
The case against the ~~\$450~~ \$800 million I-5 Rose Quarter freeway widening project

February 2020

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Four reasons

- **It won't work: Congestion won't improve**
- **It makes kids at Tubman breathe more toxins**
- **It's contrary to our climate goals**
- **We have better uses for half a billion dollars**
- **(We can address safety, covers, bike/pedestrian access, and freight implications as well.)**

**It won't reduce
congestion**

You can't build your way out of congestion

**“Induced demand”:
With “free” roads, more
capacity simply generates
more traffic**



Fundamental Law of Road Congestion

American Economic Review 101 (October 2011): 2616–2652
<http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/aer.101.6.2616>

The Fundamental Law of Road Congestion: Evidence from US Cities[†]

By GILLES DURANTON AND MATTHEW A. TURNER*

We investigate the effect of lane kilometers of roads on vehicle-kilometers traveled (VKT) in US cities. VKT increases proportionately to roadway lane kilometers for interstate highways and probably slightly less rapidly for other types of roads. The sources for this extra VKT are increases in driving by current residents, increases in commercial traffic, and migration. Increasing lane kilometers for one type of road diverts little traffic from other types of road. We find no evidence that the provision of public transportation affects VKT. We conclude that increased provision of roads or public transit is unlikely to relieve congestion. (JEL R41, R48)



ODOT admits it won't work

OPB, Politics Now, October 12, 2017

ODOT's Travis Brouwer: "We fully admit that this is not going to eliminate congestion at the Rose Quarter, But, we do expect it will make traffic a lot better."

OPB's Jeff Mapes: . . . basically, they are saying if you take care of a lot of those fender benders, its; going to reduce a lot of delays that frequently happen there.



PBOT admits it won't work

PBOT's Mauricio Leclerc to Portland Planning and Sustainability Commission

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vyl8CPemHw0>

February 28, 2017

at. 37:00

When we did the analysis, the congestion benefit is on the elimination of crashes—non-recurring congestion. The congestion benefit of just adding more lanes was very limited.

Basically you're fixing something. Certainly, there's an improvement, but it's not very large. If you are familiar with the freeway system, it's congested to the north, it's congested to the south, and if you're going to I-84, it's just going to be congested as you enter I-84. So, it has limited utility, but it does have a very significant safety and non-recurring congestion benefit. So, we're not sure what the induced demand, if that gets modeled, it's potential, but it's not very large.



Does widening freeways reduce crashes?

I-5 widening project will loosen Delta Park bottleneck

By The Oregonian on April 18, 2008 at 8:36 PM, updated

After more than a decade of stop-and-go debate, one of Interstate 5's thorniest bottlenecks is about to get its fix.


Construction will start Monday on widening a segment of the highway near Delta Park in North Portland. Two southbound lanes will expand to three in a \$70 million, 21/2-year project that is the costliest highway revamp in the Portland area this year.

By Halloween 2010, the third lane will open, taming a traffic hobgoblin known especially by Clark County commuters who suffer it daily. Now, as southbound I-5 motorists reach Delta Park, they go from driving on three lanes down to two -- and then back to three lanes about a mile south, near Lombard Street in North Portland.



