

June 5, 2017

Attn: Joint Committee on Transportation & Preservation

Re: Transportation Budget: HB-2017-3

Dear Copmmittee Members,

It's surprising how few Oregonians recognize the scope of Oregon's growing transportation needs. I have watched several of the Committee meetings, and have seen a cooperative effort to gather research and engage in a dialog that is refreshing. I support many of the projects and investments, but oppose the "Transportation Bill" in its current form because the overall budget is too large, and some of the priorities need re-visiting. At a time when millions in new fees and taxes are under consideration, most of your constituents are already concerned about rising costs for operating personal and commercial vehicles.

Transportation is a lifeline that connects our lives with the rest of the World. In recent years we've seen the results of not adequately maintaining existing infrastructure, and the need to invest in expansion where it's critically needed. Oregon's revenue is projected to increase by over a billion dollars this year, but much of that money cannot, or will not be devoted to transportation. We must act now, and that requires a bipartisan agreement.

I was one of the few who attended the initial presentation of ODOT's proposed budget before the Committee. Vague figures were provided for maintenance costs, that includes a dramatic increase in spending. The proposed budget contains improvements in accountability, but does not include enough reductions in areas that are underperforming. ODOT and Trimet will receive hundreds of millions in revenue authorized by this legislation, but both agencies suffer from a lack of trust that is self-created. I am not the only one troubled by the failure of ODOT to release all information of the 2016 audit, and by Trimet's well publicized troubles

The budget process provides an opportunity for adjusting priorities while improving accountability. It opens the door to investment in technology and efficiencies that save time and money for everyone. None of those investments will be worthwhile if a higher priority is not placed on maintaining (preserving) and upgrading our existing roads. The Federal Government plans to increase investment in existing infrastructure, creating an opportunity for more matching funds at this critical time.

Of all the projects and proposals, expanding I-205 must remain at the top. Our commerce and connection to the rest of the World depends on an immediate investment in that corridor. In addition, to meet the requirements of Goals 12 and 14, increased funding and a secure timeline for upgrading I-205 between Stafford Road and Oregon City is necessary. (Includes the Abernathy Bridge). METRO recently approved Stafford for future urbanization, and the traffic is increasingly at a standstill. When you hear that adding lanes won't relieve congestion, please ask yourself why the congestion reduces dramatically when one leaves the section that is restricted to 2 lanes

The Dundee Bypass, Hwy 212 in the Damascus Corridor, and Hwy 97 in Central Oregon, all face growing congestion and compromised safety. An appropriate way to help fund those projects would be to reduce funding for rail planning and construction. Amending SB-624 to reduce its unreasonable expectations and higher than anticipated financial impacts, must also be considered. The political implications of addressing SB-324 need to be set aside rather than allow it to become a lightning rod or sacred cow.

If a gas tax is approved, it should be reduced from the proposed 14 cents per gallon. Any tax or fee increase should be split 50/50 with local jurisdictions. At this time I strongly oppose the addition of a mileage tax. Funding to create one is included in the bill, but a clearer picture of the final initial costs, and what the cost per mile would be, especially for those with large fleets. A gas tax increase combined with a mileage tax would be excessive, and does nothing to reign in overspending in other areas.

I recommend that the Committee consider the environmental costs and lost productivity of not investing a greater percentage of the budget on roads. Our streets and highways have been taken for granted for too long, and we cannot afford to merely raise taxes and fees to address the problem.

Approval of the proposed budget requires a 3/5 majority of legislators, and we must avoid a repeat of 2016. Please demand adjustments and reductions that will provide the highest results. In spite of the work already accomplished, this legislation requires more work before an eventual approval by the Legislature

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