

Funding Status and Remaining Requirements for the I-5 Columbia River Bridge Replacement

As of February 2025, the Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Program faces a critical juncture in securing the remaining funds needed to meet its baseline budget, with evolving cost projections and funding commitments shaping the financial landscape. The project's current secured funding totals **\$5.3 billion**, leaving a shortfall of **\$700 million** against the preferred \$6 billion estimate, though escalating costs and unresolved federal requests introduce uncertainty about final requirements.

Current Funding Commitments

Federal Contributions

The program has secured **\$2.1 billion** in federal grants:

- **\$1.5 billion** from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bridge Investment Program (awarded July 2024) ^[1] ^[2]
- **\$600 million** from the 2023 Mega Grant program ^[3] ^[4]

An outstanding application for **\$1.9 billion** in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Capital Investment Grants remains pending, with a decision expected by mid-2025 ^[3:1] ^[5].

State Allocations

Oregon and Washington have each committed **\$1 billion**, totaling **\$2 billion** in state funds ^[1:1] ^[2:1] ^[4:1].

Tolling Revenue

Planners anticipate **\$1.2 billion** from tolling revenue, structured as:

- **\$900 million** upfront construction financing through bond issuance
- **\$300 million** in long-term maintenance revenue ^[2:2] ^[5:1]

Budgetary Gaps and Cost Escalation Risks

Baseline Shortfall

At the **\$6 billion** estimate, the \$5.3 billion in secured funds leaves a **\$700 million deficit**. This gap could be partially filled by:

- The pending \$1.9 billion FTA grant, which would create a \$1.2 billion surplus if fully awarded
- Additional Bridge Investment Program allocations in 2025^[1:2]

Upper-Range Projections

Critics, including transportation analyst John Ley, highlight the program's vulnerability to cost overruns, citing:

- A **56% increase** in estimates from \$4.8 billion to \$7.5 billion since 2022^[5:2]
- Parallel projects like the Hood River Bridge, where costs rose **215%** post-approval^[5:3]
- Unresolved design challenges, including U.S. Coast Guard objections to the 116-foot vertical clearance^[5:4]

If costs reach the **\$7.5 billion** upper bound, the funding gap would expand to **\$2.2 billion**, requiring either:

- Additional federal appropriations
- Increased toll rates (potentially adding \$0.50–\$1.00 to projected \$2.50–\$4.50 tolls)
- Supplemental state contributions^[5:5]

Contingency Planning and Fiscal Challenges

Risk Mitigation Strategies

The program office has outlined contingency measures:

1. **Phased construction:** Prioritizing bridge spans before light rail if FTA grants fall short
2. **Value engineering:** Simplifying seismic components and reducing aesthetic features
3. **Public-private partnerships:** Exploring corporate naming rights for ancillary structures^[2:3]
^[5:6]

Political Constraints

Key obstacles include:

- Congressional resistance to additional earmarks, given the project's existing \$2.1 billion federal allocation
- Oregon legislators' opposition to higher tolls impacting low-income commuters^[3:2] ^[4:2]
- Washington's constitutional debt limit, capping state transportation borrowing at \$1.2 billion annually^[1:3]

Conclusion

The I-5 Bridge replacement requires **\$700 million** to meet its baseline \$6 billion budget under current commitments, with completion contingent on successful FTA grant awards and toll revenue stability. However, the project's financial viability remains precarious, as a **\$1.6 billion–\$2.2 billion gap** emerges under worst-case cost scenarios. Program administrators must navigate competing pressures: advancing construction starts in late 2025 while securing buffer funding for potential overruns—a balancing act that will test the region's political resolve and fiscal creativity.



1. <https://www.columbian.com/news/2024/jul/12/feds-approve-1-5-billion-grant-for-i-5-bridge-replacement/>
2. <https://www.roadsbridges.com/funding/news/55126255/interstate-5-bridge-project-receives-15-billion-in-funding>
3. <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/12/15/interstate-i-5-bridge-oregon-washington-infrastructure-construction/>
4. <https://www.columbian.com/news/2023/dec/15/interstate-5-bridge-replacement-project-wins-600-million-federal-grant-4-billion-total-now-secured/>
5. <https://electjohnley.com/john-ley-speaks-out-against-i-5-bridge-replacement-funding-in-letter-to-secretary-buttigieg/>