

Submitter: Doug Parrow
On Behalf Of: Self
Committee: Joint Special Session Committee On Transportation
Funding
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3992

I urge you to reverse the increasing reliance of ODOT on registration and title fees, which the Governor and ODOT are proposing be jacked up even more. The original purpose of those fees has been forgotten. The gas tax and weight-mile taxes were intended to cover the cost of operating the road system. (Of course, they've never come close to doing so.) Registration and title fees were intended to cover the costs of administering those programs.

Beginning with OTIA I, the legislature started abandoning that principle, presumably because, lacking the courage to increase the gas tax, they thought that few would notice increases in those other fees. As time has progressed, the reliance on those fees for the Highway Fund has increased leading to the current whopping big proposed increases. Interestingly, I believe that the legislature adopted incentives for auto insurance companies to offer pay-to-drive premiums tied to miles driven in the same session as OTIA I.

When I worked in the areas of energy and water conservation, one of the givens was that users should pay based on the amount of energy or water that they used, and that fixed fees should be minimal. During the last several years, the state has been going in exactly the opposite direction with respect to highway funding, the result of which is undoubtedly a portion of the environmentally damaging increased congestion that is bankrupting ODOT as it pursues mega-projects which are not funded and that we can't afford.

ODOT's project planning process, for mega projects as well as smaller ones, is as intellectually bankrupt as the agency is financially. The whole process is driven by trying to design a project to accommodate impossibly large projections of future demands while ignoring any financial constraints. As ODOT has chased these impossible demand projections, it has consistently prioritized motor vehicle mobility over the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, directly contributing to the carnage that we are experiencing of our roads.

I urge you to limit new highway funding to a gas tax/weight-mile tax increase, adopt a moratorium on new project planning, and reprogramming all existing and future highway funds to maintenance and operations. Absent those changes, the bill may satisfy short-term funding needs, but it will also allow a continuation of ODOT's wasteful, environmentally reckless, and dangerous pattern of transportation management.

I hope that the transportation reform and environmental communities will join with the anti-tax folks in referring and defeating a funding measure that was inconsistent with these criteria and intend to support them doing so.