



## PROJECT FAQs

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## 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 support reconnecting 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. What recent funding has the Project been awarded?

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The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) announced in March 2024 that the Project is a recipient of a Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Grant in the amount of \$450 million.

The RCN Grant (\$450 million) funds the highway cover design completion and construction of the initial, central portion (but not all) of the highway cover. This includes finalizing the highway cover design, purchasing right of way and relocating utilities to ready the highway cover area for construction, and constructing the first segment of the highway cover near Broadway and Weidler. This initial segment of the highway cover will be compatible with the future full build out of the highway cover and I-5 safety and operational improvements.

In May 2024, the Project applied for a USDOT INFRA Grant. The application submittal requests \$750 million from the USDOT's INFRA program to fund the remainder of the highway cover construction, as well as I-5 safety and operational improvements and the Project's separated bicycle and pedestrian bridge. The Oregon State Transportation Commission also approved up to \$250 million of required matching funds for the grant application. If fully awarded, this would bring an additional state and federal investment of \$1 billion for the Rose Quarter Project. We anticipate award announcements from USDOT in Fall 2024. The INFRA Grant application is [here](#) for more detail.

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

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As of June 2023, the current cost estimate is \$1.5 billion to \$1.9 billion. This cost estimate is based on the Project's preliminary design. Future cost estimate updates will be done as project design progresses. In addition to existing state funding from Oregon House Bill 2017 and the [2024 Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant award](#), federal, state, regional and local funding sources for project construction are being explored to close the remaining funding gap.

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## 4. 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 south of the Fremont Bridge in Portland. Three major interstates come together here: I-5, I-84 and I-405.

The project area 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.

## 5. 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 U.S. West Coast and is critical for moving people and goods and connecting cities and towns from Mexico to Canada. The local streets in the project area 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 people get around. The Project addresses the following concerns:

- 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 city in the United States and the 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.

## 6. What are the Project's values?

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ODOT acknowledges the impact and harm caused to the historic Albina community by the initial construction of I-5. We are committed to supporting a safer and more equitable project for Albina. The Project 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 are:

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- **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.

## 7. 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. Auxiliary lanes will reduce congestion at the state's top bottleneck. An estimated one-third of traffic will be able to stay on these ramp-to-ramp connections to travel between interstates instead of merging and causing congestion and safety issues.
- **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 and safely.
- **A highway cover** over I-5 that will reconnect local streets and create new community spaces on top for future development and economic opportunities.
- **A new east-west roadway crossing** over I-5 that reconnects Hancock Street, adding another crossing north of Broadway/Weidler.
- **A car-free pedestrian and bicycle bridge** that creates a new path over I-5, connecting with the local walking and biking network.
- **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** from Vancouver/Broadway to the south, connecting with NE Williams Avenue and NE Weidler Street.

## 8. 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.

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- Enabling faster emergency response times by allowing responders to use wider shoulders to move through traffic.
  - Reducing frequent 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.
  - 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.
  - Designing and building a highway cover that can accommodate new community development.

## **9. 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 the 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 than the existing bridges in the event of an earthquake.

The highway cover design is one 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 wide sidewalks and the potential for future land development opportunities.

ODOT will own the highway cover structure and the new land created on top of the highway cover structure. Any future real estate or open space development on top of the highway cover will require executing long-term air rights and lease agreements or other appropriate legal arrangements in compliance with applicable federal and state laws.

The City of Portland will lead the development process for what will go on top of the highway cover, including the future highway cover land use, programming and development process, as well as the development of a Community Framework Agreement to ensure the highway, local streets and resulting land parcels within the project area are coordinated.

## **10. 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

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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.

[Watch this video](#) to learn more about how auxiliary lanes work.

## 11. 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. The addition of a car-free bridge over I-5 will enhance safety and improve access for pedestrians and bicyclists near the Moda Center.

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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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## 12. Will the Project increase the number of lanes on I-5? Will it expand the highway?

