



**DATE:** April 29, 2015

**TO:** House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

**FROM:** Paul Mather, Administrator  
ODOT Highway Division

**SUBJECT:** SB 921

## INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 921 encourages the Oregon Department of Transportation to install median barriers on interstate highways by December 31, 2021. ODOT supports passage of SB 921.

## DISCUSSION

SB 921 encourages ODOT to install median barriers on interstates when the distance between the lanes of traffic is 100 feet or less. The bill allows for exceptions if installing median barriers would prevent a needed emergency access or would create a safety or operational hazard.

In 1996 ODOT began installing cable barrier to close freeway medians. The first section was north of Salem. Since that time, ODOT began to incorporate median barrier into projects in its Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. A project was scheduled for construction in summer 2015 to install cable barrier on I-5 in both Salem and in the southern Willamette Valley. After the tragic crashes in Salem and Albany last fall, we used emergency contracting authority to accelerate these projects and we anticipate the projects to be complete next week.

Also late last year, ODOT reviewed its policy for closing freeway median after evaluating crash data. We have updated our policy from 60' to now close medians in areas where the open medians are 100 feet or less between lanes of traffic. These changes will mean ODOT will target another 100 miles of interstate medians to be closed at a cost of approximately \$20 million. ODOT's policy extends beyond interstate highways, to other divided highways (US 26, OR 217, OR 22, OR 126, US 97) with interstate type characteristics.

During the last couple of years we have made a shift in how we select safety projects. We have moved away from selecting projects in locations of high crash rates or reacting to "hot spots" to a more balanced approach that include funding proactive counter measures such as rumble strips, cable barriers and sign upgrades. However, limited funding means these improvements will be implemented over several years.

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SB 921 confirms ODOT's effort to add about 100 more miles of interstates median barrier installed at a cost of \$20 million. Projects to complete this work will compete for limited safety funding, but we expect to complete this work by 2021.

### **SUMMARY**

ODOT policy direction and SB 921 set direction for the agency to install median barriers on interstate routes, and ODOT supports the bill's passage. Median barriers are an important mechanism to prevent crossover crashes.

Attachment: Priorities for Interstate Open Median Sections Map

# Priorities for Interstate Open Median Sections

February 2015

