

Dear legislators,

I'm writing to urge ODOT to prioritize public transit and safety infrastructure for walking and bicycling in the 2025 transportation package.

In the city of Portland where I live, a record 69 people were killed by cars in 2023, and we're on track to set an even worse record in 2024. This is on par with deaths due to drugs or firearms, and that's before even getting into other issues like equity for those who can't drive, climate impact, and so on.

Our state agencies and elected leaders claim to care about this crisis, but when it comes time for action the issue of "congestion" suddenly becomes their top priority, and I want to be clear that when we're talking about "congestion" what we're really talking about is "convenience for drivers".

On one side of the scale, you have a Portland resident killed on average every 5 days, and many more injured. On the other side, you have a couple minutes of commute time for drivers. I urge you, our representatives, to really think about what it means when you decide that investing billions in public funds to expand freeways and (maybe) marginally improve commute times is more important than taking real steps to make our streets safer and reverse the grim trend of deaths, injuries, and destruction caused by unsafe driving. I urge you to look at places like Los Angeles or Houston, and really think about where freeway expansion has led them and where it would likely lead us.

Advocates for public transit, walking, and biking aren't trying to ban driving. They're not asking you to force people to travel in a way they don't want to. What they are saying is that we've invested so much of our leadership energy and our public money into making driving as convenient as possible, and we've largely turned a blind eye to the immense costs that come with that: increasing numbers of traffic deaths, climate impacts and pollution, ballooning road maintenance costs, marginalization of people who can't or can't afford to drive, loss of freedom for children who now rely on their parents to go anywhere, worse health outcomes from reduced physical activity, and so much more.

I hope you'll give these advocates' testimony and suggestions serious consideration, and find the courage to try and save lives and make our streets safer rather than fall back on tired excuses like "we're not Europe".

We don't need to force everyone to walk, bike, or take transit. But we do need a lot more people walking, biking, and taking transit, and we're counting on you to lead the way in making that happen. For our health, our safety, the livability of our communities, and our childrens' futures.

Thank you,
Matt