

# Congestion, Major Projects and Revenues

Joe Cortright, on behalf of *No More Freeways*  
Testimony to the Joint Transportation Committee  
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The I-5 Rose Quarter project is both emblematic of and a major contributor to the dysfunction of the Oregon Department of Transportation and illustrates ODOT's failed approaches to addressing congestion, planning and implementing major projects. and prudently managing public revenues.

**The I-5 Rose Quarter Project will not reduce congestion in Portland.** Widening freeways doesn't reduce congestion because [more capacity induces greater traffic](#). ODOT has admitted that the project [will not reduce daily, recurring congestion](#). They hope that the project will lower congestion by reducing crashes, but have no evidence that is the case. In fact, when ODOT spent \$70 million in 2010 to widen a stretch of I-5 at Victory Boulevard, just north of the Rose Quarter, the number of [crashes actually increased](#).

**This project will aggravate climate change.** More capacity generates more traffic and more pollution. Transportation is the largest and fastest growing source of greenhouse gases in Oregon. Transportation greenhouse gases have increased by [1,000 pounds per person in the Portland area](#) in the past five years. This project would [increase GHG emissions by about 5,000 to 8,000 tons per year](#). ODOT's so-called peer review committee was a [whitewash](#): it was not provided with any of the expert testimony submitted during the environmental review that disproved ODOT's claims about climate emissions.

**ODOT has ignored and stifled community opposition.** Portland's Mayor and City Council [now oppose the project and have pulled the city out of project planning](#). After ODOT's chosen community advisory committee started asking hard questions about the project, [ODOT simply fired them](#). ODOT has failed to provide a full environmental impact statement that would address the serious questions raised by the thousands of commenters, [90 percent of whom opposed](#) the project.

**This project has become unaffordable.** When this project was initially approved by the Legislature in 2017, ODOT said it would cost \$450 million; its cost has [ballooned to \\$795 million](#), and could go even higher due to ODOT promises to add buildable caps to the project. ODOT has shown no ability to manage costs of major projects, which [have routinely gone 100-200 percent over budget](#).

**Uncontrolled capital spending and borrowing is jeopardizing road maintenance.** Due to the recession and the pandemic, ODOT's revenues are now well below forecast, and the agency has organized its finances so that these cuts fall on operations and maintenance. In essence, [the combination of cost overruns, and plans to bond future revenue automatically lead to ODOT to cut maintenance on roadways](#). Our priorities should be just the opposite: fix roads first.

It's time to choose a different course: As Governor Brown said on July 1,

“ . . . in terms of the Rose Quarter, I think we need to take a look at all of these transportation projects in light of the economic downturn that we're seeing statewide, and frankly, nationally.”

The world, the proposed project and public opinion have changed since 2017. This project won't solve the problem that the Legislature identified, will cost twice (and probably more) what it was told three years ago, is strongly opposed by the city and community, is exactly the opposite of what we need to do to combat a growing climate crisis, and threatens to bankrupt the maintenance of Oregon roads. It's time for the Legislature to revisit this and other freeway widening projects, and choose a better course.