

It has been said that with regard to land use and transportation planning, there are two things that people in Oregon hate: One is sprawl. The other is density. In order to have less of either one, we end up with more of the other. One thing we can generally agree on is the value of proximity. We love living in a state where we can walk along our uniquely accessible coastline one day and hike in our Cascade mountain forests the next. And at the local level, we benefit from having amenities, services, and facilities in close proximity to where we live, so we can create vibrant and sustainable communities and a high quality of life.

My friend and fellow City Councilor, Veronica, lives on E. Arlington Street in Gladstone, where she can experience all the benefits of a city designed for local proximity. Her house is three blocks from the supermarket, four blocks from her son's elementary school and the public library, a short walk from our downtown commercial district, and two blocks from city parks and greenways overlooking the Clackamas River. Most days Veronica works from home in health care administration, and while there is nearby freeway access both east and west of her home, she rarely has a need to get on the I-205 freeway.

Instead, unfortunately, the freeway comes to her. Veronica tells me that traffic on Arlington is crazy every weekday, particularly during the afternoon commute. As predictable freeway congestion slows vehicles heading south on I-205, the fight or flight response kicks in, and many drivers choose a quick exit from the freeway in lieu of road rage. To avoid the feeling of confinement and frustration that comes from driving 35 mph on a highway designed for 65 mph, these drivers prefer instead to clog local residential streets with their vehicles and their vehicles' fumes, feeling that somehow they are beating the system, and "sticking to the man."

They are not sticking it to the man. They are sticking it to Veronica, who can't get her car out of the driveway. And to her son, who can't ride his bike safely in front of his own home, or cross the street to get to the riverfront parks. And to her neighbors, who park their cars with two wheels in the street and two on the parkway planting strip in order to avoid being sideswiped by semi-trucks taking their afternoon shortcut down their street. This is the current status of traffic diversion in my city, even without tolling. Tolling all lanes of I-205 and other local freeways will not reduce congestion. It will only move congestion to a less safe location, like Veronica's street.

Plan for proximity. Eliminate the need for tolling. Do it for Veronica.

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