

**Testimony of Metro Council President Lynn Peterson  
Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response  
March 20, 2020**



Co-chairs Roblan and Holvey and Members of the Committee:

As you know, Metro is the elected regional government that serves more than 1.6 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. Thank you for your efforts to support the wellbeing of Oregonians at this extraordinary time.

The Coronavirus pandemic obviously has no parallels in recent history and many of its impacts cannot be predicted at this time. For now, we would like to offer our partnership in serving our residents both in the short term and over time, and to request limited statutory changes to enable us to continue to function effectively.

**Immediate impacts:** In the short term, people are already hurting. The virtual shutdown of much of the region's economy will be felt disproportionately across the region; the greatest health and economic impacts are likely to be suffered by people with lower incomes, service workers, and those who lack secure housing. We urge you to work to minimize the impact on our region's most vulnerable residents at this time, including efforts to maintain housing stability and income stability and to ensure that people can meet their basic needs.

Metro has taken two immediate actions:

- In collaboration with Multnomah County, we are opening the Oregon Convention Center to serve as a shelter for members of our community experiencing homelessness, who generally have a higher risk of contracting COVID-19. This increased shelter capacity will ensure that people can be sheltered in a space that enables appropriate social distancing.
- With respect to our dedicated staff, many work shifts have been canceled due to the fallout from the pandemic. Accordingly, Metro has adjusted pay and leave policies to promote employee and public health and safety and to minimize financial hardship to employees.

Metro stands ready to work in partnership with the state and with the local governments of the greater Portland region, and to deploy the resources of our agency, to address the immediate effects of the pandemic on the people of our region and our state.

**Longer-term impacts:** The most direct economic impact of the pandemic on Metro will come from the cancellation of numerous conventions and other events at the Oregon Convention Center, the Expo Center and the Portland's Centers for the Arts, as well as the closure of the Oregon Zoo at least through April 8. These circumstances will result in tens of millions of dollars of losses in rental fees, concession sales, admissions charges and tourism-related taxes.

Beyond the impact on Metro, these cancellations and closures will have significant economic and fiscal impacts for the region and the state. Obviously, the overall impacts of the pandemic on the broader regional economy, and especially on workers in the service sector and on small businesses, will be unprecedented. At this time, we are working to address these impacts in the following ways:

- Our General Manager of Visitor Venues, Scott Cruickshank, is serving as a member of the Governor's Coronavirus Economic Advisory Council. Meanwhile, our Planning and Development Department is working with Prosper Portland and other partners to understand the broader economic impact of the pandemic on the Portland metropolitan region and its residents.
- Metro will continue to help build much-needed affordable housing through our 2018 \$652.8 million housing bond. Additionally, just last month the Metro Council voted to place a measure on the May ballot aimed at providing services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Both of these measures involve significant collaboration with our regional partners, primarily Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington Counties as well as the City of Portland, who are direct providers of housing and homeless services.
- We continue to work with numerous partners to develop a major regional transportation funding measure for the fall ballot. While the current situation has introduced significant uncertainty, passage of such a measure could create needed jobs and provide an important economic stimulus as the region emerges from this crisis.

As with short term responses, Metro pledges to work with you and with our local partners to mitigate the broader impacts of the pandemic on the people we serve and to support efforts at both economic recovery and community assistance as appropriate.

**Local budget processes during an emergency:** Your committee has received a March 18 [letter](#) related to legal requirements for the adoption of local government budgets; Metro signed onto this letter along with several local government associations. As noted in the letter, statutory changes may be needed to provide flexibility with respect to both public meeting requirements and quorum requirements to ensure that local governments can continue to function in the face of an emergency like the current pandemic.

Thank you again for your efforts to address this unprecedented crisis. Metro stands ready to provide whatever support we can for your important work.