

Dear Oregon State Legislature Joint Committee on Transportation,

I'm writing to you to express my support for identifying new revenue streams and using the resulting funding to invest in transit service, active transportation, and increasing access for folk who don't have access to a car. Further, I encourage transportation policy and funding to be considered and planned to encourage changes to land use policy that will mutually reinforce each other and together bring expanded benefits to all Oregonians.

ODOT and Oregon as a whole is currently running a deficit with regard to our transportation system funding, but we also continue to invest in the same failed transportation concepts that have led to the budget shortfall. This disconnect between our financial realities and current transportation policy direction was on display Tuesday evening at the public listening session which I attended but was unable to speak at due to the number of participants. ODOT's director told you about the problem clearly, although he did not, unfortunately, suggest that you take the actions needed that would resolve these long-term issues. Director Strickler stated in no uncertain terms that the current financial trajectory of ODOT is unsustainable. ODOT needs about 2 billion per year (more in the future) just to break even on its plans—and more to accomplish the misguided massive investments that ODOT presumes it will continue with.

Director Strickler was also clear that the current revenue streams paid by road users simply do not provide the revenue needed to maintain the system. And yet you heard a few (not the majority) of voices from industry and anti-spending partisans claim that ODOT should be able to do more with less, and should be able to build the I-5 expansion and support the IBR project. One of these groups must be wrong. Either ODOT has the money to do much more with the revenue they have, or the industry and anti-spending advocates don't actually understand the economics and finances of the situation. They can't both be completely right.

They are both partially right. ODOT is right that the current system is unsustainable. On the other hand, it is true that the money we spend on highway expansion through ODOT could be better spent. The financial reality is that we have overbuilt our roadway system—we have focused on the convenience of drivers instead of efficient movement of people and goods. We have done this for so long that ODOT doesn't feel like it can say that directly, and the public has been taught incorrect lessons about transportation economics which has led to unrealistic expectations.

In order for us to get back on track we need to refocus our transportation planning to encourage efficient communities, and simultaneously we must provide efficient transportation options and encourage their use. It will take time—we've dug ourselves into a big hole—but we can reconnect communities, shorten commutes, expand the horizons of non-driving travellers, and improve our budget as we do it. We owe it to Oregon's underserved populations who rely on transit and we owe it to future generations who must inhabit this region and planet, to start that work in earnest now.

This issue is important because it is necessary to be in alignment with our shared transportation values as Oregonians: equity, climate, and safety. Everyone should be able to get around, but today's transportation system means that nondrivers have a small fraction of the access that drivers do. Our transportation sector must do its part to reduce our impact on

the environment, but our current system induces people to travel further for their daily trips and take less energy-efficient modes. We should all be able to get where we're going feeling safe, but dependency on cars means predictable death and injury for more Oregonians each year.

We need a positive vision about the resilient urban, suburban, and rural communities that we can have, knit together through many accessible modes of transportation. It's different than the car-centric vision of mobility that we've let our region and country slip into. But it's a more inclusive vision, a more interesting vision, and a more economically viable vision too. We need to start communicating with the public honestly about the future costs of our decisions. We today are paying the very high maintenance costs on infrastructure and land use decisions made decades ago. We need to talk clearly about those high costs, and about how our actions today will affect future generations.

New revenues

New revenue streams should both be resilient based on what changes we expect in the economy, and also incentivize use of more efficient modes. Consider congestion pricing, road usage fees, index current revenues to inflation, and expand the ability for transit districts to increase payroll tax rates.

New spending

We must cease all spending on highway system expansion (no more freeways, no more freeway lanes, no more widenings, no more "auxiliary" lanes). However, we must increase spending on other modes to help them catch up with cars. Public transit spending should double in just the next biennium or two, and further expand as ridership returns to the system. The active transportation network for all pedestrians and non-motorized road users should be rapidly expanded to be as complete as feasible.

New practices

We must further rethink how we plan our communities and communicate with the public. We need to be direct about the infeasibility of providing universal access through cars. We need to communicate about how our past lack of understanding about the consequences of planning decisions made decades ago caused problems that we now need to solve. We need to be clear that there will be some inconveniences in the transition but also what the benefits will be. And we must think about transportation and land use together. In urban and rural areas we need the appropriate clustering and density of development that allows walkable neighborhoods that transit and active transportation can efficiently serve.

These changes won't be easy and your job next session won't be either. But it is your job to analyze these issues and help Oregon move in the right direction. We're relying on you—but I for one and many others also believe in you. Thank you for your service.

Best,

Thomas Craig
Portland, Oregon
97203
House District 44