

July 17, 2024

Joint Committee on Transportation 900 Court Street NE, Room 453,
Salem, OR, 97301

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Committee Members,

My biggest concern regarding transportation is its effect on our climate. According to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, transportation is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon. In 2021, transportation contributed to 35% of statewide emissions. Therefore, we need state-wide action to reduce transportation's climate impact and the need to drive.

I live in Eugene's River Road area, and unfortunately we missed our chance to move toward more climate friendly transportation with the cancellation of Bus Rapid Transit. Due to this, River Road will continue to be car-centric, leaving behind equity issues and transportation for all. People are typically averse to change, but we can either introduce the change through climate-friendly transportation options, or be consumed with change brought on by worsening heat-domes (like we experienced last week), wildfires, and more climate chaos. If we choose climate friendly transportation options, communities will have mass-transit and land-use decisions that lessen our need to drive.

The research is clear: automobile infrastructure expansion induces more trips that increase greenhouse gas emissions and pollution. To reduce these burdens on our communities and especially on frontline communities that bear the heaviest burden, we must reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled. This means actively managing travel demand, electrifying our vehicle fleets, and encouraging shifts to transit and other modes.

A related concern is the financial squeeze on transportation funding. A good place to start is with the most expensive project in the state. The Interstate Bridge Replacement Project will replace the I-5 bridge. A seismically-safe bridge is needed, but we do not need a major freeway expansion. If the IBRP is right sized the cost will go down and, it will be centered in climate justice that includes social and environmental equity. If the project was fiscally responsible it would not be the most expensive and inflexible design choice, with the largest footprint, which crowds out funding for other needed transportation investments across the state. Another way to address funding applies to freeways: is an equitable congestion pricing system to manage congestion. And this system should be implemented prior to any commitment to increase freeway capacity.

I appreciate the opportunity to give comments during this legislative listening session. Please consider climate friendly transportation and land-use options, which choose mass transit over car dependency as a large part of your overall vision.

Respectfully,

Debra Higbee