\$70 million to widen I-5 at Victory Boulevard in 2010

I-5 Project to Solve One of Portland's Worst Bottlenecks

 Fri June 04, 2010 - West Edition
Rebecca Ragain, CEG CORRESPONDENT

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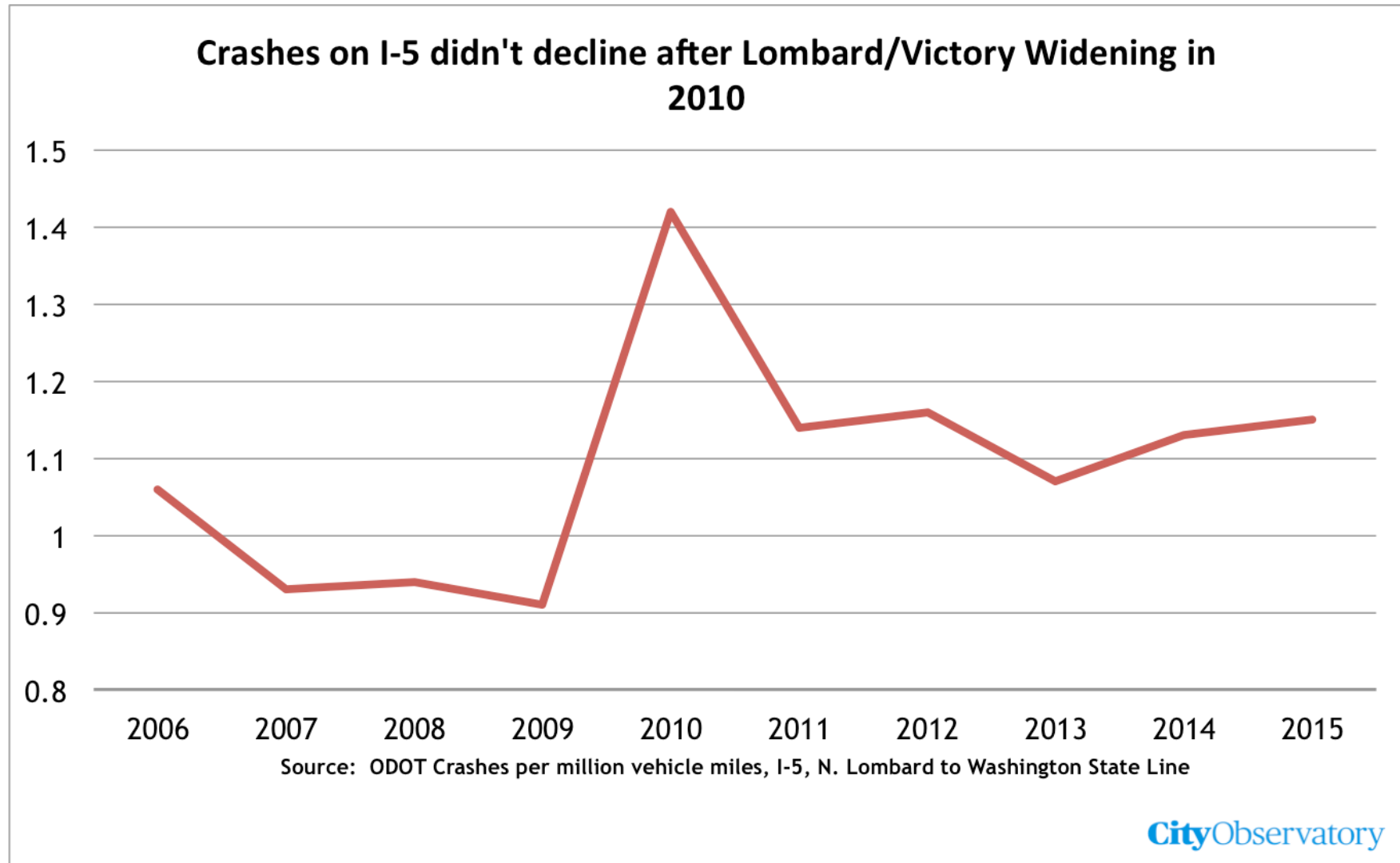
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An aerial view of the work bridge with cranes in place.



