



MEMORANDUM

TO: Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors
FROM: Matt Ransom, Executive Director
DATE: June 1, 2020 
SUBJECT: **I-5 Bridge Replacement Program – Regional Agency Partnering Process Update**

AT A GLANCE

The purpose of this report is to provide an update regarding the ongoing engagement of government agencies in the restart of the I-5 Bridge Replacement Program.

BACKGROUND

Replacement of the I-5 bridges over the Columbia River has been a project identified in the Regional Transportation Plan and subject to several policy resolutions of the RTC Board of Directors. As proposed in the current [Regional Transportation Plan \(March 2019\)](#), the project is envisioned to include replacement of the bridge structures, improvements at adjacent interchanges, high capacity transit services, and improved bicycle and pedestrian access accommodations.

In recent years, the Washington Legislature has enacted both policy guidance and funding to restart I-5 bridge replacement project development activities. In 2018, [SSB-5806](#) was enacted and initiated a [WSDOT inventory](#) of past project efforts and formation of a WA legislative working group which initiated policy development discussions. In 2019, the Washington Legislature approved funding for WSDOT to form a project office and restart project development activities, and the Oregon Transportation Commission committed resources for the same effort. Additionally, in 2019 the [Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee](#) was convened and held three meetings, beginning the legislative work towards the I-5 bridge replacement project.

Gubernatorial support and formal endorsement for the replacement of the I-5 bridges has taken many forms over the course of the past project development efforts. Most recently, in November 2019, the WA and OR Governors convened to sign the [Oregon-Washington Memorandum of Intent on Replacing the I-5 Bridge over the Columbia River](#). That Memorandum of Intent directed the department(s) of transportation to open a joint project office, proffered guidance on project scope, and directed the department(s) to file periodic progress reports.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY PARTNERING PROCESS

Regional engagement and support for replacement of the I-5 Columbia River bridges has taken many forms. During the preceding I-5 corridor studies and the Columbia River Crossing project development process, a committee of regional agency leaders was convened to offer input and advice to the I-5 project development team(s) (the most recent committee of that type was referred to as the Project Sponsors Council).

In February 2020, the Washington Secretary of Transportation and Oregon Director of Transportation invited a group of regional governmental agencies, (those expected to be formal signatory agencies to an EIS process, and also those closely aligned with past project committees), to convene for a series of *Partnering* discussions. The intent of the *Partnering* discussions was to begin preparing the framework and establishment of a regional leadership committee which would provide input and recommendations to the I-5 Bridge Replacement Program team and may also engage with the Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee.

Governmental agency partners to the recent *Partnering* discussions included: WSDOT, ODOT, C-TRAN, Tri-Met, RTC, Metro, City of Vancouver, City of Portland, Port of Vancouver, and the Port of Portland.

The partner group met on four occasions through May. The *Partnering* discussions were topical in nature, and covered a range of issues including: project background and Legislative engagement, key issues and commitments, and project decision making. Like most project initiation efforts, the thrust of the *Partnering* discussions was the gathering of key governmental agencies to begin the “chartering” of how to re-engage in the I-5 Bridge Replacement Program activities. The written outcomes of the *Partnering* discussions have been summarized in a series of working documents, which are intended to be a starting point for the formal convening of an Executive Steering Group (see attachments).

The Executive Steering Group is conceived as a focal point of regional government agency engagement with the I-5 Bridge Replacement Program team. The Executive Steering Group is expected to be composed of government agencies as convened for the *Partnering* discussions, representatives from a not yet convened Citizen Advisory Group, and will also include participation opportunities by representatives of the Joint Oregon-Washington Legislative Action Committee. The Executive Steering Group will be a resource for government agency and community input, recommendations, and will broadly guide the I-5 Bridge Replacement Program project team in the development of the project scope in a manner which meets regional and community needs.

The Executive Steering Group will likely be formed in July/August 2020. Additional discussion regarding this topic and recurring project updates will occur in the months ahead.

