

Co-Chairs and Members:

What's captured the imagination of many as of late is the idea that our transportation system is underfunded. To my mind, that's a misnomer. Our statewide transportation system is overallocated. It is dangerously overallocated to the tune of tens of billions of dollars with 3 mega projects which are largely focused on moving people in cars in the Portland metro area. Those oxygen stealing priorities rob Region 4 of funding for neglected projects which will move people outside of cars. ODOT cannot continue with its current mindset of moving volumes of cars at the expense of other modes. That mindset has proven unsustainable.

Take the North Highway 97 project here in Bend as an example. ODOT's plan (some 15+ years in the formulating) to reroute the highway is laudable and yet shortsighted when you consider fully funding convenient and inter-connected public transportation (hopefully to include a plan for the last mile of travel) between Redmond and Bend might have tackled 80% of the daily travel needs served by the NHwy97 project, and been imminently more scale-able for growth at a fraction of the costs for the inevitable (and imminently foreseeable) requests to expand or extend this short segment of roadway.

As this Joint committee searches for new revenue streams to fund transportation projects, it's worth pointing out that moving cars is by far the largest segment Oregon spends on new and maintenance projects. Part of the driver behind that is not only the growing volume of cars on the road (largely encouraged by a continual emphasis on new construction to expand roadway auto carrying capacity), but also the weight of non-freight automobiles. Might an annual tax based on car weight outside of metropolitan areas help right-size cars for our collective future?

Our current fixation with expensive car-centric road projects has left us dividing up dwindling transportation funds which neglect those entities where livability issues are most salient – at the local level. Cities should receive a larger percentage of funding to be able to ensure that they can enact their planned active transportation projects to ensure healthier, safer and more equitable transportation options.

Thank you for your time.

Lucas Freeman