



Forest Park Neighborhood Association
C/O Neighbors West Northwest
2257 NW Raleigh
Portland, Oregon 97210

April 9, 2019

Joint Committee on Transportation
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Forest Park Neighborhood Association opposes Senate Bill 413

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

Forest Park Neighborhood is unique. Our boundaries include portions of urban Portland and a large area in unincorporated Multnomah County. The neighborhood includes Portland's 5,000 acre Forest Park and thousands of acres of high value habitat on rural land around the park that helps keep the park and its wildlife healthy. These lands are used by elk, mountain lion, and nesting bald eagles even though they are within minutes of downtown Portland.

Our neighborhood association worked hard to get the rural portions of our neighborhood, which include EFU farmland and CFU forest lands designated as Rural Reserves to preserve them from urban development and protect these valuable natural resources. Multnomah County designated all of the unincorporated land in these hills as Rural Reserves for Important Natural Landscape Features. Washington County designated a large swath of their adjacent rural lands as Rural Reserves.

Forest Park Neighborhood strongly opposes SB 413. SB 413 authorizes creation of special districts with the power to create new, privately owned tollways anywhere within their district boundary. The bill explicitly allows these new highways to be built in rural reserves. The District would be allowed to exercise the power of eminent domain to acquire property. The tollways may be leased to and operated by private entities. In addition to tolls, the bill also authorizes the special district to impose property taxes, imposing a cost burden on every property owner to support highways that are open only to those who can afford to pay the tolls and subsidizing private entities operating the tollways.

SB 413 would prohibit counties from denying the development applications for the tollways because a tollway would be inconsistent with intergovernmental agreements (IGAs), plans, laws, or ordinances protecting rural reserves, even if the tollway would ruin the resources protected by the rural reserve. Currently, new highways cannot be developed in rural reserves because they will fragment and harm the high value farm/forest lands and natural resources that rural reserves were intended to protect from development.

The most likely application of this bill would be an effort to create a "westside bypass" through Washington and Multnomah Counties, which would likely pass through our neighborhood, cutting across important wildlife movement corridors around Forest Park.

While Portland area local governments and current transportation planning processes are focused on building a balanced transportation system that supports transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists in addition to maintaining and improving existing roads, these new special districts have a single purpose – building new tollways.

This bill appears to want to turn back the clock to 1960's "let's build more freeways" thinking that more freeways, and more driving, will solve our transportation problems. It would also undermine the state's efforts to limit carbon emissions and limit climate change.

The Portland region has a Regional Transportation Plan that includes a Regional System Design, developed in coordination with counties and cities, which balances and coordinates the region's needs for highways, freight, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. This bill, however, singles out highways and would establish special districts to focus on that one element, and with no requirement to coordinate with the rest of the region or other modes of transit. This overly narrow focus has many potential negative consequences:

1. Highways developed by special districts could harm the rest of the regional system through poor design, by pulling attention and funding away from other, higher transportation priorities, or by pushing (through tollways) traffic onto local roads.
2. These new special districts have only one tool (highways) available to solve transportation problems, so they'll have a huge incentive to build highways to justify their existence, even if a highway isn't the best way to solve a problem.
3. Surveys consistently show that people want transportation choices, including improved transit, sidewalks, bike lanes. This bill does nothing to address those non-highway needs. New highways would encourage additional development in satellite cities, creating more long-distance commuters and carbon emissions.

Rural reserves were designated to protect our most valuable rural resources. Allowing development of highways through rural reserves would badly fragment farm/forest lands and natural resources, and would encourage early development of rural reserves that were supposed to be protected from development for 50 years.

Once these Special Districts are established, there's no requirement for local citizen input into any of their decisions about potential new or existing highways.

Development of a Westside Bypass would pull limited funding, resources, and attention away from replacing the Interstate Bridge and maintaining existing transportation facilities, which should be much higher priorities.

Development of these highways will encourage long distance commutes, increasing carbon emissions. Do we really want to encourage satellite cities like Scappoose and Ridgefield to develop (further) into bedroom communities for jobs in Hillsboro? We need more investment instead in local communities to improve facilities for walking and biking to meet daily needs, and to provide more and better transit options (including high capacity transit) to create more safe, attractive transportation options for local residents.

Extensive research shows that expanding existing roads or building new ones results in induced demand -- more people choose to drive and make decisions that increase driving like living in a satellite city because the new road makes it easier and faster to drive. This quickly cancels out

any initial reductions in congestion. New highway projects are a poor investment of limited infrastructure capacity. The priority should instead be to maintain existing transportation facilities, improve walking, biking, and transit options, and to invest in regionally supported transportation improvements to reduce congestion.

The bill does not include any provision allowing a city or county to withdraw from one of these new Special Districts, or for dissolution of the District.

Property taxes and toll-payer funds should be used to create and maintain public assets, not private assets and private profits.

Our largely rural neighborhood is already hammered by long distance cut-through urban commuters on our rural roads who want to avoid a congested Highway 26. Upgrading one of those rural roads into a tollway would push commuters onto our other rural roads, exacerbating existing congestion. A study of tolling on NW Cornelius Pass Road done by ODOT a few years ago demonstrated that tolling one road simply pushes drivers onto other, even less suitable roads, creating longer out of direction trips and generating more carbon emissions and pollution while disrupting the local community and harming wildlife. The lack of required coordination between the Special District and regional transportation planning is a serious problem.

Tolls also put more burden on low income drivers, but this bill does not provide a way to use the funds raised by tolling to help those drivers. If the legislature wants to take action to facilitate development of tollways, I suggest that you develop proposals that would allow funds raised by tolling to be used to provide improved transit or other options to ensure that low income residents won't bear an outsized burden on their transportation choices.

Forest Park Neighborhood Association urges you to oppose SB 413. This isn't the right solution for our transportation issues and would harm rural reserves that provide important protections for farmlands and natural resources.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,



Carol Chesarek
President, Forest Park Neighborhood Association