

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek and members of the Committee:

My name is JP Lempke. I am an educator, non-profit manager, and transportation advocate who has been a resident of Eugene, OR for six years. I am writing in order to submit public comment for the meeting of the Joint Committee on Transportation on Wednesday, July 17th.

As someone who does not own a car, I primarily travel to my destinations by walking, biking, and taking the bus. Because of the danger of high-speed, overly wide roads within Eugene, I have to be selective about where I travel for my own safety. I am nevertheless forced to cross two four-lane, one-way roads on my short commute to work, roads where I have almost been hit by a car several times. Others have not been so lucky. One of my friends who was cycling in a painted gutter was struck years ago, which cost him the use of his arm for several months and prevented him from conducting music. Someone outside my old apartment complex was struck and killed in 2020 on a road clearly designed to move vehicles fast rather than people safely.

Our overly built "stroads" are also empty, ugly, and polluted. It is little surprise how few people travel outside a vehicle on roads like 6th and 7th Avenue in Eugene near my home. The noise alone makes the immediate area unliveable, and few restaurants see customers use their outdoor seating there (if they bother to put out any at all), even on pleasant days. As someone who lives next to these car sewers, I'm well aware of the years of my life that will be lost thanks to the noise and pollutants. I'm also aware that the switch to electric vehicles will not reduce the amount of brake and tire dust particles that will be emitted, nor the decibel level, unless those vehicles are travelling under 20mph.

Our highways are in many cases worse versions of the major arterials that run through Eugene. They not only don't serve me or the quarter of Oregonians like me that don't drive regularly, but actively block my ability to travel in my own city. Four-lane one-way roads are a hazard, but highways are a wall--they're wide, massive, and have few, if any, comfortable and dignified ways to cross. It's clear that roads like I-5 are expensive to maintain and offer very little return on investment. For the amount of space they take up, they move remarkably few people per hour compared to an even poorly put together bus or train network. Given the speed of the vehicles on the road, I rightfully fear for my life every time I ride with someone inside or outside the city.

Given all the problems they cause us, it's a wonder why our state government is still expanding highways by adding lanes or creating larger, more complicated ramps that may (or may not) improve the efficiency of car traffic while doing little to provide other safe, clean, affordable transportation options. The expansion of Highway 126 between Eugene and Veneta is a case in point. It would be highly expensive, increase vehicle trips by inducing demand, and saddle Oregonians with maintenance expenses for decades to come. And for what exactly? A minute decrease in commute time for automobile owners? We could ask ourselves the same questions about any highway project. How many people will die on these roads before we recognize how unsafe they are? How many lanes will we build before we realize we can't afford them? How hot will it have to get for us to stop feeding into the carbon-spewing systems that keep making our summers more sweltering and our fires worse?

This has to stop. It is not optional. All our freeway expansion projects must end, including, but not exclusively, Highway 126. It's time to take a step back and rethink promises made years ago on infrastructure projects that will cost us billions and provide almost no benefit. ODOT is worried about how it will fund these projects, and there's an immediate partial solution readily available: stop building

them. Save our money for what matters: responsible transportation options that will save lives and prevent an ecological and humanitarian catastrophe.

I can't envision a carbon-neutral state that is crisscrossed with spiderwebs of highways. It is difficult to imagine a world with zero deaths on our transportation network if people have few options but to use high-speed car-dependent infrastructure. Many of our citizens find it hard or impossible to pay the rent right now because this system is not just expensive for the state to maintain, but crippling financially for individuals who have to pay a blistering \$12,000 per year on average for the privilege of driving to work.

We can do better than this. We know what is safe, efficient, clean, and carbon-neutral. We need dense neighborhoods where people have close access to the things they need, narrow roads with less impermeable surface and slower speeds, sidewalks in all parts of our cities and towns, fully connected bike networks, frequent and fast public transportation, and rail lines that will not only replace our highways, but be far faster and more comfortable than our bloated road network will ever be, no matter how much money we sink into it. If we do not act quickly, more people will die, our summers will become unbearably hot, and the fires will worsen to the point where we lose control of them entirely. As our leaders and representatives, I implore you to change now. Do not set dates 20 years in the future. We don't have the time. We have to act before it is too late.

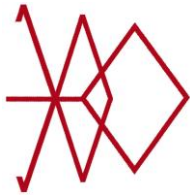
Thank you for your time.

Best regards,

JP Lempke

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