020

After the close of the Environmental Assessment public review and comment period on April 1, 2019, continued public engagement activities included:

- Four (4) African American discussion groups
- One (1) Native American discussion group
- Community briefings, including briefings with local business organizations
- Tabling at over five (5) fairs, festivals and community events
- Two (2) “Meet the Primes”/Industry Forum events
- Two (2) Community Opportunity Advisory Committee (COAC) meetings
- Survey of Disadvantaged Business Enterprise capacity/availability
- Ongoing updates via the project website
- Six (6) e-newsletters
- Project information mailers to local addresses in the Project area and surrounding areas
- Meetings with media outlets
- **Presentations and public testimony at two (2) Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) meetings (December 17, 2019, January 23, 2020)**
- Community Advisory Committee recruitment via mailers, door-to-door outreach, e-newsletter, social media, and digital and print ads (February 2020)
- Community Advisory Committee Meet and Greet on March 25, 2020

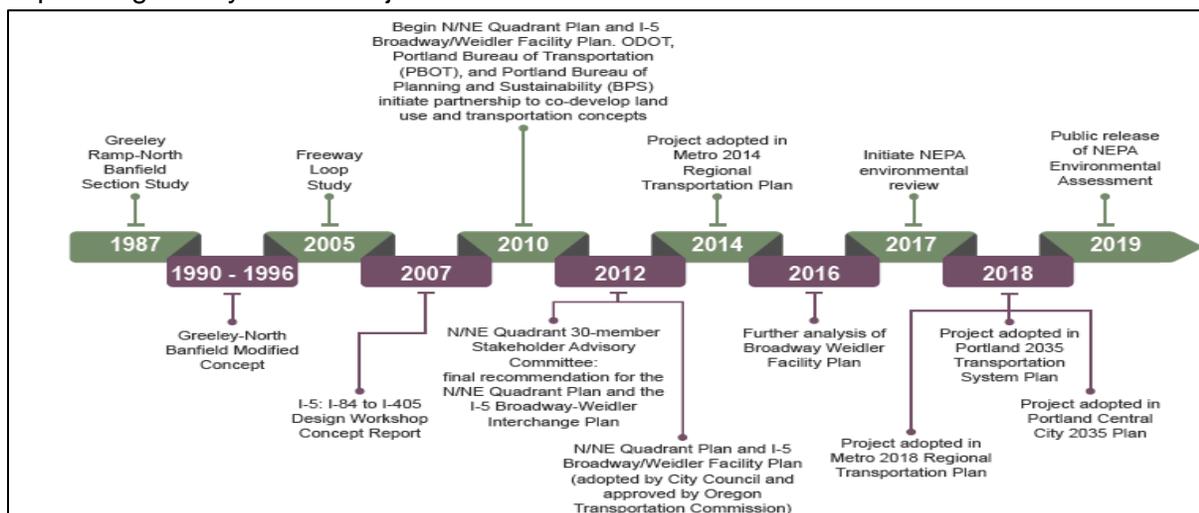
## April 2, 2020 OTC Meeting

- Two (2) week public comment period beginning Monday, March 16, 2020 and continuing through 5 p.m. PDT on Friday, March 27, 2020

There are multiple options to provide public testimony in advance of the meeting on April 2: electronically via the OTC comment form, written comments via standard mail, or scheduling videotaped comments at ODOT Region 1 Headquarters.

## Background – Planning History and Engagement

For additional background, this section summarizes the community engagement that occurred prior to the Project’s Environmental Review Phase. The graphic below summarizes the decades of planning history for the Project:



## **2010 – 2012: N/NE Quadrant Plan/I-5 Broadway/Weidler Facility Plan**

Early planning efforts were guided by a unique collaborative partnership between ODOT and the City of Portland, and a 30-person Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC met monthly and was integral to the process and defining one recommended design concept. The SAC included members representing neighborhood, business, bicycle, pedestrian, freight and other interests.

