

Submitter: Alta Lynch
On Behalf Of: o
Committee: Joint Interim Committee On Transportation
Funding
Measure, Appointment or LC 2
Topic:

OPPOSE, OPPOSE, OPPOSE.\

Sad that the page for submitting testimony does not give a choice of in favor, opposed, or neutral opinion to check off.

I could go on and on of why this is a bad bill, but I don't have much faith that these will be read by very many folks in the legislature.

Even the Oregonian Editorial Board has commented as follows: I have included some of their comments because they ring true in my opinion (amazingly)

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Editorial: Billions in new taxes should come with a commitment

But the current proposal will do little to increase accountability for the state's spending of transportation funds, despite supporters' claims. While provisions for more audits and regular reviews may help keep tabs on ODOT, accountability also depends on the commitments made ahead of time. And even as state officials paint a dire picture of crumbling roads, unplowed highways and other maintenance nightmares if new taxes aren't approved, they have yet to insert any language that requires the new revenue to go to those crumbling roads, unplowed highways and other maintenance nightmares.

Instead, elected officials and ODOT could choose to use those dollars to support ongoing highway megaprojects whose costs have already quadrupled their original estimates, exposing ODOT's profound "accountability" gap. Lining up new revenue has become even more urgent in light of Kotek's abrupt decision to cancel tolling on Portland-area highway projects as a way to pay for them. And that flexibility will come in handy for Kotek to maintain her controversial "Project Labor Agreement" executive order, which is expected to significantly boost the cost of publicly funded highway projects – while benefitting her loyal labor union donors.

To be sure, the talk heading into this week's special legislative session is all about maintenance and filling the roughly \$300 million hole in ODOT's budget for the 2025-27 biennium. Without more money, the agency said it will need to lay off nearly 500 people next month and more in the months ahead; close maintenance yards around the state; and prioritize what work can be done and how quickly. There's no talk about directing money from the proposed tax hikes to ODOT megaprojects, including the now \$815 million (formerly \$250 million) Abernethy Bridge along Interstate 205 or the \$2 billion (formerly \$450 million) Rose Quarter expansion along Interstate 5.

But as economist and longtime critic Joe Cortright has noted, ODOT has a history of quietly moving funding around to prop up ever-escalating highway projects at the expense of other core responsibilities, such as preserving bridges. ODOT is also already using gas tax dollars to repay debt. Cortright questioned whether the state will carve off some of the new revenue as well to support additional bonds for projects.

And while ODOT has long claimed that legislative language limits how it can use highway project funds, it's worth noting that the current proposal lacks similar wording to prevent ODOT from using these new dollars to backfill whatever financial gap the agency needs to patch.

It may be asking too much of state leaders to tie their own hands on how to use that money. But that's exactly what the proposal needs.

IT APPEARS ODOT NEEDS MORE OVERSIGHT AND PERHAPS THE LAYOFFS NEED TO COME MORE FROM THE TOP AND NOT THE MAN/WOMAN IN THE TRENCHES.