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Cc: [Ross Danielle](#)
Subject: Testimony on HB 3231
Date: Tuesday, April 04, 2017 7:12:16 AM

Dear Chair McKeown and Members of the House Committee on Transportation Policy,

I will not be able to testify at Wednesday's hearing on HB 3231, but ask you to place this testimony into the record.

I own and live in a home in the Tualatin Mountains west of Portland, in western unincorporated Multnomah County. For many years, my neighborhood has worked hard to preserve the farms and significant wildlife habitat in these hills. Forest Park Neighborhood includes Portland's Forest Park and thousands of acres of high value habitat on rural land around the park with that helps keep the park and its wildlife healthy. We worked hard to get the rural portions of our neighborhood designated as rural reserves to preserve them from urban development and protect these valuable natural resources. Currently, new highways cannot be developed in rural reserves because they will fragment and harm the high value farm/forest lands and natural resources that rural reserves were promised to project.

I oppose House Bill 3231, and hope it will not be endorsed by your committee.

HB 3231 authorizes creation of special districts with the power to create new, privately owned tollways anywhere within their district boundary (including in rural reserves), and prevents the county from enforcing environmental protections or requiring coordination with other transportation projects. The bill explicitly allows these new highways to be built in rural reserves.

Representative Vial has talked about using this approach to create a Westside Bypass. While Portland area local governments and current transportation planning processes are focused on building a balanced transportation system that supports transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists in addition to maintaining and improving existing roads, these new special districts have a single purpose – building new tollways, which could be planned and built with no coordination with the Regional Transportation Plan. This bill would allow new highways to be built even if they harm the rest of the regional transportation system.

This bill appears to want to turn back the clock to 1960's "let's build more freeways" thinking that more freeways, and more driving, will solve our transportation problems.

The Portland region has a Regional Transportation Plan that includes a Regional System Design, developed in coordination with counties and cities, which balances and coordinates the region's needs for highways, freight,

transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. This bill, however, singles out highways and would establish special districts to focus on that one element, and with no requirement to coordinate with the rest of the region or other modes of transit. This overly narrow focus has many potential negative consequences:

1. Highways developed by special districts could harm the rest of the regional system through poor design, by pulling attention and funding away from other, higher transportation priorities, or by pushing (through tollways) traffic onto local roads.
2. These new special districts have only one tool (highways) available to solve transportation problems, so they'll have a huge incentive to build highways to justify their existence, even if a highway isn't the best way to solve a problem.
3. Surveys consistently show that people want transportation choices, including improved transit, sidewalks, bike lanes. This bill does nothing to address those non-highway needs. New highways would encourage additional development in satellite cities, creating more long distance commuters and carbon emissions.

Rural reserves were designated to protect our most valuable rural resources. Allowing development of highways through rural reserves would badly fragment farm/forest lands and natural resources, and would encourage early development of rural reserves that were supposed to be protected for 50 years.

It is hard to believe, in 2017, that Oregon lawmakers would propose allowing new highways to be built without requiring them to meet local environmental standards. This bill explicitly forbids counties from requiring these projects to meet their environmental standards or locally developed and adopted transportation policies.

Once these Special Districts are established, there's no requirement for local citizen input into any of their decisions about potential new or existing highways.

Development of a Westside Bypass and new bridge(s) would pull limited funding and attention away from replacing Interstate Bridge and maintaining existing facilities, which should be much higher priorities.

Development of these highways will encourage long distance commutes, increasing carbon emissions. Do we really want to encourage satellite cities like Scappoose and Ridgefield to develop (further) into bedroom communities for jobs in Hillsboro? We need more investment instead in local communities to improve facilities for walking and biking to meet daily needs, and to provide more and better transit options (including high capacity transit) to create more safe, attractive transportation options for local residents.

Extensive research shows that expanding existing roads or building new ones results in induced demand (more people choose to drive and make decisions that increase driving like living in a satellite city because you've made it easier and faster to drive). This quickly cancels out any initial reductions in congestion. New highway projects are a poor investment of limited available economic capacity. The priority should instead be to maintain existing transportation facilities, improve walking, biking, and transit options, and to invest in regionally supported transportation improvements to reduce congestion, such as fixing I-5 through the Rose Quarter and Highway 217.

The bill does not include any provision allowing a city or county to withdraw from one of these new Special Districts, or for dissolution of the District.

I happen to favor tolling (or better still, a carbon tax) if it is applied properly. But my rural neighborhood is already hammered by long distance cut-through urban commuters on our rural roads who want to avoid a congested Highway 26. Upgrading one of those rural roads and turning it into a tollway would push commuters onto our other rural roads, exacerbating existing congestion. A study of tolling on NW Cornelius Pass Road done by ODOT a few years ago demonstrated that tolling one road simply pushes drivers onto other, even less suitable roads, creating longer out of direction trips and generating more carbon emissions and pollution while disrupting the local community and harming wildlife. Again, the lack of required coordination between the Special District and regional transportation planning is a serious problem with this bill.

I also oppose using private entities to build highway infrastructure funded by tolls. Taxpayer and toll-payer money should be used to create and maintain public assets, not private assets and private profits. I don't see any good reason that state or local agencies shouldn't be able to handle these projects if they're appropriate.

Tolls also put more burden on low income drivers, but this bill does not provide a way to use the funds raised by tolling to help them with added transit or other measures like subsidized car pools. If the legislature wants to take action to facilitate development of tollways, I suggest that you develop proposals that would allow funds raised by tolling to be used to provide improved transit or other options to ensure that low income residents won't bear an outsized burden on their transportation choices.

Please do not support moving HB 3231 forward. This isn't the right solution for our transportation issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

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