

Testimony before the Joint Transportation Committee  
September 27, 2024, Hillsboro, OR  
Dan L. McFarling

Chairs Gorsek and McLain -

If we do not understand history – how we arrived in gridlock, deficits, and unmet needs

–

we will Fail to Find a path Forward.

Early public-private partnerships built canals, railways and toll roads. In Oregon, for-profit road builders received 2.5M acres of land, 40% more than railroads.[1]

But roads did not make a profit and roads became a government burden.

Railroads use private dollars for ROW, and pay taxes on ROW to subsidize services upon which we all depend.

Prior to WWII, public transit, like railways, was for-profit.

Government ignored the need to restore railways and transit after the war.

Instead, funding and policies pushed pavement, often 90% federal match, for expansion, not maintenance.

Competing with expanding, subsidized roads, rail was forced to downsize or go bankrupt. Passengers and freight forced to shift from rail to hazardous, inefficient roads. For-profit transit was downgraded and became a government burden. With little exception, every two decades, road crashes kill more Americans than all the wars since the Revolution.[2]

Roads fail to provide Freedom of Mobility for the 30% of Americans who do not drive.

Emphasizing road maintenance, a myth ODOT voices as it adds and widens lanes, fails to correct priorities, and obligates future dollars to maintain past failures.

\_\_\_\_\_ End of Oral Testimony

We need an adequate and stable source of funding for intercity transportation, rail and bus, bringing urban and rural Oregonians together. Uniting our state.

Safe. Economical. Environmental. Equitable.

With only two minutes on the canvas, I used a broad brush. As a member, Director and Officer of AORTA (Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates) since 1976, I have long been dedicated to improved transportation policy. This testimony is my own.

Since the 1940s Schools of Engineering have emphasized traffic flow – roadway throughput, not safe, efficient mobility of people and freight. These schools condition minds, develop patterns of behavior, and populate DOTs - a single response to a complex issue - behavior that continues to dominate DOTs.

ODOT acknowledges we lack sufficient funds to adequately maintain the pavement. We need a moratorium on pavement expansion, and emphasize development of safe, economic, environmental and equitable transportation in heavily traveled corridors to make meaningful progress.

Imagine if we applied the approach to roadways that we apply to intercity rail and transit:

If a road “operates” at under 1-5% of capacity, we would cut back, or stop “operating” it. That is how we deal with passenger rail and transit. “There just isn’t enough money!”

Rail/transit (the road) is just too expensive.” In truth, rail and public transit have a history of “profitability.” Roads do not.

Most local streets in urban centers, and rural roads, “operate” well below 5% of capacity. Many below 1% capacity. After we abandon neighborhood street and rural roads, the same problem, "operation below 5% capacity," would be true for most remaining roads - access would not be possible. This is how "we" destroy public transit. Soon, applying this standard, no one would be able to drive anywhere - the road system would fail. This is how “we” downgrade public transit.

Rural and urban areas have somewhat different transportation needs. Rural areas are more road dependent than urban areas.

But for ANY transportation SYSTEM to work, it must be available to take people where and when people need to go.

Rail and transit systems have an element of flexibility that road systems do NOT have. Rail and public transit are far more flexible in terms of CAPACITY, and during adverse weather conditions (especially rail).

Road systems, because they are extremely inefficient in terms of land use, are not. In urban areas, land tends to be much more valuable and less available. In rural areas, the opposite is true.

Wasting space for roadways, or right-of-way, is not the only means by which we waste land to satisfy our dependency on single occupant vehicles.

In urban areas we waste an incredible amount of land on parking - eight to ten spaces for every registered motor vehicle - and there still is “not enough.” Land with high value is wasted and unused because it “must” be available for a mode of transportation that is extremely wasteful in terms of space - wasteful when the contraption is moving - wasteful when the contraption is in storage.

Add to parking and right of way the land devoted to sales, fueling, servicing, repairing, scrapping and graveyards and we begin to recognize - we waste a lot of land to maintain our car dependency!

We can adjust the cost of transit systems by easily modifying frequency when demand is low. That does not work with a road system. When roads get too crowded, they become too slow, resulting in immobility.

Roads reach peak efficiency at relatively slow speeds - speeds at which consumers become very displeased - speeds at which the cost, measured in time spent is far too high.

Clearly, rural areas will be more dependent than urban areas on roads. But Europe recognizes that rural areas need both transit and roads.

---

[1] Atlas of Oregon, University of Oregon, 1976, p 11. Much more needs to be explained about this topic, and evolution of transportation policies.

[2] This disturbing statistic does not include car-pedestrian and car bike fatalities.