PAST RTC RESOLUTIONS and REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANS

In recent years, the RTC Board has adopted policy and plans and ratified legislative statements which support replacement of the existing I-5 Columbia River bridges. Those policy endorsements have included:

Specific Study / Project / Resolution Endorsements:

- Resolution: I-5 Transportation and Trade Study (BR 12-02-25)
- Resolution: I-5 Columbia River Crossing Locally Preferred Alternative (BR 07-08-10)
- Resolution: I-5 Columbia River Crossing Final Environmental Impact Statement (BR 08-11-14)
- Resolution: Recommendation to the State of Washington that a Future I-5 Bridge Replacement Project be Designated as a Transportation Project of Statewide Significance (BR 02-17-03)
- Resolution: Supporting Clearing of Impediments in Law to Funding a Future I-5 Bridge Replacement Project (BR 02-17-04)
- Resolution: Supporting the Replacement of the Interstate 5 Bridge between the State of Washington and the State of Oregon (BR 10-18-24)

Regional Transportation Plans:

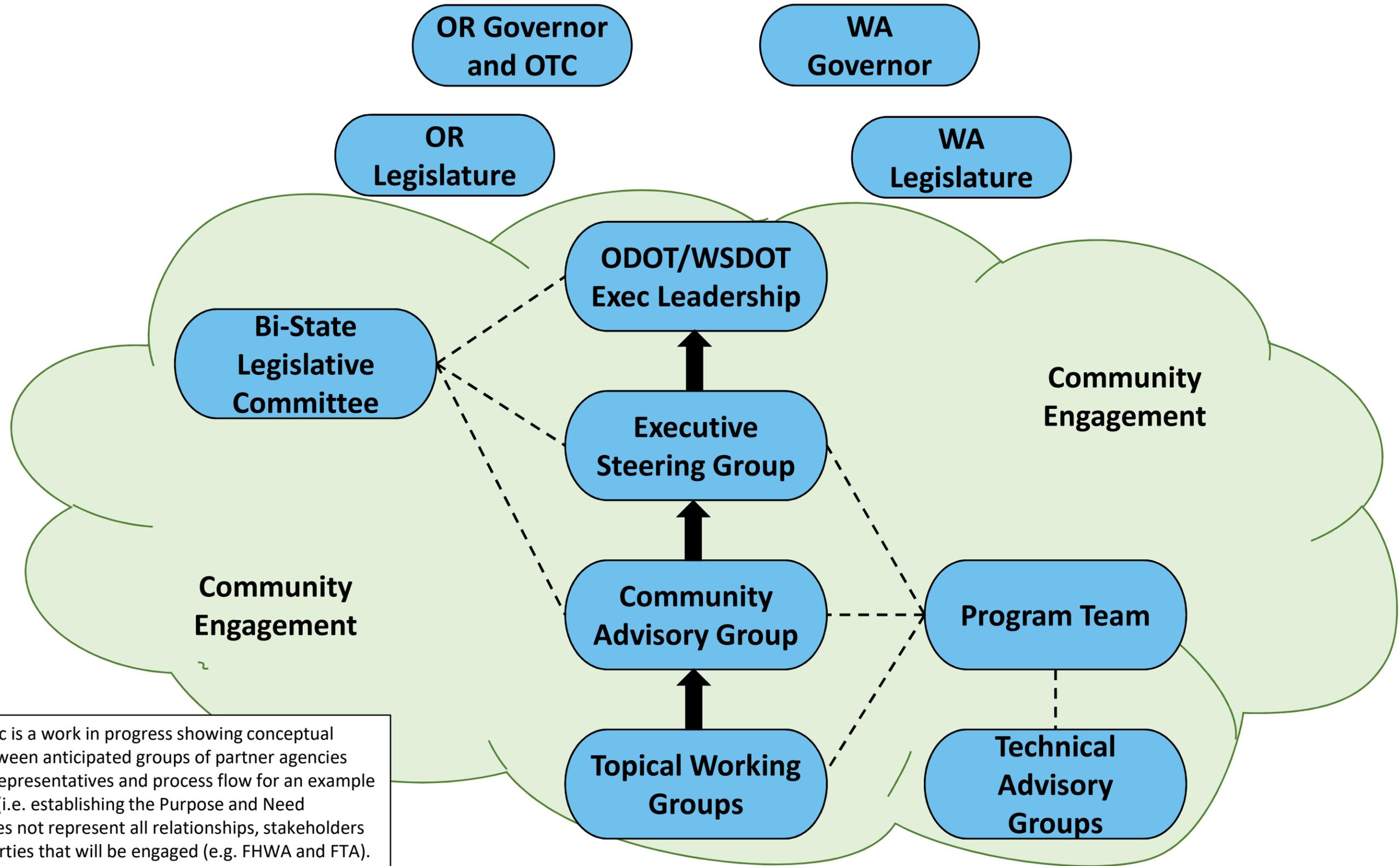
- Since 2008, the RTC Board has approved a Regional Transportation Plan which includes a specific project to replace the I-5 bridges. The current Regional Transportation Plan was adopted in March 2019 (BR 03-19-04).

