

Welcome to Gladstone. I'm your host, Mayor Michael Milch. Thank you for once again coming directly to the people and for providing a forum for both local voices and elected leaders.

I want to focus today on the role of this Subcommittee in shaping policy on Transportation funding, and to urge you to be open to a full range of options.

I am a retired Baby Boomer, but during my working and commuting years I relied on local radio traffic updates. For the benefit of the Gen-Z and Millennials in the audience who have never known life without the smartphone, drive time radio traffic reports are my generation's version of the red and green lines on a Google Map.

You turn on your dashboard radio, and in between the best of 80's, 90's, and today comes a voice that tells you: "There's a jackknifed semi truck on the outbound Banfield Expressway," followed by the three words no motorist wants to hear: "Use alternate routes." In other words, your direct path to your chosen destination via I-84 East is blocked, and you need to exit the freeway and navigate some surface streets to get to where you want to go.

**Oregon's direct path to a safe and efficient transportation system is blocked by a jackknifed semi-truck filled with bloated overhead and administrative costs, limited public transit options, declining purchase power of fuel tax revenue, inherent inequities for low income residents, and an untimely and misguided decision to use an East Coast solution to solve a West Coast problem. Use alternate routes.**

I have always appreciated the bold and creative ways our state has addressed the challenges it faces. Fifty years ago we tore down a freeway in downtown Portland and replaced it with a waterfront park named for a Republican environmentalist governor, the same governor who gave residents unprecedented access to our state coastline.

We adopted innovative land use planning policies that protected agricultural land and other natural resources from unchecked development. We formed a democratically elected regional government to chart a wise course for the future while protecting the things we love about this place. Never once did we say, let's just do what they do in New Jersey or New York. So why start now?

Use alternate routes. For decades, Oregon has had a pilot program to develop a far more efficient funding mechanism based on Vehicle Miles Traveled. It is far simpler than tolling, ensures that all types of vehicles contribute to the system, and the rates can be adjusted based on zip code to ensure an equitable division between urban and rural residents. It is time to evaluate all the options available for transportation revenue, and to view them through a lens of equity. Use alternate routes.

Fuel taxes (which, by the way, were another Oregon innovation) continue to be the simplest user-based means to fund our roadways, and we already have systems in place to allocate costs equitably between passenger and commercial vehicles.

And besides revenue options, it is time to consider the transportation cost benefits of proximity with regard to the trade sector economy in Oregon. The focus this past term on expanding semiconductor chip facilities has yielded good results. Now it is time to put the same effort into locating jobs and facilities for processing agricultural and lumber commodities in closer proximity to the rural communities where the resources are grown and produced. We should double down on commercial transport by rail and by river barge when the Willamette Falls Locks upgrade project is completed. Use alternate routes.

And while we're at it, let's provide more local health care and other amenities to serve those same rural communities. Reducing the need for dependence on freeway travel for basic needs should take precedence over exploiting it for revenue for maintenance and expansion.

Plan for proximity. Use alternate routes. Do it for Oregon.

Mayor Michael Milch  
Gladstone, Oregon