

New Grant Will Pay for New I-5 Highway Cover

By BEVERLY CORBELL

A grant of \$450 million, close to a half billion dollars, is coming to Portland to construct a new highway cover over Interstate 5 as part of the Oregon Department of Transportation's plan to add more lanes to the highway.

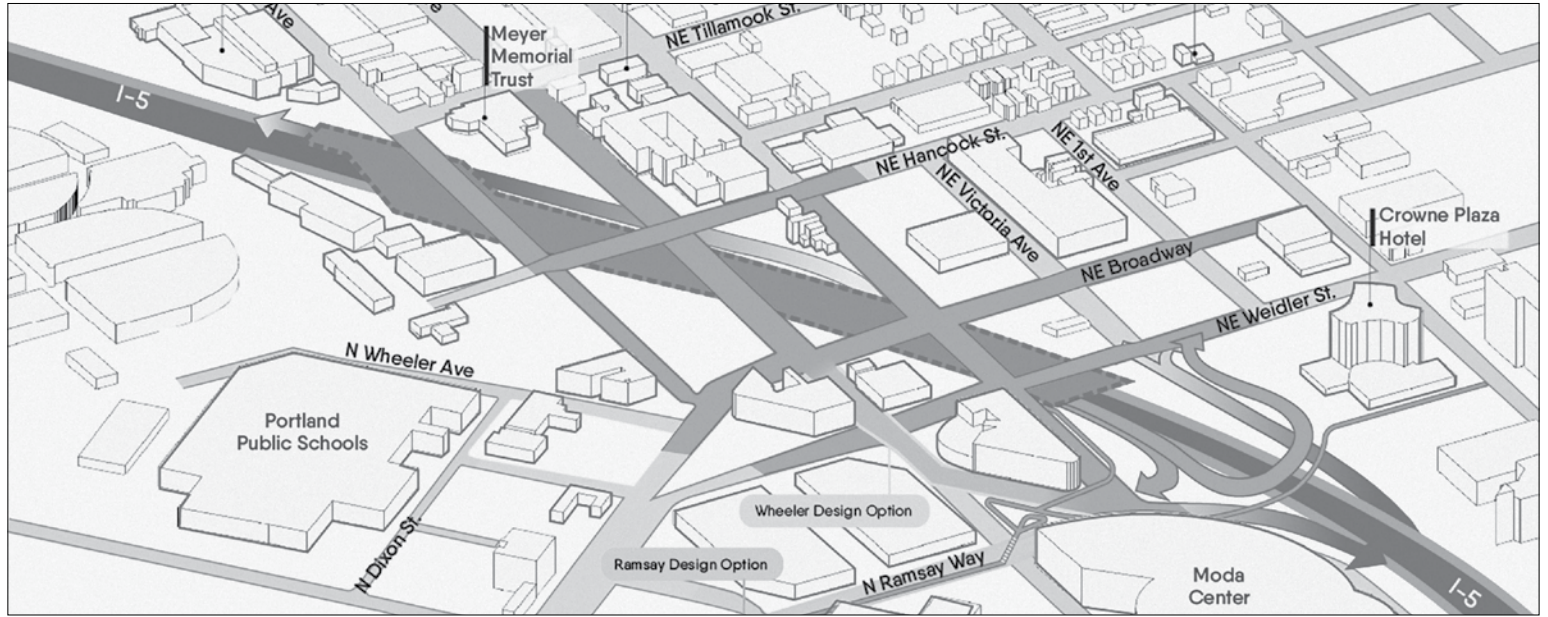
Exactly how that will look remains to be seen, but both Rep. Earl Blumenaur and President Joe Biden and many others are excited at the prospect.

In a March 13 article in the Guardian, Biden hailed infrastructure spending on U.S. projects "to right historic wrongs."

Biden said the construction of interstate highways led to the demolition of thousands of homes and businesses, disproportionately impacting Black and poor neighborhoods in the 1960s, with losses of prosperity and opportunities "that still reverberate today."

Although there has been much debate about whether to put covers over the reconstructed interstate because of the cost, ODOT director Kris Strickler was quote on I-5 Rose Quarter website at i5rosequarter.org, as being pleased with the news of the federal windfall.

"Receiving the grant is an important step in realizing the vision of reconnecting neighborhoods, improving transportation network, and taking part



Map of I-5

in a collective movement toward restoring the historic Albina community," she said. "Working with community leaders, we saw a path to make this project about more than reducing congestion...To do so, we've designed a feature we've never had the opportunity to build before: a multi-acre highway cover which will reconnect neighborhood streets and create new space for community activities.

The old Albina neighborhood will never be completely restored, of course, but the grant makes new beginnings possible, said Win-

ta Yohannes, executive director, quoted on the I-5 Rose Quarter site., i5rosequarter.org.

"This catalytic federal investment represents the beginning of a new chapter, one where government plays an active role in not only healing the harms of history, but investing in community-driven visions of a better tomorrow," she said "The Albina Vision Trust is overjoyed to celebrate this victory alongside our partners at the Oregon Department of Transportation."

Ken Modica, a member of the project's Historic Albina

Board, was also quoted, and highlighted the significance of the funding as "more than just financial support. It represents a pivotal step towards revitalizing our community."

But just what will the covers look like? According to ODOT, the project will build much needed auxiliary lanes to I-5, but it is more than reducing congestion and is an opportunity to build community by providing a multi-acre highway cover "to reconnect neighborhood streets and create new space for community activities."

Blumenaur said he's worked for years to mobilize other leaders to "reclaim the legacy" of Lower Albina, and even got Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg to visit Portland last spring to learn about the neighborhood's history and make the case for federal investment.

"This funding will be transformative," Blumenaur said in a press release, "not just for Portland but to serve as a national model for how we heal communities torn apart by destructive federal projects. With this investment we are showing how to do it right."

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