



Home of the St. Paul Rodeo

City of St. Paul

PO Box 7
St. Paul, Oregon 97137

April 5, 2017

Representative Caddy McKeown
Chair, House Committee on Transportation Policy
900 Court St. NE, H-476
Salem, Oregon 97301

Via Electronic Delivery

Re: HB 3231 – Letter in Opposition

Dear Representative McKeown:

I am writing to state my opposition to HB 3231, which would be the first step in authorizing the formation of a Special District to oversee the construction of a new toll highway in northwest Oregon, hereinafter referred to as the "Bypass".

The proposed routes for the Bypass that I have seen would negatively affect the City of St. Paul, surrounding communities, and construct a large, heavily used, highway through the heart of the French Prairie district, which comprises some best farmland in the Willamette Valley, and contains historic farms and structures pre-dating the Oregon's formation as a State.

Further, the construction and operation of the Bypass through French Prairie has the potential to harm critical wildlife habitat surrounding the Willamette Valley, which is on a major flyway for migratory waterfowl which are easily disturbed by construction and traffic.

St. Paul and Donald are already feeling the impacts of traffic from Newberg and the Portland metropolitan area. We are seeing ever increasing numbers of cars and commercial trucks using roads which were originally intended as market roads or for agricultural use. These roads were never intended or designed to carry many vehicles, vehicles traveling at high speed, or large numbers of commercial truck traffic. As a result, we're experiencing more accidents, many of the serious, and more fatal accidents. Once the Newberg-Dundee Bypass opens, more traffic will be routed into the French Prairie area on McKay/Ehlen Road east to the I-5 Aurora interchange, which is horribly congested now.

The proposed "Northwest Passage" would only serve to exacerbate the situation, as several proposed south terminus points would be the I-5 Aurora interchange or the I-5 Brooks interchange to the South.

The proposed Bypass has the potential to encourage urban sprawl. Development naturally tends to occur around interchanges. One only has to look at the interchanges along I-5 between Tigard and Wilsonville. A similar situation in the French Prairie area due to the Bypass would destroy it.

HB3231 would create a Special District with the power to tax, regulate, and worse, the authority to use eminent domain to take private land for the creation of the Bypass. If formed, a Board would oversee the Special District, but the bill is silent upon the makeup of the Board, which suggests that the interests of small cities like St. Paul or Donald or unincorporated areas would be ill represented, if at all.

HB3231 would allow the Special District to enter into design-build projects with private entities for the construction of privately financed toll highways. Privately built and financed toll highways may be enticing to legislatures strapped for cash, but in practice, they have proven to be disastrous for many jurisdictions that tried them. Bankruptcies, lawsuits, and taxpayer bailouts of private tollways are the norm rather than the exception.¹

HB3231 would allow operators of the private tollway to collect civil penalties from scofflaws who don't pay tolls, and require the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles to provide registered owner information to the private operator for the purpose of collecting unpaid tolls and civil penalties. Toll highway operators often turn over these debts to debt collectors, and many cases of abusive debt collection associated with unpaid tolls can be documented.²

HB3231 places an unfunded mandate on cities and counties by requiring them to adopt changes to land use zoning and comprehensive plans, all of which are time consuming, expensive, and require land use hearings to comply with Oregon land use statutes.

In conclusion, I grant that Oregon needs more transportation infrastructure, but neither the proposed "Northwest Passage" or the concept of private toll highways is a workable solution. The Oregon Department of Transportation has its own transportation plans and the Legislature would better serve Oregonians by devoting funding and resources to the Department.

Sincerely,



Kimball Wallis
Mayor

cc: House Transportation Policy Committee members
Mr. Ben Williams, Friends of French Prairie
Representative Bill Post
State Senator Kim Thatcher

1 <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2012/1112bondgraham.html>
2 <http://money.cnn.com/2015/09/01/news/unpaid-tolls-debt>