

Dear Senators and Representatives:

I am a professional transportation engineer and have worked in Oregon for more than thirty five years. I have worked in both the public sector and private sector. I have worked in both traffic operations (as a county traffic engineer) and as a long-range transportation planner. I have worked on major construction projects, public transportation projects, as well as bicycle, pedestrian and parking issues.

I am absolutely in favor of a major increase in the gas tax. The only problem with the gas tax is the failure by the state legislature to periodically increase the gas tax to keep up with inflation. The Oregon gas tax has been increased only once since 1993. Just to account for inflation, Oregon's gas tax should be 41 cents per gallon today. We have lost billions of dollars that should have been used for transportation system maintenance and improvements by the failure to increase the gas tax by 1 cent per year every year for the last 20 years.

Cars and trucks USING the roads are what cause the need for maintenance and expansion. The best way to collect revenues to address USE is a gas tax. The more you drive, the more gas you use, the more you pay. It is deceptively simple.

The vehicle license fees, title fees, and driver's license fees have been increased over the last decades, but these are not directly related to use of the transportation system. I oppose additional increases in these fees. When my car is sitting in the garage, it is not causing any burden on the transportation system. I already pay my fair share because of these high fees.

The transportation bill proposes tiered vehicle registration fees that higher for efficient vehicles and are lower for gas guzzlers! This is preposterous! Why in the world would we give discounts for big vehicles? We should be encouraging smaller, more-fuel efficient vehicles, especially because they are safer for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. I oppose higher registration fees for fuel efficient vehicles. A minor surcharge for fully electric vehicles might be reasonable, but the current proposal actually provides economic benefits for gas guzzlers.

The transportation bill proposes a sales tax on bicycles. This is wrong for so many reasons. We should be seeking to encourage use of non-automobile modes for our short distance trips. Why levy a sales tax on one mode that helps accomplish this? The proposal would also have a negative impact on Oregon bike shops and encouraging purchase from out-of-state, on-line sellers. Finally, the administrative costs would likely eat up a measurable portion of the revenue. I know that there is an argument that "bicyclists don't pay anything for roads," but that is simply not true. I pay vehicle registration fees, driver's license fees, and lots of other taxes that go toward transportation system maintenance. Those fees are available to support the transportation system regardless of whether I choose to drive, walk or take my bike for a particular trip.

The transportation bill proposes a sales tax on motor vehicle sales. While I happen to favor a state-wide sales tax, I oppose implementing one – however modest – on motor vehicles. Owning and purchasing a car does not cause any demand on the transportation system. Using one does – see gas tax.

The transportation bill proposes an increased employee payroll tax (aka an income tax) to support transportation system improvements especially for public transportation. Oregon already has one of the highest income taxes in the country. I oppose an income tax to support transportation system

maintenance and upgrades. Having a job does not cause any burden on the transportation system. Why should one who works at home or walks to work have to pay for transportation system improvements? The appropriate mechanism for funding transportation system maintenance and upgrades is an increased gas tax.

By the way, gasoline consumed for transportation use is actually rising, not falling. There are vehicles that achieve high fuel economy, but the overall fuel economy of the vehicle fleet is barely creeping up – it has increased by only 15 percent in the last 15 years.

The real failure is the failure to adjust gas tax to account for inflation. Just increase it. The state of Washington has done so, Oregon hasn't. It's past time to do it.

I have actively supported increases in the gas tax for my entire career and I support a major increase, but I do not support the current transportation bill. It seeks revenue from activities that are only indirectly related to the demand on the transportation system; it rewards the use of gas guzzlers; it penalizes the purchase of bicycles; it effectively disconnects the concept of paying for use by implementing an income tax to be paid by all to reduce the expenses of those who choose to use the system the most.

Just increase the gas tax!

Sincerely,

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