

**Testimony of Juan Carlos Gonzalez, Metro Councilor District 4
In Support of House Bill 2744, -1 amendment
Joint Committee on Transportation
March 25, 2021**



Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, housing and homeless services, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

Metro strongly supports HB 2744 with the -1 amendment, which advances the prospect of jurisdictional transfers of key facilities in the Portland region and statewide.

In many parts of Oregon, and specifically in the Portland region, ownership and management of streets, roads and highways reflect historical circumstances but do not always support current transportation needs, land uses and development patterns. Many state highways originally built as farm-to-market roads and designed and managed for throughput, intercity travel and freight movement serve today as local roads or main streets for cities that have grown up around them. These facilities now need to safely accommodate many different kinds of users than those for which they were originally designed: pedestrians, bicycles, buses, and passenger vehicles making short trips with lots of turning movements.

Because ODOT's mission focuses on intercity travel and freight movement rather than local travel, the state has not made the investments to bring these roads up to multimodal urban standards. Often referred to as "orphan highways," these roads end up failing to adequately support the needs and aspirations of the local community. They become a barrier to community livability and economic development, present safety hazards that put people at risk, and fall into disrepair because they are considered unimportant in the context of the state highway system. Moreover, because these facilities often serve low-income communities and communities of color, failure to address these deficits disproportionately harms those communities.

Because these roads now serve very different functions in very different communities from the ones in which they were built, one strategy is to align their ownership with their current context and function. In many cases, this means transferring ownership from the state to a local government (usually a city). However, while this makes logical sense and is good policy, years of deferred maintenance and the cost of improving these facilities to urban standards – with the safety and multimodal elements that that entails – create a substantial financial liability that local governments are not prepared to assume. No city can afford to take on a huge liability like a road with poor pavement condition, major safety problems and inadequate facilities for bicycles, pedestrians and transit. A funding source is needed that will

support improvements to these roads to the point that it is possible for the local community to consider assuming responsibility.

That is why Metro has continued to advocate for funding solutions for these facilities, including placing a transportation measure on the ballot in November of 2020 that would have provided much needed improvements to a significant number of these facilities in our region. It is also why Metro, in consultation with ODOT, sponsored a study of facilities across the region that might be promising candidates for jurisdictional transfer. This study, finalized and adopted by Metro Council last December, developed an analytical framework for evaluating specific facilities both on a technical level and with respect to the readiness of local governments to assume ownership under appropriate circumstances. It was conducted in partnership with the cities and counties of the Portland region as well as state and regional transportation agencies. The study identified eleven state-owned highway segments that could be considered for jurisdictional transfer and addresses some of the opportunities and barriers to transferring the routes.

This study is called out specifically in the -1 amendment and there is a copy on OLIS. Our region does not need another study on jurisdictional transfer; we've done one already. What we need is to find the funding to implement these critical and necessary repairs. That is why we are excited to support the -1 amendments, which call on ODOT to work with local partners to take the next step in fixing this crucial transportation issue in our region and to work collaboratively to identify funding solutions.

The Metro Council urges you to pass HB 2744 with the -1 amendment and take a significant step forward in addressing much-needed investments in urban arterials throughout our state.