Other public engagement activities included:

- 2 design charrettes (65 attendees)
- 4 open houses (450 attendees)
- Community walks
- Over 20 community group meetings with neighborhood and business associations, advocacy groups and other organizations
- Commission briefings and public hearings
- Meetings with individual businesses, property owners and other interested stakeholders
- Project website updates
- On-line survey on concept alternatives (140 responses)
- Mailings and newsletters (electronic and hard copy)
- Media announcements and distribution

Formal adoption of the N/NE Quadrant Plan by the Portland City Council and the I-5 Broadway/Weidler Facility Plan by the Oregon Transportation Commission in 2012, as well as adoption of the project in the 2014 Regional Transportation Plan by Metro Council, provided additional public testimony opportunities.

**Appendix B: Comment Summary: December 1, 2019 –  
January 6, 2020**



# Comment Summary:

## December 1, 2019 – January 6, 2020

January 17, 2020

**Total Comments (December 1, 2019 – January 6, 2020): 440**

- **Letters:** 13
- **Emails:** 348
  - **Ask ODOT inbox:** 2
  - **Project Inbox:** 341
  - **OTC Admin Inbox:** 5
- **Postcards:** 79

## Summary

Between December 1, 2019 and January 6, 2020, the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project received 440 written comments regarding the December 17 Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) meeting in Lebanon, Oregon which included a discussion of the project on its agenda. The project team continues to receive comments as of the week of production of this summary.

The project team reviewed each of the written comments related to this meeting and summarized them in this report by category: letters, emails and postcards. The majority of commenters asked for an EIS to be conducted. Many asked the OTC to delay making a decision on the environmental process, and some asked for the project to be canceled. Many referenced concerns about the climate and how this project could impact it. Many asked for investments in the transportation system as a whole—including transit and multimodal infrastructure—to address traffic congestion. Some offered project alternatives for consideration in an EIS process, such as considering impacts from ODOT's tolling project. Some referenced concerns about air quality at Harriet Tubman Middle School. Some asked to move quickly toward construction to ease congestion and/or open up economic opportunities for construction firms.

The following sections capture all key comment themes for each of the categories: letters, emails, and postcards.

## Letters

Key comment themes expressed in letters from various organizations and individuals are outlined below. Full text of all correspondence is available upon request. Many letters expressed the following:

- Request for an Environmental Impact Statement
- Request for a delay a decision on the project
- Request for a third-party review of highway covers
- Request for a clear and inclusive decision-making structure
- Request for no EIS so the project can move ahead as quickly as possible
- Request for an EIS that incorporates the I-5/I-205 Tolling Project
- Concern about how the project plans to achieve its congestion and safety goals
- Concern about the OTC meeting being held in Lebanon rather than in Portland
- Concern that the project runs counter to the State's goal of lowering greenhouse gas emissions
- Request to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding
- Concerns about disruptions to the streetcar service during construction
- Request for high-speed rail to be studied as an alternative in the EIS process

## Emails

Key comment themes expressed in e-mails from various organizations and individuals are outlined below. Full text of all correspondence is available upon request. Many e-mails expressed the following:

### Ask ODOT inbox

- Express support for the project and concern about Governor Brown's request to delay the project
- Ask ODOT to not delay the I-5/I-205 Tolling and I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Projects as this will affect Oregonians outside of the Portland metropolitan region

### Project inbox

- Request for an EIS
- Request for a more reliable, comprehensive public transportation system
- Concern that the project can solve congestion
- Request for the project to be completely stopped
- Request for ODOT/the project/OTC not to conduct an EIS

### Commission inbox/other

- Request for an EIS
- Request that an EIS not be completed
- Concern for local industry commerce and how congestion is impacting freight and logistics
- Express belief that ODOT should tackle climate change and congestion by implementing alternatives to driving rather than by adding road capacity

- Ask ODOT and the State of Oregon to include mode shift as a no-build way to increase car capacity

## Postcards

Key comment themes expressed in postcards from various organizations and individuals are outlined below. Full text of all correspondence is available upon request. Many postcards expressed the following:

- Request for an EIS
- Concern that the project runs counter to climate crises action/reducing emissions
- Concern about the cost of the project
- Concern for the health impacts from increased traffic and pollution
- Concern for Harriet Tubman Middle School and other school children
- Request for a more reliable, comprehensive public transportation system instead of highway expansion
- Concern that the project can solve congestion
- Questions the project's safety goal