Attachments

DRAFT Working documents from recent *Partnering* discussions:

- 1) DRAFT Process Diagram – Purpose and Need
- 2) IBRP – DRAFT Conceptual ESG Issues List
- 3) IBRP – DRAFT Conceptual Partner Expectations

Interstate Bridge Replacement Program Working Draft Process Diagram – Purpose and Need



Note: This graphic is a work in progress showing conceptual relationships between anticipated groups of partner agencies and community representatives and process flow for an example program activity (i.e. establishing the Purpose and Need statement). It does not represent all relationships, stakeholders or responsible parties that will be engaged (e.g. FHWA and FTA).

DRAFT - CONCEPTUAL EXECUTIVE STEERING GROUP ISSUES LIST INTERSTATE BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

This document was developed through a facilitated workshop process with the bi-state agency partners that have direct involvement in addressing the transportation challenges associated with the Interstate Bridge: TriMet, C-TRAN, Oregon Metro, the Southwest Regional Transportation Council, the cities of Portland and Vancouver, and the Ports of Portland and Vancouver. These bi-state agency partners are expected to play a central role in providing regional leadership throughout program development as an advisory structure is defined and implemented, which is assumed to include an Executive Steering Group as well as a Community Advisory Group.

This document is intended as an initial draft list to inform future conversations on the potential issues that an Executive Steering Group may provide guidance on, to be considered as such a group is convened.

- Program Vision
- Program Values
- Program Area
- Purpose and Need
- Develop and recommend program performance measures
- Equity and environmental justice strategies
- Transportation demand management strategies
- Transportation system management strategies
- Community engagement strategies
- Finance plan strategies, including tolling
- SEIS Alternatives
- Locally preferred alternative development and adoption process
- High capacity transit mode
- Multimodal river crossing structure type and configuration
- Program phasing options
- Freight (especially High, Wide, Heavy cargo requirements) considerations
- Affected properties mitigation strategy, timeline, and approach
- Local connectivity and complementary off-system multimodal improvements

DRAFT - CONCEPTUAL PARTNER EXPECTATIONS INTERSTATE BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

In an effort to ensure that work on the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program follows a data-driven, transparent process that prioritizes equity and inclusion, ODOT and WSDOT hired an independent facilitator to guide a collaborative process with the eight bi-state partner agencies that have direct involvement in addressing the transportation challenges associated with the Interstate Bridge: TriMet, C-TRAN, Oregon Metro, the Southwest Regional Transportation Council, the cities of Portland and Vancouver, and the Ports of Portland and Vancouver. These are the parties with a direct role in any future improvements, due to their positions within the integrated multi-modal transportation system as an owner, operator, transportation policymaker, or public economic development entity reliant on direct access to operations within the bridge corridor.

This facilitated process included a series of workshops this spring to determine how to work together as regional partners to identify a solution with broad regional support that reflects community values, is rooted in outcomes, and can successfully advance to construction. It is assumed that this will include the formation of a regional leadership group as well as a community advisory group to provide for well-rounded input from a diverse array of community perspectives. The bi-state agency partners are expected to play a central role in providing regional leadership throughout program development as an advisory structure is defined and implemented.

This document was developed through the workshop process to identify shared expectations for how bi-state partner agencies will work together on the program and initial principles for consideration to guide future work. This document is intended as draft framework to inform future conversations as a regional leadership group is convened.

Shared context

- Memorandum of Intent signed by Governors of Oregon and Washington state on November 18, 2019 highlighted replacement of the Interstate Bridge as a high priority for both states based on major seismic risk and being a traffic bottleneck for the region and the nation.
- Oregon and Washington State legislatures have committed to engaging in a bi-state committee regarding a reinvigorated bi-state effort to replace the Interstate Bridge and tasked ODOT and WSDOT to do this work in coordination with stakeholders.
- Both states have allocated funding for ODOT and WSDOT to open a bi-state office to restart bridge replacement efforts and have directed them to consider opportunities for efficient decision making.
- Interstate Bridge Replacement is a designated improvement project in both the RTC and Metro fiscally constrained regional transportation plans as well as the comprehensive growth plans for the City of Portland and the City of Vancouver. These plans call for corridor planning that consider multiple facilities, modes and land uses in solutions for improving mobility.
- Support for replacing the Interstate Bridge and adding high capacity transit across the Columbia River has been documented recently by local jurisdictions through resolutions and letters.