Widening I-5 increased crashes



**It's out of line with our
adopted climate goals**

We're losing ground on climate



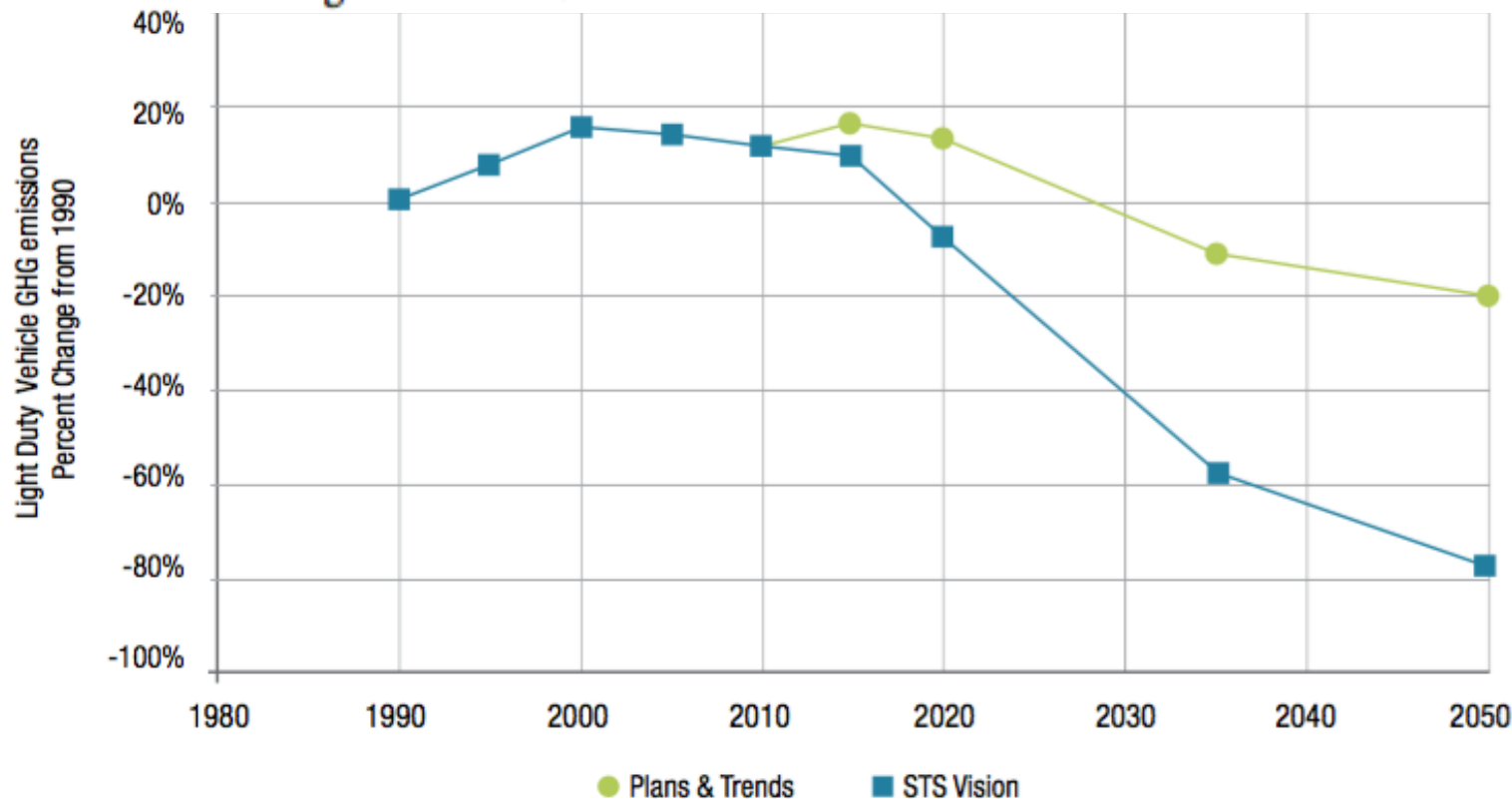
Oregon
Global
Warming
Commission



Carbon pollution is up in Oregon because of driving

3. Rising transportation emissions are driving increases in statewide sector-based GHG emissions.

Transportation GHG emissions have risen during each of the past three years and have grown from 35% of the statewide total in 2014 to 39% in 2016. In



