



Representative Paul L. Evans, District 20
900 Court St. NE, H-281
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1420
Rep.paulevans@oregonlegislature.gov

March 30, 2019

Committee on Rules
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Colleagues:

HB 2974 is a tightly written measure that, if passed, would do one thing: establish a twenty-eighth (28th) category of special district. This new category would provide the citizens of a specific area of the Mid-Willamette Valley with an opportunity to form a Capitol Region Bridge District if, and only if, the voters agree with the proposals offered. With the amendments provided, the measure would adjust the counties eligible as well as insert a sunset for initial organization of any district.

This measure is the next step in the Mid-Willamette Valley quest for infrastructure resiliency as well as a critical new tool for future growth optimization. Unfortunately, Senior Leadership of the advocacy group 1000 Friends of Oregon is either knowingly, spreading false information, or wholly ignorant of the issues at hand. Whatever the case, they recently sent out thousands of email messages stocked full of demonstrably false statements as well as potentially actionable claims about my motives as well as purpose.

The following is offered to demonstrate the falsity of the narratives spread by this group and their leadership: to provide you with the facts.

1. The bill was not, is not, and shall never be an attempt to “get around the City of Salem’s recent decision regarding a 3rd bridge...” That proposal, the “Salem River Crossing” including the site widely discussed over the past year is effectively dead. The “no build” designation means that federal funds cannot be spent on the preferred site – or likely any of other final options – outlined in the study. In simplest terms, this bill has absolutely nothing (as in zero) to do with the site location/s of the previous efforts.
2. The bill establishes the ability of a Capitol Region Bridge Special District to be formed but it does not require it to be a taxing entity. Property taxes may be a part of the district should one be organized, but it is not assumed: the organization as well as the functions of the special district will be negotiated by those working to establish the district and then voted upon by all citizens potentially impacted by the district area. It is irrational to assume that anyone, myself included, knows what choices would be made regarding funding mechanisms.
3. The bill does not “override” the City of Salem decision. In fact, many of the councilors involved in the “no build decision” for the last proposal expressed at the time that other alternative locations for a crossing would be worthy of study and potential action. This measure is not

related to the decisions of the Salem City Council excepting the elimination of potential sites for a future bridge or bridges.

4. This bill does not require a location that would adversely impact the most valuable farmland in the state; several potential sites already have significant infrastructure nearby – thereby potentially limiting negative impact at other viable sites. The assertion that “some locations” would adversely impact the land is a cheap fallacy of construction: it assumes a set number of choices as well as the inevitability of negative consequence. At best, this is an inflammatory as well as insufficient commentary.
5. This bill does not automatically require a taxing authority for any district that may be established. However, it likely might include a property tax mechanism. Whatever the choices of those who organize the process, the voters would have the final decision over whether the district a) would exist; and/or b) would tax. More importantly, the assumptions that “most of whom will never use the bridge during the hours...” presupposes a site location for a bridge – which is wholly fear-mongering.
6. This bill has no mention of tolling whatsoever. The arguments made by leadership of 1000 Friends of Oregon are irrational, irresponsible, and unrelated to the bill as drafted. The mention of “tolling” is another fearmongering device inserted to cloud rather than clarify the realities of our circumstances.
7. This bill would in fact, do the exact opposite of what 1000 Friends of Oregon asserts when they argue, “adding another route will merely increase the traffic volume...” because it presumes to know where the bridge/s might be located. Their argument also appears to be completely decoupled from the realities of an already increasing volume of traffic absent appropriate infrastructure – in places that can mitigate rather than exacerbate congestion challenges. A bridge or bridges built for the movement of commercial traffic could – and would – yield undeniable benefits for passenger traffic throughout the region. We have more craft beer, distillery, and wine production along the 99W Corridor needing to get to the I-5 network: strategic placement of infrastructure would yield significant gains for the communities currently experiencing this surge of activity.
8. This bill could lead to a gradual reduction in net carbon impact. The carbon release associated with gridlock is neither neutral nor a value to be prized. Our existing infrastructure is misaligned with the needs of our realities; strategic placement of river crossing throughout the Mid-Willamette Valley may well reduce net use of fuel as well as the negative impacts associated with diesel (associated with movement of freight via truck). This argument is at best insufficient, at best a purposeful effort to ignore the present impacts of congestion.
9. This bill has nothing to do with the cost of \$400 Million – the figure estimated as the price for the proposal the City of Salem just voted to stop. While any bridge or bridges that could result from the establishment of a district would certainly require large investments of capital, I am truly at a loss how this figure can be defended with any intellectual honesty: how does 1000 Friends of

Oregon know the price of a bridge – built at a spot yet undetermined, with undetermined scale, scope, and design costs? This projection of costs is not rational, reasonable, nor responsible.

10. This bill provides the City of Salem, local governments throughout the region, as well as the state of Oregon a framework for strategic planning for best placement for necessary infrastructure critical for our region. The assumption that congestion (in 2019) is the only problem worthy of solving, and even then, only “infrequently...” is simply ignoring reality. Congestion worsens with population increases – and it becomes a negative factor for smart development when it is allowed to worsen to the point of intractability.
11. This bill has nothing to do with internal traffic dynamics of the City of Salem. The argument for increased ramp access, traffic control, and other local measures for congestion mitigation are worthy pursuits – but unrelated to this bill, period.
12. This bill has nothing to do with seismic retrofits of existing bridges, but would secure modern era construction of new bridges. That said, the Center Street Bridge is outlined in statute for an upgrade before 2025 (through the passage of HB 2017, during the 79th Legislative Assembly). I have been a proponent, a loud one, of upgrading our existing bridges but that does not relate to the regional need for investments for future progress. We must guard against mixing apples with pizza – they are not the same at all.

In closing, I want to clarify our situation. HB 2974 is a vehicle for regional leaders to collaborate on development of identified strategic infrastructure investments. These efforts if done well, could likely yield both cost containment as well as optimized transportation utility. However, the bill by itself does nothing more, or less, than the establishing the authority for a new category of special districts. Please consider the facts involved, and let me know what more information may be helpful in your decision-making on this issue.

Best regards,



Paul L. Evans
State Representative
House District 20