

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek and committee members,

Thank you for the round table in Coos Bay. The meeting was run very well, everybody was able to get their thoughts out, and it was interesting to hear that there was a consensus regarding what needs to be done to bring our transportation system up to a level that will enhance our communities and state.

I did want to elaborate on some points.

I mentioned at the roundtable that we need to look forward, rather than keep repeating what's been done for decades. Every effort needs to be put towards making our transportation system more equitable, safer, more sustainable, and which improves the lives of Oregonians. Doing more of what's been done for decades and expecting a different result will not address the problem.

Particularly when maintenance is lacking and as Director Strickler said, we are looking at more cuts, building more roads when we can't take care of what we have will only exacerbate the problem; more funding as currently spent will only keep repeating the cycle.

Simply put, we need to re-think not just the way we pay for our systems but re-evaluate the systems themselves. This will not be easy, but let's face it, we need to make some changes. And as with any change, there will be challenges, insecurities, and unforeseen events. Looking back at our lives illustrates just how much change we've been through. Remember Blackberries? Remember rivers catching on fire? Remember the auto industry saying pollution controls would kill the industry? Remember American auto manufacturers ignoring those funny, cheap, foreign cars? Remember your first computer compared to what you are using now? Having lived through and benefitted from these changes provides the context for planning for and not being afraid of the change needed for our transportation system.

Obviously, one high priority well-discussed is funding. While there were interesting suggestions at the roundtable, a variety of funding mechanisms is needed to avoid the issue we are now dealing with, that is, a decrease in the major funding for our transportation systems. Certainly, indexing is necessary and regardless of methods, the funding mechanisms must be well-understood by the public so there is a general understanding of system fairness and equity. I was impressed with the ideas that arose regarding detection systems to ensure payment is made. We need to take advantage of these types of systems.

Regardless of how funds are obtained, projects must be funded based on the scoring regarding the criteria of the program as opposed to selecting projects by some other methods, which typically is political rather than based on merit. For example, the highway 101 slide must be repaired, but this should not be a specific part of the funding discussed, it should be funded based on merit shown by the scoring system. Doing otherwise degrades the process and puts our government in a bad light.

I think all in attendance, and I suspect across the state, want bridges repaired and modified to address seismic and weather threats, and streets maintained. And there is a huge gap between spending on modes other than single motor vehicles. Transportation that addresses the needs of the 30% of Oregonians who can't drive or shouldn't drive, must be a priority, certainly before expanding roadways for cars. Micro-mobility is already having a large impact on how people and even freight are moved, and is an area that needs additional planning, encouragement and support. As we move away from single-occupant motor vehicles, our roads will also be opened up to ease the movement of freight. Perhaps the carpool lanes should allow freight haulers since they are important to our economy and will improve the merging movements for any vehicle entering or leaving the roadway since these large vehicles will not need to be an obstacle.

To expand on what I said at the roundtable, funding to accommodate more single-occupant automobiles is a never-ending process that we simply cannot afford in terms of our communities, our safety, and impacts to our quality of life. In 2021 *The Washington Post* estimated that highway widening and expansion consumed more than a third of states' capital spending on roads (over \$19 billion). These projects were backed by promises to reduce congestion. The public isn't buying it. The results of a national survey of 2,001 registered U.S. voters—90 percent of whom own a car they drive regularly—underscores a widely shared belief that highway expansion doesn't work as a short- or long-term strategy for reducing traffic and that we should invest more in other options.

- 70 percent of respondents agree that *“providing people with more transportation options is better for our health, safety, and economy than building more highways.”*
- 67 percent of respondents agreed that *“expanding highways takes years, causes delays, and costs billions of dollars.”* The same percentage believes that *“widening highways attracts more people to drive, which creates more traffic in the long run.”* Only 11 percent felt state DOTs actually deliver congestion relief with highway expansions.

In other words, the public understands the concept of “[induced demand](#),” which is widely ignored by state legislatures, DOTs, Congress, and federal agencies.

- 69 percent of respondents agree that *“it’s more important to protect our quality of life than to spend billions of tax dollars on expanding highways. By removing a few miles of highway and adding more transportation options, like trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks, we can have healthier communities.”*
- 71 percent of respondents agree that *“no matter where you live, you should have the freedom to easily get where you need to go. Almost all government spending on transportation goes to highways. Instead, states should fund more options, like trains, buses, bike lanes, and sidewalks.”*

Safety must be a high priority in every program and project. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, using 2021 data, motor vehicle crashes were the #3 killer of children under one year of age, #2 killer for ages 1 – 4, the #1 killer for ages 5-24, and the #2 killer from age 25 and up. Smart Growth America just released its report “[Dangerous by Design](#)” which shows a 75% increase in the deaths of people walking since 2010. Clearly our transportation system as currently planned, built, and funded, is failing us.

On the bright side, ODOT has done excellent work putting together some forward thinking programs. Among them is the Great Streets Program, Bicycle and Pedestrian funding including Safe Routes to Schools, the Urban Design Manual, the Strategic Action Plan, and I’m probably missing a few. These need to be part of ODOT’s everyday operating activities rather than being available from grant programs.

Our transportation system shapes our communities and our lives. It must not just be about moving cars as quickly as possible; it is about our people and our economy.

Thank you for your efforts and consideration.

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