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At specific areas along the state's worst highway bottleneck, the Project will add one new [auxiliary lane](#) in each direction on I-5 between I-84 and I-405, which serve as ramp-to-ramp connections. The Project will also widen shoulders along this same segment of I-5. While these improvements will change the paved width of the highway at some locations, the auxiliary lanes are designed to improve safety and operations on I-5 by separating slower vehicles entering and exiting the highway from the higher-speed traffic using the existing through lanes.

[Click here for more information and graphics on the existing and proposed highway width.](#)

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, more than 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.

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

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The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law requiring agencies seeking federal funding or approval to assess the potential impacts of their projects on the natural, human and built environments, including impacts on things such as air quality, traffic, historic resources, communities and more.

On March 12, 2024, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) reviewed the Project's [Revised Supplemental Environmental Assessment](#), finding that the Project would have no significant impact on the natural or human environment. FHWA's decision is formalized in a Finding of No Significant Impact.

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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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This federal decision approves the Project to proceed into final design to ready the Project for construction. The Project's environmental review process is now complete.

[Click here to find more information about the environmental review process and documentation.](#)

## **14. 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 and other partners, the I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project supports state, regional and local policy that addresses goals for reducing emissions. As such, greenhouse gas levels related to the Project should be considered in the context of the state and region'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 along the West Coast Electric Highway.<sup>3</sup> On December 19, 2022, Oregon policymakers, joining California and Washington, approved a rule that will ban the sale of new gasoline-powered passenger vehicles by 2035. 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.

## **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 is 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-

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<sup>3</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 to 50 miles along I-5, U.S. Highway 101, and other major roadways in British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California.



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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 be a national model for how a transportation project can invest in people. That means fostering economic empowerment, self-sufficiency and wealth creation opportunities for the Black community through good-paying jobs and pathways to entrepreneurship.

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

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ODOT stands by its commitment to work collaboratively with Portland Public Schools (PPS) and will continue to keep the school district apprised of the latest data and developments regarding the Project.

PPS is leading a separate effort to relocate Harriet Tubman Middle School 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.

## **17. 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 Project's 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](#).

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

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Advisory committees oversee and provide recommendations for the Project's design and engagement process. 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 purpose of the [Historic Albina Advisory Board](#) (HAAB) 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.

- HAAB members are deeply involved in the design process for the Project's Main Construction Package, which includes the highway cover. The highway cover design work includes designing the cover structure across I-5, as well as what will ultimately be developed on top. ODOT is leading the process to design the highway cover structure and preferred opening-day uses. The City of Portland is leading the public process to define what will be developed on top of the cover in the long-term, which includes the development of preferred longer-term development concepts, street and path design, and options for governance and financing, followed by the formation of a Community Framework Agreement to guide future development. We'll be leaning into existing partnerships to leverage the most success in reconnecting communities.

The [Community Oversight Advisory Committee](#) (COAC) ensures the construction contractor meets its community and project goals and expectations for contracting with [disadvantaged businesses](#) and employing minorities and women. COAC members bring a broad perspective on community, social, economic and workforce issues in the project area. The committee last met in January 2023 and will resume a regular meeting schedule when construction on the Project begins.

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## 19. How does the Governor's recent decision on tolling impact the Project?

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Tolling was envisioned as just one possible source of revenue. With the recent significant investment from the federal government in this project, we are eager to work with our legislative partners to identify the best way to fund this critical safety, equity and congestion improvement project.

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## 20. 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). Stay informed about opportunities to provide input by signing up for our mailing list and checking the Project's Events and Meetings page for updates.

- **Website:** [i5rosequarter.org](https://i5rosequarter.org)
- **Email:** [i5rosequarter@odot.oregon.gov](mailto:i5rosequarter@odot.oregon.gov)
- **Phone:** 503-470-3127
- **Mailing List:** [i5rosequarter.org/contact](https://i5rosequarter.org/contact)