

2017-06-07

To: Joint Committee On Transportation Preservation and Modernization  
Re: Public Testimony on HB 2017

Dear Transportation Committee Members:

As an Oregon resident, voter, and taxpayer, I am writing to share my opinions on the proposed transportation bill, HB2017. While I am happy to see the work towards a payroll tax for funding transit, I strongly urge you to reconsider the freeway widening and bicycle tax portions of the draft.

First, the good.

I am happy to see the work towards creating a first-ever statewide payroll tax to fund long-term investment in public transit. I am happy to see this also is tied to requirements that local transit agencies demonstrate the equitability of planned projects. Separately, I would be in support of further incentives for youth to ride the bus/transit, and would support the companion bill HB 2693, focusing on grants for youth transit passes.

Second, the bad.

I am most concerned about the planned highway expansions, in particular, the \$1.1 billion dedicated to large freeway widening in the Portland metro area. I grew up in Atlanta in the 1980s and 1990s, and I have first hand experience with the congestion nightmares that freeway expansion inevitably leads to. The roads get wider and wider, and the traffic gets worse and worse. As I'm sure you are by now quite aware, numerous studies have shown time and time again that expanding roadways induces traffic. CityObservatory has written about this recently, with special attention to Oregon's history ( <http://cityobservatory.org/happy-earth-day-oregon-lets-widen-some-freeways/> ). Wikipedia also has a useful set of referneces to research — going back to the 1930s! — documenting this phenomenon ( [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Induced\\_demand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Induced_demand) ). These projects will not fix the congestion problems to which they are responding, and we should be making better choices without having to learn this lesson all over again.

Portland lept ahead of cities like Atlanta in the 1970s when we decided to build a transportation system that was truly designed for the future by investing in the development of MAX. At that time, we also tore out one freeway and cancelled another; and today we have the beautiful riverfront park that people enjoy as residents and tourists. Today, I'm so very grateful that the residents and politicians of the 1970s made these forward-thinking decisions.

Yet, here we stand in 2017, prepared to take a page from 1950s traffic planners and expand our freeways. In addition to the problems with induced demand, wider freeways also stand in stark opposition to our climate goals! With Trump's recent move to back out of the Paris Climate Accord, Governor Brown, along with many other local politicians have made strong statements about leading the fight against greenhouse gas emissions whether or not the Federal government wants to be involved. If we are actually serious about this as a real problem — and not interested in it solely as a political move to score points — then we need to put our money where our mouth is and start investing in clean transit options, not in building wider freeways. We should instead be doubling down on investments in public transit: creating dedicated bus lanes, improving and expanding the MAX and WES lines in Portland metro, and expanding and improving bus lines throughout the state.

Moreover, while this bill does do some work to expand bike/ped infrastructure, it falls far short of even meeting existing demand, much less creating the kind of infrastructure that might entice more people into bicycling, walking, or taking public transit. The Safe Routes to School package is one step in the right direction, but does not go nearly far enough. I believe we could do better here by bringing this broader transportation package in line with HB 3230. Making all of our streets more walkable is important not only for full-time pedestrians, but also for people making connections between public transit, and even walking from a car to a shop, workplace, or restaurant.

Lastly, I am also strongly opposed to the bicycle excise tax. It unreasonably places an extra tax burden on cyclists who are already choosing a mode of transportation that is cleaner, healthier, has much lower impact on our streets, and does not contribute to traffic congestion! We should be encouraging more cycling, and working to get people out of their cars, not using taxes to discourage a behavior that is beneficial to society at large. It also puts local bicycle shops at a further disadvantage to online retailers. These shops typically focus on high quality — and often locally made products. Consequently, they disproportionately sell bikes that exceed the \$500 price point at which bicycles start being taxed. Our local bike shops are already at an economic disadvantage because they cannot buy and sell products in bulk, and they have the overhead of paying for and staffing a local storefront. Yet, these shops are important not only to our local economies, but also for people riding bikes, who need local places to get repairs done, or replace a broken light before a night time commute home. Let's not make their survival harder!

In sum, I would urge you to please reconsider the planned highway expansion projects. We must instead commit to spending our tax dollars more responsibly and with an orientation to the needs of future Oregonians and global citizens. We can work to improve our air quality and fight congestion at the same time if we redirect our investment away from freeways and towards public transit, walking, and cycling infrastructure. Let's modernize our transportation infrastructure, like the name of this committee suggests!

Respectfully,

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CC: Senator Kathleen Taylor  
CC: Representative Rob Nosse