



Building Our Community Together

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TO: Joint Committee on Transportation

FR: Kem A. Marks JD, Dir. of Transportation Equity The Rosewood Initiative

DR: March 6, 2019

RE: HB 2702

The Rosewood Initiative is a community organization (501c3) on the Gresham-Portland border located at SE Stark St and SE 162nd Ave. Our mission is "Building a safe, healthy and vibrant community where neighbors can thrive together." One of the concerns our community has identified is the need for safe roadways for all users including those walking, biking, and rolling, be it using a mobility device or a micromobility device.

The Rosewood Initiative supports local jurisdictions having authority to set their own speed limits according to local needs and conditions. We urge the Joint Committee to grant The City of Portland immediate authority to set speed limits. We also urge the committee to grant ODOT authority to research and establish minimum guidelines to certify other jurisdictions to set their own limits if they so choose. ODOT's authority should not supercede Portland's authority to set its speed limits.

Current Conditions in East Portland

The City of Portland has recognized the need to reduce the speed limits as the city has become more dense, especially in areas like East Portland which has 28 of the city's 30 high crash intersections and 15 arterials that are high crash corridors. This is more than any other section of the city.

The street network in East Portland was designed after World War II and to a standard appropriate to a semi-rural environment. Over the ensuing decades farmland gave way to large lots with single family homes. Apartment developments have since taken their place along almost all of the major arterials and collectors. This density will increase as the city adds new forms of infill to address the housing crisis.

Existing multifamily developments are mostly populated by some of the most vulnerable groups including children, people of color, low income residents, seniors, and people with disabilities

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due to naturally occurring affordable housing. These people are more reliant on walking and walking to public transit to meet their life needs.

The City of Portland has recognized the need to reduce speeds on its arterials and collectors for some time, but has been hamstrung by an inefficient process of having to request changes on a piecemeal basis; street by street, and segment by segment, from a central state authority that is not cognizant of the quickly changing local conditions. The process is opaque to the public, is time consuming for local staff, requires long waiting periods for decisions, and these decisions are based on criteria that do not take into account the needs of all users or the increasing density along arterials and collectors.

Inefficient Process. Inconsistent System

The piecemeal approach required by current statute and regulations results in inconsistency in speed limits in our street network. Similar type streets, e.g. 122nd Ave. and Division, which are both five lane arterials, do not have consistent speed limits. Furthermore, changes on one arterial results in traffic moving to another to bypass the speed reductions, because the same speeds do not apply to the entire network. After speeds were reduced on Outer Division to address the rise in traffic deaths, drivers rerouted to Outer Stark. Stark experienced a spike in deaths and when the speed limit was reduced on Stark, drivers started using Glisan and Halsey more. The City is working hard to reduce deaths and injuries of all road users in East Portland with projects like the East Portland Arterial System Strategy (EPASS). However, these efforts will not be successful if the city cannot control speeds on these arterials as part of the system-wide approach.

Opaque Process

The process is opaque to the average person. After seven road users were killed on Outer Stark (SE 108th Ave to SE 160th Ave) in approximately 1.5 years, The Rosewood Initiative and Oregon Walks requested that Portland reduce the speed limit from 35 mph to 30 mph to increase safety. The City responded that it would take a year or more to get ODOT approval, and this might not happen if a speed study showed that 85% of drivers were driving at the then current speed limit or higher. The community along Stark, which is overwhelmingly residential multifamily, was facing an existential crisis, and we were forced to request an emergency ordinance to reduce the speed. We were aware of these rules and able to work within them, but we talk to people regularly who are not, and greatly frustrated when we explain to them how

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long it takes and how it works. Most do not have the capacity to work on such projects to conclusion.

Changing National Standards

A consensus is developing that the 85th percentile methodology of setting speed limits is obsolete, and is designed solely for vehicular traffic. Cities need the authority to set speed limits to meet local conditions including providing safety for pedestrians, cyclists, mobility device users, and micromobility users, and do so in a timely manner. Examples of the changing consensus include:

- Engineering Group Takes on High Speed Limits, story on the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices considering change to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices regarding speed limits.
- The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (2018) found that “lowering the speed limit in urban areas is an effective countermeasure to reduce speeds and improve safety for all road users.”
- The National Transportation Safety Board (2017) found that “the current level of emphasis on speeding as a national traffic safety issue is lower than warranted and insufficient to achieve the goal of zero traffic fatalities in the United States.”
- The World Health Organization’s Global Status Report on Road Safety (2018) recommends that urban speed limits should not exceed 30 mph and local authorities should have the power to set speeds.

Frankly, no one needs a degree in traffic engineering to understand this. They just need to walk on the arterials and cross the intersection along five lane urban highways such as those in East Portland. Speed kills! We see this in East Portland where almost every arterial is a high crash corridor. We see the drivers going 10 mph or more over the already high posted speed limit and act as if it is a right to do so.

We also would like to note that letting drivers dictate what the speed limit is instead of taking all road users and local conditions into account is a dangerous and illogical methodology.

Action Needed Now

We are encouraged that ODOT is convening a round table of stakeholders to look at this issue, and that Portland is working within this process. **However**, the residents of East Portland (and

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all of Portland) do not have the luxury of waiting as ODOT studies the issue, and works to bring partners on board to some future framework that is probably going to happen incrementally. The City of Portland, advocates, and most importantly, the residents of Portland need local control of speed limits to solve the ongoing crisis of people being killed and injured on our streets. This problem will only get worse as the population continues to grow, and more people walk as part of their travel options in response to actions by the State, Metro, and the City of Portland.

Again, we support the legislature granting the City of Portland authority to establish its own speed limits, and grant ODOT the authority to establish a regime for other jurisdictions to become certified to do the same if they so desire.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kem A. Marks".

Kem A. Marks, JD

Dir. of Transportation Equity

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