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NEWS RELEASE

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STATEMENT FROM HOUSE SPEAKER TINA KOTEK ON THE I-5 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT

“Last year, the Oregon Legislature took action to replace the I-5 Bridge across the Columbia River and upgrade the adjacent intersections. This project, as recognized by the federal government and local planning processes, has been the most important transportation infrastructure need facing our state and the Pacific Northwest. The current 100-year-old bridge is seismically unsound and inadequate for the freight and transit we need for our future economic growth. Drawbridge lifts leave commuters, trucks, and emergency vehicles stalled on the bridge roughly 400 times per year. Bike and pedestrian access is unsafe and unacceptable. Negative impacts from traffic and pollution on residents neighboring the bridge are intolerable.

“When the Washington Legislature failed to follow our lead and hold up their end of the bargain, Oregon leaders regrouped. We knew we were in danger of losing years of preparation and millions of federal dollars, while potentially setting the project back another decade or more. Governor Kitzhaber, legislators, and business, labor, and transportation leaders came together to develop an Oregon-led plan that could responsibly move the project forward. That plan accounted for Washington State’s reduced participation, yet still required their partnership in order for Oregon to move forward. An Oregon-led project was deemed to be technically, administratively, operationally, financially and legally possible.

“The Oregon House of Representatives stood ready to enact the Oregon-led plan. I’m proud of our leadership in the House, and for my colleagues’ dedication to finally addressing this longstanding weakness in Oregon’s transportation system.

“In the end, however, Washington again failed to step up. Even though a majority of Washington legislators signed a letter of support, action was required by Governor Jay Inslee to move forward. Absent clear, public commitment from Governor Inslee and the necessary memoranda of understanding between our two states, an Oregon-led project will not be approved this year.

“I want to thank everyone who worked incredibly hard to move the project forward. I especially want to thank the hundreds of residents in my district, particularly the community leaders from the Hayden Island, Bridgeton and East Columbia neighborhoods, who collaborated to create the best possible project and advocated on behalf of their neighbors to improve the safety and livability of their community.

“Oregon faces many challenges. These challenges require leaders with courage and a willingness to step up to tackle them head on. Oregonians should know that in 2013 the Oregon Legislature acted, and in 2014, the Oregon House was ready to lead again.”

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