

Wednesday, September 25th

To: Joint Committee on Transportation

RE: Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility Comments for Transportation Listening Session

Dear Senators and Representatives of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input for the future direction of transportation planning, budgeting and revenue. Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (Oregon PSR) is an organization of health professionals and public health advocates working to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival.

Oregon PSR takes health, equity and carbon and air pollution very seriously. We feel there is a profound opportunity to address all of these issues if Oregon takes serious steps in 2025 to prioritize maintenance and safety within the highway system while advancing clear policy to increase public transit. Maintenance entails continued investment in the existing assets and does not include widening, new lanes, new intersections, or expanded intersections. Safety entails eliminating unsafe conditions by reducing capacity for single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) through reclaiming existing lanes and allocating that space to non auto modes, reducing speeds for all modes, reducing traffic volumes, and providing pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users with safe places to wait, move, and cross.

We encourage you to be visionary in valuing new concepts and directions to reduce our transportation carbon, soot (diesel), tire and air pollution which disproportionately impact those of lower income and communities of color.

Reducing carbon pollution will require more accessible, efficient and frequent public transit such as intra- and inter-city busing, and passenger rail. Current Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Metro plans for achieving emissions reductions rely on use of public transit, yet its funding is a small portion of the transportation budget. High price highway expansion should be curtailed while expanding rail freight and multi-modal personal travel. In addition, planning and provision of parking to access public transit is essential.

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility

The US affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize

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Equally important is strong collaboration on land use planning to keep trips shorter and to make walking and rolling safer. None of these are adequately funded for ODOT, counties, cities, METRO or DLCD nor for their collaboration in achieving them. All of these budgets should be evaluated together and will require new funding.

A full 25 to 33% of all Oregonians don't or can't drive. This is an equity issue. Cars are extremely expensive polluting machines. Public transportation that is frequent, efficient and safe needs to be subsidized just as highways are. Individual vehicles should be taxed accordingly to fund highways and subsidize public transportation even if that requires a tire tax or other method to get around the constitutional requirements for the Highway Fund.

Concepts for funding outside of the Highway Fund sources should include increasing the **Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF)**, a tire tax, a fee based on deliveries, a carbon tax, or a fee based on luxury vehicles or high weight personal vehicles.

The Healthy Climate Team at Oregon PSR is in favor of continuing or increasing the gas tax with the addition of an inflation index until other methods of funding are identified. There needs to be offsets for low income and rural drivers.

Charging fees for registration of electric vehicles based on weight could be additive, while still providing subsidies to increase their usage to meet carbon pollution reduction goals.

There should be no plans for highway widening except for safety since widening highways only induces demand for driving. ODOT data shows that there are more miles traveled on roads in Oregon than ever before. Subsidizing and incentivizing alternate modes of transportation are essential to reducing congestion including for non-motorized transportation adaptations to roadways.

The second major topic for ODOT's budget of over \$3 billion a year needs to prioritize maintenance and safety. These include much more funding for the Safe Routes to School program, seismic retrofits for our most vulnerable bridges and improved and local management of orphan state highways.

It is exceedingly difficult to follow the funding for major infrastructure projects. Plans are incomplete, analyses are inadequate or misleading and nowhere in the analysis are there good projections for carbon pollution reduction. We strongly encourage improved transparency in planning and funding along with safety and air and carbon pollution monitoring.

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The new legislation should require new, large highway projects to have clear, feasible funding mechanisms separate from baseline ODOT funding, with good oversight. The Legislature should require ODOT to create and make available to the public and other planners accurate models for large projects significantly in advance of project approval.

ODOT should provide measurable goals for system attributes of safety, climate and equity, with a public dashboard for tracking. Web reporting is neither complete nor transparent. The Legislature should require ODOT to engage directly with regional and urban transportation planning bodies for planning and funding.

Thank you for soliciting comments as you prepare for the 2025 Transportation Package.

Respectfully submitted,

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