

June 2, 2024

Dear Committee Members,

I appreciate the Joint Committee taking the time to listen to Oregonians' views on transportation ahead of the 2025 legislative session. As someone who drives a car, commutes by bike, and walks to many of my destinations, I have experienced first-hand many of the challenges our transportation system faces. Our system is not on a financially or environmentally sustainable path, nor does it promote safety. The following items are my top concerns that I hope this Committee addresses going into the 2025 legislative session.

1. **Oregon must treat the climate crisis with the urgency it deserves.** With transportation being the largest contributor to the state's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions¹, we cannot afford to continue the car-centric practices of the past. Widening I-5 as part of the Rose Quarter and Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) project are two examples of climate-damaging projects that will induce more car traffic and make our climate goals harder to reach. It's past time to stop widening freeways and to start redirecting those resources to transit, active transportation, and maintenance. The immense sums of money we currently spend on motor vehicle projects would go a long way toward building world-class walking, biking, and transit projects that would enhance safety and reduce GHG emissions.
2. **Safety must be a top priority.** The increasing trend of deaths and injuries on Oregon's roads is unacceptable². I have experienced numerous near-misses while walking and biking during my daily activities because of the glaring safety gaps on our roads. We need a whole-of-government response to this crisis. This response should include increased funding for safety programs focused on proven behavioral and infrastructure safety countermeasures, including automated (i.e., camera) enforcement. Recently, the California Senate passed a bill to require passive speed governors in all new vehicles by 2032³. I encourage the Committee to propose a similar or stronger provision (e.g., active speed governors that prevent drivers from exceeding the speed limit by a set amount) for Oregon.
3. **We need a new, sustainable source of transportation funding.** I strongly encourage the Committee to propose replacing the gas tax with a vehicles-miles traveled (VMT) fee. Such a VMT fee should increase for heavier and more emissions-intensive vehicles, as they produce more wear on roads and contribute disproportionate amounts of pollution. Increased DMV registration fees for heavier and more-polluting vehicles would complement this kind of VMT fee. A VMT fee should also increase during peak congestion periods (i.e., rush hour). The state's 2006-2007 VMT pilot program⁴ found this policy successfully reduced miles driven.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/ghgp/pages/ghg-inventory.aspx>

² <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/11/28/oregon-data-shows-traffic-deaths-increasing/>

³ <https://www.roadandtrack.com/news/a60871999/california-passive-speed-limiters-bill/>

⁴ https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/2909_10-04.pdf

4. **We should use the funding we have more wisely.** The state has already spent millions of dollars on the Rose Quarter and IBR projects, which have yet to break ground. It's time to scale these projects back to their core intended functions. For the IBR, the Legislature should only fund a project that will create a seismically sound, transit-enhanced connection *without adding car lanes*. The current plan to reconstruct interchanges along I-5 and widen the freeway is wasteful and unnecessary. The Rose Quarter project should focus only on capping the freeway and enhancing local street connectivity, not adding "auxiliary lanes." Widening the freeway and adding lane capacity would increase GHG emissions and tragically perpetuate the harm to the community that I-5's original construction caused. Furthermore, ODOT should increase its own capacity to plan and execute capital projects rather than relying on expensive consulting firms. Maintaining in-house expertise will reduce costs in the long run.

Once again, thank you for listening to your constituents' thoughts on transportation priorities. I hope the Committee will proactively address the critical climate, safety, and funding concerns our transportation system faces.

Sincerely,

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