

PBOT

PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION

1120 SW Fifth Ave, Suite 1331, Portland OR 97204

Main: 503-823-5185 TTY: 503-823-6868 Fax: 503-823-7576

Chloe Eudaly Commissioner **Chris Warner** Director

February 4, 2020

Senator Lee Beyer and Representative Caddy McKeown, Co-Chairs
Joint Committee on Transportation
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and McKeown and Members of the Joint Committee:

The City of Portland is a Vision Zero city, with the Council-adopted goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries on our streets. To this end, we urge your support for HB 4103, which would grant greater authority for local jurisdictions to set and slow speeds on locally-owned streets.

Over the past five years, speed has been a major contributor to nearly half the fatal crashes on Portland streets. Speed, including speeding and driving too fast for conditions, is especially dangerous for pedestrians, who make up a disproportionate percentage of traffic deaths in the city. Portland employs a variety of tools to bring speeds down and save lives – including street redesign, education, automated enforcement, police enforcement and speed limit reductions. We are grateful to the Legislature for its partnership to make many of these tools available in Portland and other cities around the state.

Setting safe speed limits matters for safety, and just 5 or 10 mph makes a significant difference. A pedestrian hit by a driver at 40 mph is more than twice as likely to die than a pedestrian hit by a driver at 30 mph.¹ Additionally, the chance that a driver can stop and avoid a crash altogether becomes much less likely at faster speeds. Recent research from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that “lowering the speed limit in urban areas is an effective countermeasure to reduce speeds and improve safety for all road users.”²

Today, changing speed limits can be arduous and inefficient for local jurisdictions in Oregon. In Portland, the segment-by-segment request process has resulted in a patchwork quilt of speeds across the city. These piecemeal changes tax both City and State resources and result in different speed limits on similar-feeling streets.

¹ Tefft, B.C. (2011), “Impact Speed and a Pedestrian’s Risk of Severe Injury or Death,” *AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety*

² Hu, W. and J.B. Cicchino (2018), “Lowering the speed limit from 30 to 25 mph in Boston: effects on vehicle speeds,” *Insurance Institute for Highway Safety*



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To address this inefficiency and enable certified local jurisdictions to set speeds on locally-owned streets, the City of Portland has been working with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to enact a statutory change that would allow ODOT to delegate speed setting authority to certified local jurisdictions. HB 4103 would enable this change. ODOT and cities from around Oregon will work together to develop administrative rules to structure and administer the delegation program.

The new program will reflect national research on the importance of local context in setting safe speeds – especially in urban areas. This research makes it clear that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to setting speeds does not necessarily lead to safe outcomes on urban streets. HB 4103 serves as the first step in creating a statewide process that provides local jurisdictions more autonomy in setting safe speed limits based on the urban context – but does so within a consistent statewide framework.

As an active participant in the state-led process to update Oregon’s speed setting methodology, Portland is grateful for ODOT’s collaboration and recognizes that we are all deeply invested in safe streets for Oregonians. In granting speed setting authority to local cities, Oregon would join many states that have done the same, including Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Virginia and Washington. This would enable Oregon cities to join their Vision Zero peers in efficiently managing speed limits to reduce serious crashes and save lives. The City of Portland asks for your support passing HB 4103.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Warner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chris Warner, Director
Portland Bureau of Transportation