- Given the funding reality for similarly large transportation projects nationwide, it is acknowledged that a bridge replacement program will require revenue from a diverse array of sources, including tolling, state funds from both Oregon and Washington, and federal funds.
- Extensive and meaningful public engagement will be a critical component to inform program work and identify a solution with broad regional support.
- Previous planning efforts to address issues identified with the existing Interstate Bridge corridor resulted in a locally preferred alternative to build a replacement river crossing with multimodal improvements, which will be informative to support an efficient decision-making process with new program development efforts as appropriate within current context.
- The approach to addressing transportation challenges has changed in the time since previous bridge replacement efforts shut down and new work will need to reflect current conditions and regional community values to ensure that all travelers enjoy the same access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options.

Key problems to address – While there may be additional problems identified as work gets underway, some of the fundamental problems that have been identified that are essential to address with any improvements include the following. Note that key issues are not listed in priority order.

- Seismic vulnerability of the existing bridge & regional resiliency needs/requirements
- Limited public transportation
- Inadequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Impaired freight movement
- Safety concerns as a result of structures that are functionally obsolete and existing roadway design
- Current congestion and growing travel demand that constrain economic vitality and development
- Significant and increasing operations and maintenance costs

Initial shared principles – The following initial principles have been identified as essential in this work. Additional principles to guide program development work will be identified with the community as work gets underway and engagement structures are developed:

- Use of common values identified by partners and the community to guide program development and decision making
- Conducting work through an open, transparent, data-driven process
- Respecting the role of decision makers
- Extensive, inclusive and continuous public engagement
- Commitment to safe, healthy, reliable and affordable transportation that supports access to jobs, education, culture and recreation
- Commitment to equity of processes and outcomes and consideration of historical context
- Recognition of urgency
- Commitment to identifying a cost-effective solution that contains costs as practicable to optimize benefits and make the best use of limited public funds
- Fundability
- Consistency with state climate change policies, goals and plans

- Holistic approach to mobility that provides transportation options for all travelers and incorporates both congestion management and transportation demand management
- Context-sensitive multimodal design
- Follows legislative guidance
- Utilization of previously completed work to the extent feasible and in context with community and regional leadership feedback
- Consider this work in context with other regional transportation planning and project efforts, including ODOT's tolling work

Shared key outcome expectations – While many details will need to be developed through work with input from the public and guidance from technical, advisory, and oversight groups, the following have been identified as essential outcomes for this program to address the transportation issues associated with the existing Interstate Bridge:

- Replacement of the existing Interstate Bridge with a seismically resilient facility
- Providing a balanced system for all modes of transportation, including high capacity transit and improved facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians and other travelers
- Improved mobility and travel reliability for freight and traffic
- Improve local connectivity and complementary off-system multimodal improvements
- Facilities that support adjacent land use, community-building efforts and enhance regional economic resiliency
- Seeking to avoid or minimize impacts to the social and natural environment and to human health, including disparate impacts to minority and low-income populations
- Incorporating financial strategies that also manage bridge traffic and demand
- Ensuring safe design of the roadway in consideration of standards and context
- Balancing the needs of various users and constraints, including air traffic and marine navigation
- Enhance regional economic resiliency

Shared partner expectations - As the local agencies with direct involvement in addressing the transportation challenges associated with the Interstate Bridge, bi-state partner agencies are committed to working with each other and with the community to identify a solution that reflects the values and needs of the region. The following is a draft list of expectations for how partners will work together to further this goal:

- Working together as regional partners in a collaborative and constructive way to advance bridge replacement efforts
- Working with our communities/constituencies to identify a solution with broad regional support that reflects community needs and values, is rooted in outcomes, and can successfully advance to construction
- Thorough and expedient review of materials and transmittal of input, in acknowledgement of the timeline(s) and schedule(s) developed by the legislatures, governors and the state transportation departments
- Collaborative leadership in developing a viable funding package, including consistent and shared communication with state legislators, Congress, and federal agencies

- Developing effective bi-state partnerships that could serve as a foundation for future joint efforts to address issues of regional significance

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