

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization  
Date: June 8, 2017

I encourage the committee to support and fund Safe Routes to Schools campaigns and all alternatives to single occupancy vehicle transportation.

Specifically,

- Tax TIRES instead of taxing cars or bikes.
- Increase funding for Safe Routes. \$10 million isn't enough. Make it \$20 million.
- Do away with limits on distance (¼ mile v. 1 mile)
- Do away with the ten year sunset on Safe Routes funding
- Fund more transit

RE: CONGESTION

Congestion and traffic are awful. Everybody hates traffic. And the funny thing is it's only traffic because we're all stuck in it together.

The next time you're stuck in traffic (which happens a lot to people who regularly use I-5), please look around and envision what would happen if 1 out of every 10 drivers was not there because they were car-pooling. And the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cars were also not there because those people were instead riding their bikes. And the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> people were using a good transit option (like a commuter bus or train). All of a sudden, you've easily dealt with half the cars on the road ... and you're no longer stuck in traffic! Bikes and good transit are the golden solution to congestion.

If you build it ... they will come. But what will you build?

RE: Safe Routes

I've learned a lot about how individuals make commuting choices this last year and a half working with my local school's bike club encouraging kids to ride bikes.

It used to be assumed that kids would walk or bike to school. In 1969 about half of kids walked or biked to school. But that number has radically declined. It is common to see traffic jams surrounding many schools in the mornings. Idling cars spew exhaust as they wait to drop off kids as close as possible to school.

Last year a child was hit by a car in front of our school during drop off. Because of that incident many parents felt like it was more important to drive and the traffic problem of cars got worse. This exemplifies the false promise of cars: "Only a car can keep you safe from the danger of cars." The flip side is that if we could all agree to never drive to school, then our kids would not be in danger of so many cars. I became active in my school's bike community because parents were actually talking about

how to keep kids who walked or biked away from the school. They are so addicted to their car that they perceive the children as the problem instead of the use of cars as the problem.

Many parents don't let their kids walk or ride a bike to school because of dangerous physical infrastructure. We have spent the last century creating a built infrastructure that works only for automobiles. We need to change our built infrastructure.

In my neighborhood although we have a couple of good crossing points for kids, we still have several very dangerous intersections (like SE 19<sup>th</sup> & Bybee) and much of the school's area has no good route to get to the school without at least one dangerous crossing of a busy street. I know other parents whose children only get to ride when we have a large group on our "bike train Fridays."

A number of those kids live approximately 1.5 miles from school and have to cross a busy street at about 1.2 miles from the elementary school. This crossing is about .5 miles from the middle school. I fear many deserving projects wouldn't fit within the ¼ distance from school standard.

Getting kids to ride bikes to school has numerous benefits which are hard to quantify. Because of riding bikes, I got to know a neighbor boy, "T.O."

T.O. is a great kid. He gets excited about doing things and has a ton of energy. Before he began riding his bike to school, he was always in trouble. With decreased school budgets and focus on testing, kids sit more. When T.O. was being dropped off by his parents, he sat on the ride to school, and sat all day. He was a bad combination of listless, had energy and attention issues, and it was basically a very bad situation. But when T.O. started riding his bike, he had to actively engage the world with his brain on the way to school. He had to exercise and make many of his own choices such as navigating traffic. Over a course of weeks and months I saw a huge difference in the confidence and attitude of this boy. He changed from a person who others had to do things for and give constant direction, to a boy who could take charge of his own life, show appropriate autonomy while thinking about how his actions affect others. Two weeks ago I saw him outside the school at the end of the school day and he told me his mom was there for another meeting with his teacher. I was afraid he'd got in trouble again. But he proudly told me, "This meeting is about all the good stuff I'm doing now and how responsible I've become!"

Every kid deserves this kind of opportunity. But the few of us doing this kind of activism can only reach out to so many kids. How many more kids would bike in my neighborhood if we had better crossings? How many more kids across our city and state would ride if we presumed that all kids should be able to have a safe route to walk or bike to school?

Every dollar we spend getting kids to ride bikes is a dollar well spent. Kids who ride bikes become adults who ride bikes. Adults who ride bikes are more fit, have lower health care costs, and are a general benefit to society.

RE: The built environment

Our State Capitol is a great example of the balance of automobiles, bikes, and walking. The streets, the sidewalks, the parking lots, the absence of bike lanes and make it obvious that this area is designed to drive an automobile as close as possible to the destination and park it and then walk the final bit to the destination building. Automobiles demand more space. They need more lanes to get around the traffic they create. Buildings have to be farther apart to accommodate the parking lots for the cars. The

increased foot print makes buildings farther apart and induces people to drive so they need a car and more parking. It is a vicious cycle of never enough.

The built environment discourages bikes. I'm an avid bike rider, but I'd be afraid to ride my bike around our state capitol. There are no bike lanes. Bike parking is invisible.

RE: TAXES AND FUNDING

The bike excise tax is wrong. I listened intently to the testimony of the automobile industry claiming that the proposed tax/fee on new automobile sales would destroy their industry. Although I understand and sympathize that they don't want any increase in fees, costs, or taxes, I don't believe this cost would destroy their industry. More likely is that this will be just one of a number of fees for which they provide financing to the consumer.

As a bike enthusiast I am aware that many bike shops run on very thin margins. The bikes that they sell are almost not profitable, and this includes the \$500 bikes (which is really the bottom entry price of a decent bike). Local bike shops have to compete with customers who purchase items via the internet in a way that auto dealers do not.

It is a generally recognized principal of government tax policy that we should tax the behavior we want to discourage. From that perspective, taxing bike sales is wrong. Rather, we should have a state subsidy or tax credit for people who purchase bikes.

The sales tax on bikes exists solely as a rhetorical response to the argument of, "Make Bicyclists pay their fair share!" I can tell you that as a citizen and as a bike rider, I would love a good policy that had us all pay our "fair share." But a bike tax won't do that. My family already owns a number of bikes and I might not have to purchase another new bike for over a decade.

But we all use TIRES. Bikes use tires. Gas powered cars use tires (new cars and used cars). And electric vehicles also use tires. What if we had a 10% tax on all tires? The next time I bought a single new \$45 bike tire, I'd pay \$4.50. Meanwhile, a gas powered vehicle that replaced half of its tires for two new tires at \$150 each would pay \$30. No tax scheme is perfect and somebody always complains but this seems to be a simpler better solution to tax and fund the mode of use.

Thank you again for all your hard work on these varied issues which have a huge impact on all of our lives.

Regards,

Edward T. LeClaire