Oregon
Global
Warming
Commission

2018 Biennial Report to the Legislature
FOR THE 2019 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

**It won't make travel
safer in Portland**

**It makes kids at Tubman
breathe more pollution**

Freeway closer to Tubman



For starters, it would cut away this hillside
to **expand and add lanes.**

Freeway closer to Tubman

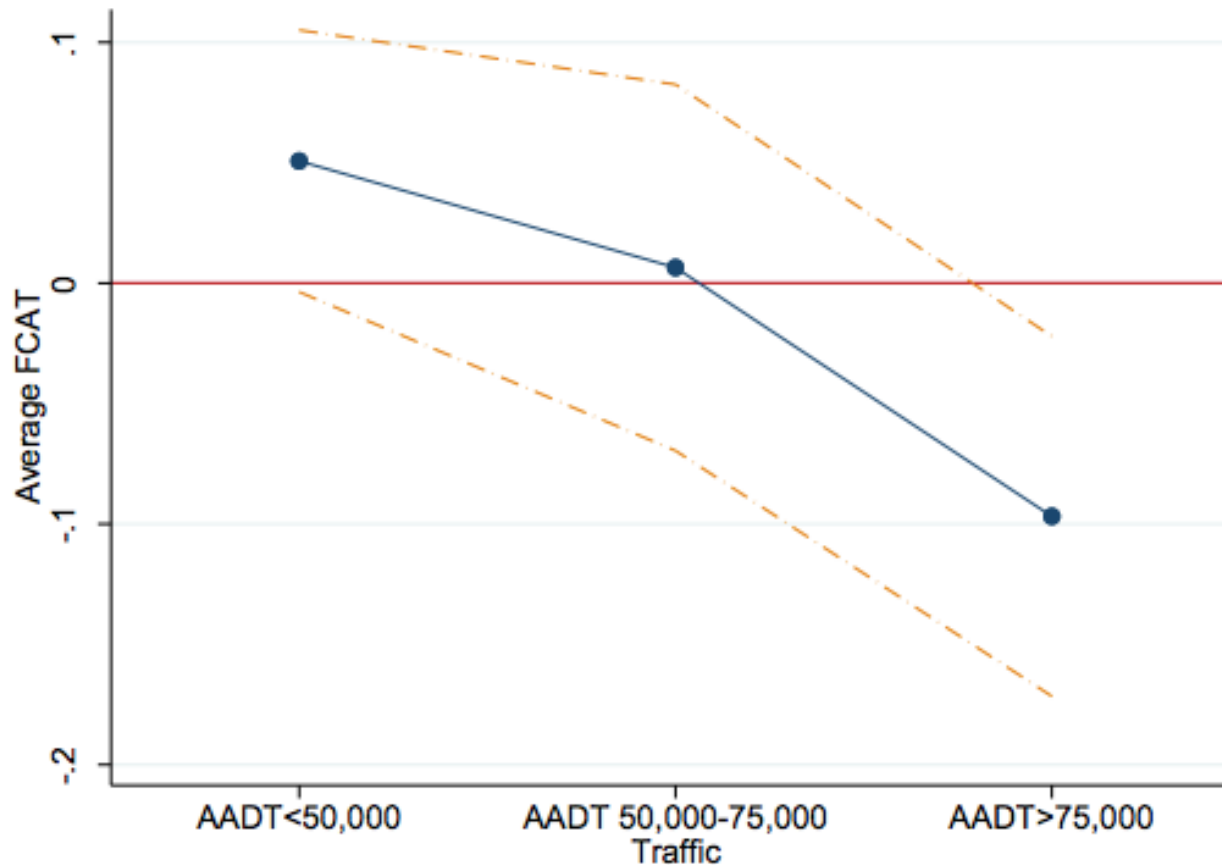


For starters, it would cut away this hillside
to **expand and add lanes.**



Busier roads = lower achievement

Figure 5: Effects of being downwind 60% of the time by traffic



Jennifer Heissel, Claudia Persico, David Simon, Does pollution drive achievement? The effect of traffic pollution on academic performance. NBER Working Paper No. 25489.



Highways=lower test scores

. . children who move to a school downwind of a major highway have lower test scores and a higher likelihood of behavioral incidents and missing school than when those same children attended schools with similar characteristics that were not downwind of a major highway. The effects are larger for more heavily-trafficked roads, and the effects appear to last even after the child moves away from a downwind school. This suggests that once damage from pollution is done, even during middle childhood, it might persist, potentially affecting outcomes far into the future.

Jennifer Heissel, Claudia Persico, David Simon, Does pollution drive achievement? The effect of traffic pollution on academic performance. NBER Working Paper No. 25489.







This is not a wider freeway





This is not a wider freeway



This is not a

Magritte, 1920



ODOT, 2019



Claims project will reduce crashes 35-70%

2016-2018 STIP

ROSE QUARTER HIGHWAY MOBILITY

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

- The expected delay savings for users of the system is projected to be between \$10.25 and \$11.85 million annually.
- Additional benefits will accrue from the increased efficiency of freight movements to local businesses, rail, air, marine, and intermodal terminals.
- Reduce crashes on I-5 by 35-70%
- Improved pedestrian and bicycle safety

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | 55

Source: [ODOT, 2016-2018 STIP project description](#)

Wholly Moses

Portland Improvement

ROBERT MOSES, *Director*

Consulting Engineers

MADIGAN-HYLAND
W. EARLE ANDREWS
GILMORE D. CLARKE
WADDELL & HARDESTY

Attorneys

HAWKINS, DELAFIELD & LONGFELLOW
RAYMOND P. McNULTY

NEW YORK CITY

NOVEMBER 10, 1943

Finally, I would suggest that an entirely new name be found for the postwar public works program in the Portland district. In fact, it would be desirable all over the country to get away from anything reminiscent of work relief, which is humiliating and disheartening to all those involved, and certainly no basis for an enthusiastic return to civil life by those in the armed forces and in war industries. Unfortunately, the endless permutations and combinations in which the words "public" and "works" have been used by federal and other agencies during the depression will bring any new combination of these words into disrepute. We ought to invent something which spells unified effort to improve the community, something which will arouse enthusiasm, something with which the worker will be proud to be connected. At the moment, I can think of nothing better than the words "Portland Improvement".



