

**Testimony of Randy Tucker, Legislative Affairs Manager**  
**In Support of House Bill 2846**  
**Joint Committee on Transportation**  
**May 13, 2019**



**Metro**

Metro is the elected regional government of the Portland metropolitan area. One of our major areas of responsibility is the planning and delivery of transportation investments and operations. We do this work through collaboration with our public partners at the local and state levels and with multiple community stakeholders.

The Metro Council supports House Bill 2846, which would advance the effort to transfer the ownership of state highways that serve a local purpose from the state to local governments.

Jurisdictional transfer of so-called “orphan highways” has been an issue since the early 1980s, when Interstate 205, the last of the major freeways in the Portland region, was built. The construction of major freeways meant that many state highways originally built as rural or farm-to-market roads or to serve inter-city traffic no longer served those purposes. As a result, the Oregon Department of Transportation significantly reduced its investment in these facilities. Meanwhile, as city limits expanded, many of these roads became surrounded by increasingly dense development and became de facto major urban arterials.

For example, the function of Tualatin Valley Highway changed after Highway 26 was built. Before that, TV Highway was the primary freight route enabling farmers and loggers from Yamhill and Washington Counties to reach the Port of Portland. After Highway 26 opened, the cities of Washington County grew in population and density. Now TV Highway serves as a major transit corridor, carrying the second highest number of bus riders in the region, after 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue in Portland.

Candidates for jurisdictional transfer can be found in all three counties of our region. On many of these state-owned roadways, vehicle speed and the width of the roadways have not changed, but the surrounding land uses have intensified, increasing pedestrian activity. Unfortunately, many of these roadways have now become high crash corridors. There are multiple fatalities per year on roadways such as TV Highway, McLoughlin Boulevard, and Barbur Boulevard.

Because of the changed function of these roadways, it makes sense for them to be owned and operated by the cities they serve. However, years of underinvestment and the need for design changes to support urban needs make cities reluctant to take on a major liability. Two types of investments are needed: upgrades to the existing pavement and assets, and capital investments to improve safety and pedestrian access to transit. The bottom line is that funding is needed to facilitate these transfers.

In the Portland region, Metro and ODOT Region 1 have been leading a conversation about how best to assess needs and costs to make these transfers happen. Last fall, stakeholders in the

development of the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan identified a Jurisdictional Transfer Assessment as a necessary step to help our region meet its equity, safety and multi-modal transportation goals. Metro plans to kick off that process this summer. The primary purpose of this process is to create consensus in the region about which facilities should be prioritized for jurisdictional transfer.

As part of this process, we will identify gaps and deficiencies on these routes, develop a methodology to assess the cost of improvements needed for transfer, identify barriers and opportunities for transfer from state ownership to local ownership, and most importantly, prioritize the routes regionally.

However, after agreeing on a prioritized list of highways, we will need to identify state resources to support the maintenance and upgrades that will be required to facilitate the transfers.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you to pass HB 2846 as a first step toward solving the intractable “orphan highway” problem in our state.