



December 14, 2023

Mayor Buck's Comments before the Joint Committee on Transportation's Special
Subcommittee on Transportation Planning

Co-Chairs Nathanson & Fredrick, Vice-chairs Boquist & Mannix and members of the subcommittee:

Oh behalf of the City of Lake Oswego I am pleased to deliver these comments on the proposed I-205 Third Lane & Abernathy Bridge tolls and the broader Regional Mobility Pricing Plan tolls for I-205 and I-5. It is impossible to discuss these proposals in silos as their design and implementation timeline play critical roles in how the projects impact local communities and all road users.

As Mayor of Lake Oswego I have been deeply engaged in the toll proposals for several years including as the Clackamas cities representative on JPACT and as a representative on MPAC as leader of the County's largest city.

Lake Oswego recognizes the need to raise revenue for transportation projects that improve safety, increase transportation options, and mitigate the system's climate impacts. We can also recognize that ODOT as an agency is facing extraordinary funding shortfalls that require current executive and legislative action and the tolling proposals are the result of the inability of current revenues via the gas tax and ODOT's other funding sources to meet the demands maintaining and improving the system. But we should also highlight that ODOT's murky funding woes are not derived exclusively from projects along I-5 and I-205 and that the need to raise revenue for large regional projects and ODOT's operations and maintenance should be shared equitably by all Oregonians.

While we do not oppose tolls as a piece of the funding equation, we strenuously oppose in the strongest terms the current proposals because as designed they divert trips and emissions from the interstate onto local roads, they decrease safety and increase climate impacts. Without revenue sharing or the funding of mitigation projects, residents of abutting jurisdictions not only shoulder the tolls but bear the impact of financing the local safety improvements needed to address their impacts. The piecemeal approach of introducing tolls on existing travel corridors in only certain portions of the region places the funding burden of a state system on only certain residents and greatly exacerbates the negative impact to local communities compared with a more comprehensive and broader regional and statewide approach the funding dilemma demands.

Impacted jurisdictions have provided troves of detailed transportation data to ODOT as part of the local process that highlight these points. This is data and feedback compiled by transportation engineers, experts on this subject with advanced knowledge of the local system. Nevertheless, ODOT has refused to partner with cities to share revenue or meaningfully fund mitigation projects needed to keep our residents and road users safe, even on roadways currently under ODOT jurisdiction with substandard infrastructure. They've favored meeting the minimum requirements for Federal approval over building trust with local communities, brushing aside innumerable comments under the cover of their legislative mandate. This is why your action as our State leaders is so important.

Alternative transportation modes including transit and active transportation for communities abutting I-205 in Clackamas County are nearly non-existent. Tolling as a congestion management strategy as the RMPP is only works if drivers have options, either the option to travel outside of peak times or to use another mode outside of the car. The letter we've submitted that supplements this testimony highlights the specific dearth of options in our area. Any variable toll program congestion management approach should include a roadmap to expanding transit and other options for users that works to decrease emissions on local roadways and improve safety.

The projects currently being proposed from project-specific tolls to variable price congestion fees along I-5 and I-205 will invariably impact immense numbers of residents. Despite ODOT's years of work and tens of millions of dollars in consulting fees alone, the relevant and basic details of these programs such as the amount of the tolls and the projects they'll fund are all completely unknown. There is also no understanding of the cumulative impact of these connected but separate programs and how the cost of the infrastructure and ongoing administration of the various toll programs compares to alternative options with similar variable pricing features (like VMT). Again, ODOT hides behind the legislative mandate in not pursuing alternative options beyond the toll programs.

The legislature has signaled the need to talk about comprehensive transportation funding in the next long session. This conversation is critical, and we ask you to please analyze how the current path forward may very well be foreclosing on alternative options that could better meet our shared goals more efficiently while not imposing disparate impacts on certain communities. If short term funding solutions are needed, please ensure those options are ones that equitable spread the burden of funding our systems on all roadway users - like the gas tax.

Lake Oswego asks this committee to please ensure the state does not continue to pursue what could be the most expensive and costly of all options simply because a group of legislators, most of whom are no longer serving, thought this was a great idea 6 years ago. No matter what plan we pursue it must ensure local communities have safe roadways and alternative options to reduce emission and that local residents do not bear the impossible burden of financing those projects. We need to work together to build and restore trust between local communities and ODOT, and we need legislative intervention to correct the current path we're moving down.

Thank you all for taking the time to be here and for elevating the voices of our residents.