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Or by at least 50%

Public Involvement Plan – DRAFT

I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project

Oregon Department of Transportation

August 17, 2017

page 15

- The project will reduce crashes by over 50% on I-5

A phony marketing plan

3.1.2 Key Messages

Key messages that should be communicated throughout the project include:

- With high traffic volumes, closely spaced interchanges, and no shoulders, I-5 at the Rose Quarter has the highest crash rate in the state of Oregon. This stretch of I-5 frustrates freight haulers and commuters with long and unreliable travel times.

This is not about getting public input on possible alternatives, its about manufacturing the illusion of consent for pre-selected action.

It's not about disclosing a wide range of possible alternatives and getting public comment on their relative merits, its about selling a choice that ODOT has already made.



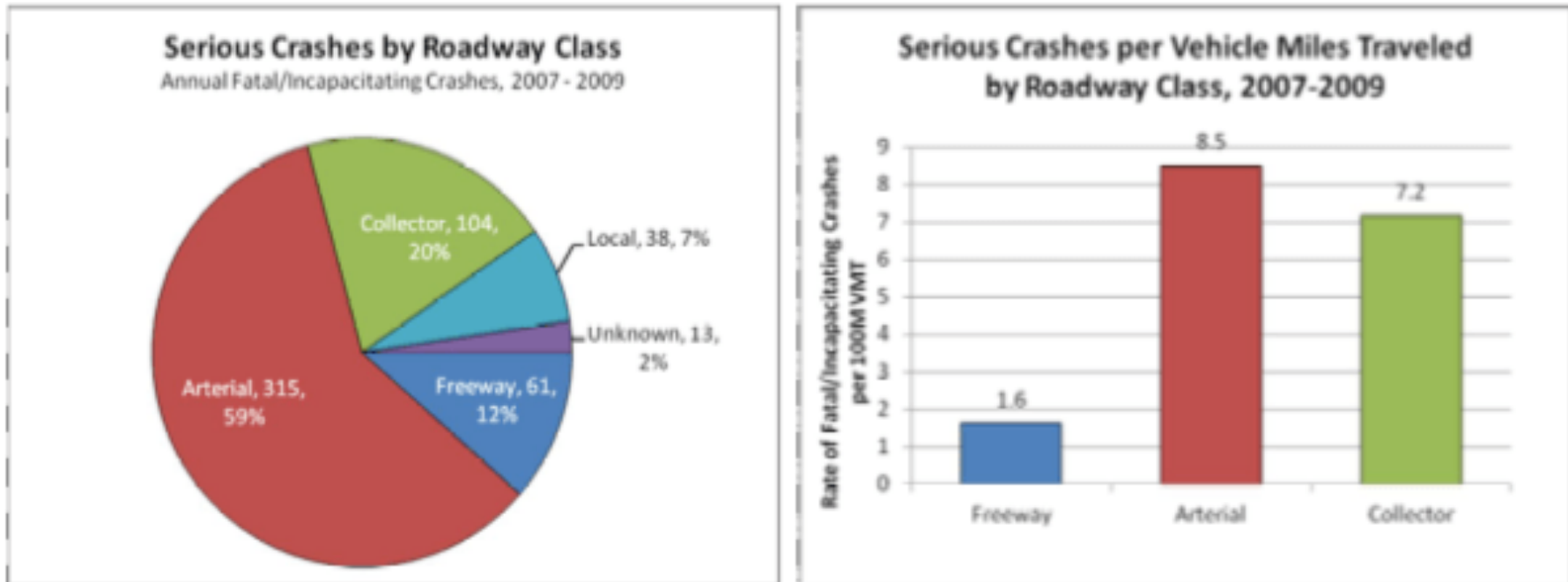
Other issues

- **Is this about safety?**
- **What about the freeway lids?**
- **Is it better for bikes and pedestrians?**
- **Don't we need it for freight?**
- **What should be do instead?**

