

Joint Committee Transportation^[1]
September 30, 2024

Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:
For the record, my name is Lynn Handlin I live in Happy Valley Oregon

I am writing to testify on the 2025 transportation funding package, to ask you to please, consider all of our children's futures, and really commit to doing something about climate change. Transportation is 40% of the state's carbon emissions, we need a plan that drastically reduces carbon emissions, not increase as this plan surely will. The following are some of my biggest concerns.

From the plan:

“While these and other efforts have made strides, and emissions are projected to be reduced long-term, there is still work to be done.”

But also from the plan "Miles of bicycle facilities: 976

Miles of roads: 87643"

Clearly there is still work to be done, but work to improve bike facilities, pedestrian facilities and access, public transportation improvements and expansion, NOT adding more lanes to freeways.

ODOT, your priorities are clear: Roads, especially freeways are what you know, what you do, your history. It is time to change that, for real not just words.

I5 bridge needs replacing? Indeed it does, but what does ODOT want? A bridge that widens the freeway adding more vehicle miles driven, is so tall and badly designed that those who get around on bike and foot have looked at the plan in depth and determined that it will be only the hardest individuals who will be able to climb that monster, not everyday commuters. The proposed I5 bridge replacement is a travesty and must be stopped. It will add to VMD, increase danger for all, especially those who live anywhere near this monster, increase GHG emissions, and ultimately will not decrease congestion. You need to think past the goal of decreasing commute times for some people for a little while at the expense of our children's futures.

ODOT, you hired air quality experts to review the impacts that the widening of the Rose Quarter section of the I5 freeway would have on nearby air pollution, but refused to give the experts the opportunity to review the corrupted traffic data on which any review of air pollution would necessitate. Your claims that this proposed freeway expansion would improve air quality are impossible to verify without providing the public this traffic data, and then you continue to withhold this information. Whose interests are represented here? Not those who care about climate change. What does need to be done in this area is the Albina Highway Caps, without widening the freeway.

“Robust public transit is a key component to reducing VMT and GHGs”, true, too bad ODOT does very little to increase access to public transit, making it more user friendly, expansion, going fareless or at least providing free mass transit for all students statewide, etc. These apparently seem like radical ideas to ODOT, but they are in fact, a big part of what needs to be done to have any hope of curbing climate change before it is truly too late, and do it in a way that is just. You need to allocate far more resources to public transit, to reduce GHG emissions and to make our transportation system more equitable. ODOT tried very hard to get massive funding from the general fund for widening I5, but where was the ask for massive funding for public transportation? I live in Happy Valley and I have to either walk for an hour to get to a bus stop, a dangerous

walk, or drive and then take a bus. When I moved to Happy Valley over 30 years ago there was infrequent bus service, but I made it work, thinking it's ok, this area's population is growing, surely there will be more buses. But instead, after population explosions, now there are no buses. This is unacceptable. I went to the Transportation Road Show in Happy Valley, and had to drive, clearly public transportation is not a priority, but it must be. Once I drive to the nearest bus or train, it takes me over an hour using public transportation to get to a weekly meeting I need to attend, it takes 15 minutes by car. If the bus connections were just a bit better it would cut my commute time in half, by more than 30 minutes. Why is it that decreasing car commuting times by a few minutes by widening I5 is so much more important than cutting commute times in half or more by spending a much smaller amount of money on public transit?

“Transportation infrastructure is built in a way that avoids impacts on key habitat and results in better environmental conditions for wildlife and native vegetation”

Where was this consideration when ODOT decided to widen Powell Blvd east of 205 and cut down 570 large mature trees in the process? This is where I work and my family live. The Powell project was described as “safety improvements”. Some of the project does improve safety: the sidewalks. The proposed bike lanes are badly designed and put cyclists at risk. The widening part of the project is seriously downplayed as though it were not happening, but it is. Part of the tree removal is to “increase line of site” so people can drive through faster, why not reduce the speed and keep the trees? How many people will die because you are increasing the heat island effect in the part of town that is at the most risk for heat deaths due to lack of shade? That is not safer. This project will end up with more deaths not fewer because of the heat. Of course this is happening in a low income part of town, not surprising. When I asked an ODOT representative about the tree cutting I was told that it will be ok because 120 trees will be planted in the area, if possible, and some money will go to a fund for more trees in other parts of the City to offset this. That is not helpful. The 120 trees, if we get them, will take decades to mature and at best will replace less than one fifth of the shade and carbon sequestration of the existing trees. Long after many have died from heat.

You have a budget problem:

Solution:

Stop widening and adding freeways and highways including the I5 bridge replacement and the I5 Rose Quarter expansion, do spend on public transportation, bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

We need a transportation plan for the future, one that allows for at least a possibility that future generations will have a livable planet, this plan does not do that.

I know you all can do better, all of you who are reading this must want a liveable future for all your children, grandchildren, friends' grandchildren, someone. Please consider them and do better, I know you can.

Thank you

Lynn Handlin