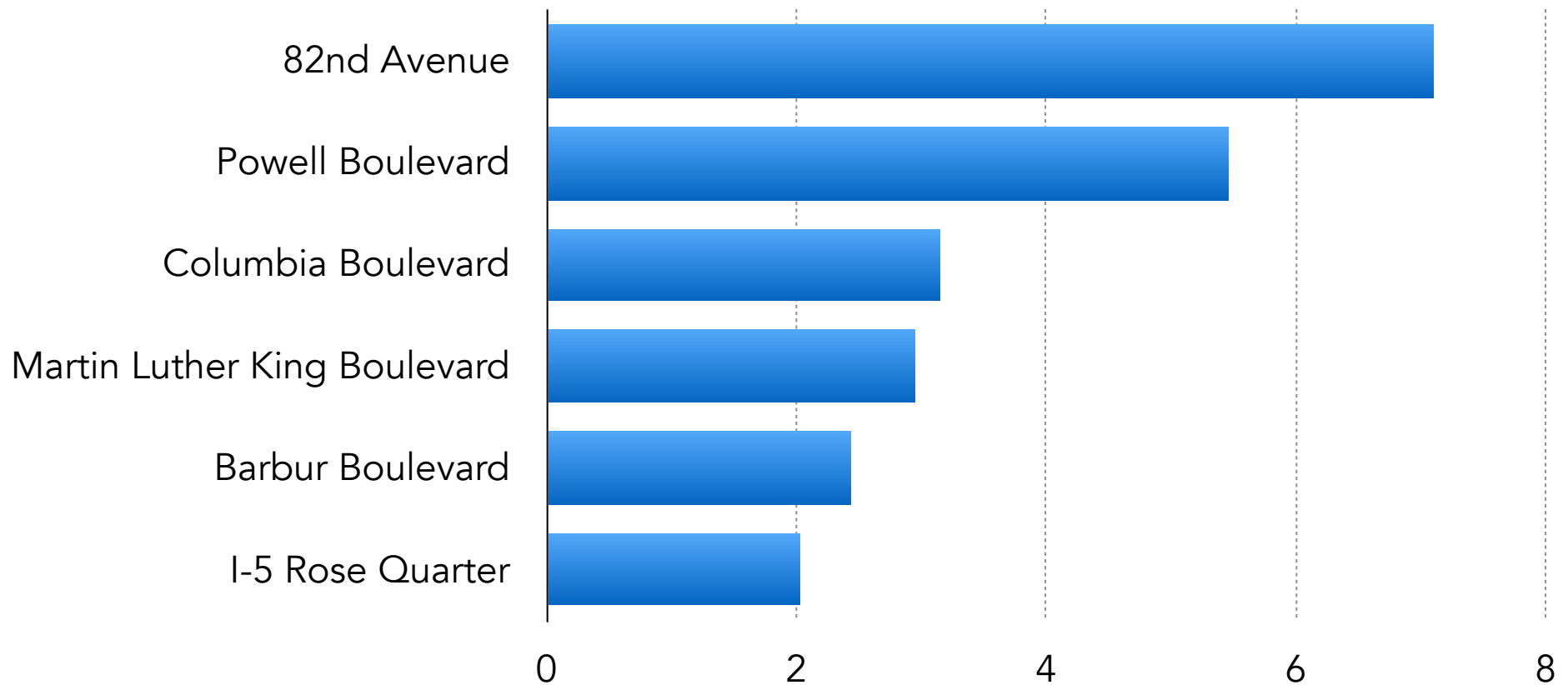
Safety is a red herring

Freeway are 5 times safer than arterials
Metro State of Safety Report

Figures 2-8 and 2-9



Rose Quarter is safer than other ODOT roads



Crashes per million vehicle miles, 2015 (ODOT data)



Purpose: “Reduce minor or non-injury crashes”

Constrained Project List - Public Review Draft
Projects are listed alphabetically by County and nominating agency.



Project Name	Start location	End location	Description	Estimated Cost (2016 dollars)	Included in Financially Constrained project list	RTP Investment Category	Primary Purpose
I-5 from I-405 to I-84 (Rose Quarter/Lloyd District) Construction	I-84	Greeley St.	Construct improvements to enhance safety and operations on I-5, connection between I-84 and I-5, and multimodal access to and connectivity between the Lloyd District and Rose Quarter.	\$ 375,000,000	Yes	Throughways	Reduce minor or non-injury crashes



Conclusion

**Congestion exists because
roads are under-priced
Widening freeways doesn't
work**

**Price first, build later, or waste
billions**

