

SB 1021: Public Hearing and Possible Work Session: Directs Department of Transportation to add auxiliary lane on portion of Interstate 5 near City of Wilsonville and make seismic improvements to Boone Bridge.

Testimony to the
Oregon Joint Committee on Transportation
by
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Co-Chairs Beyer and McKeown, and Members of the Committee, good afternoon. My name is William A. (Bill) Wallace and I live at 32433 SW Lake Drive in the city of Wilsonville, the part of the city called the Charbonneau District. It is south of the city and across the Boone Bridge.

I want to speak to you today in support of SB 1021, access additions and seismic improvements to the Boone Bridge.

A little about me... I am a retired engineer still working on a few things I like to do: teaching a graduate distance learning course in sustainable engineering for the University of Florida and working with the Committee on Sustainability for the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE).

In late 2016, My wife and I moved from a small Colorado mountain town to Charbonneau to be closer to family and to enjoy what this area and the state of Oregon have to offer. When we moved to Charbonneau, we figured we'd be visiting Portland a lot, taking advantage of its parks, restaurants, shopping, museums, gardens, you name it. However, we don't. We and the people we've met in Charbonneau think Portland is a fine city. But we—and they—rarely go there, not wanting to get stuck in traffic.

Throughout my career my work took me to many different places in the U.S. and abroad. I lived Seattle, Denver, and Washington, DC, all cities that have become notorious for their traffic congestion. Now, living near Portland where the major route is Interstate 5, I get to experience traffic congestion all over again. Not only is the congestion on I-5 bad, it's up there with any big U.S. city in which I've ever lived or worked.

When we moved to Charbonneau, we quickly learned that traveling north is okay because we have a ramp-to-ramp road connection across the bridge. Traveling south is another matter. In rush hour, we are competing with a horde of Wilsonville commuters trying to get out of the city and onto I-5. Then, we and the Wilsonville commuters are competing with the hordes of commuters coming from the north, all merging onto the I-5.

Turn on your GPS app around evening rush hour and you'll see I-5 colored in deep red, indicating that south-bound traffic is backed to I-205 and beyond. Importantly, that backup ends at our I-5 interchange, Exit 282, relieved when the people traveling to Charbonneau or the Canby area get on the exit ramp.

Looking at the big picture, the Boone Bridge on I-5 crossing the Willamette River is our only practical access to and from Wilsonville stores and services. There are no reasonable alternatives. As the City of Wilsonville noted in their flyer, the Boone Bridge is the only crossing for 28 miles. Moreover, the bridge is vulnerable to earthquakes. If it becomes unusable after some seismic event, we, the residents of Charbonneau and Canby, and huge flow of commercial traffic on I-5 are in big trouble and could remain that way for many years.

In preparing for this hearing and being relatively new to this area, I contacted my friends at ASCE to get more information about Oregon's infrastructure. Here's what they told me. Much of this you may already know.

- Earlier today, ASCE released the new 2019 Report Card for Oregon's Infrastructure. The report evaluates and grades ten of the state's infrastructure categories: bridges, dams, drinking water, energy, inland waterways, levees, ports, rail, roads and wastewater. And, there is certainly room for improvement to our roads including the congested area of Interstate 5 near Wilsonville.
- The I-5 bridge, which handles more than \$40 billion in freight traffic annually, is expected to see a 77% increase in large truck traffic in the next 20 years. The four to six hours of congestion the area sees daily could extend to 15 hours a day by 2030.

- An improving economy and a growing population have contributed to significant capacity challenges, particularly in the Portland metropolitan region. Fortunately, Oregon lawmakers acted to provide significant new funding for the transportation system beginning in 2017. From 2017 to 2027, \$5.3 billion of additional State Highway Fund revenue will be available to go toward projects that alleviate congestion and improve roadway conditions.
- Oregon has a long history of supporting infrastructure through investment and innovation, and our economy and quality of life has benefited. While this leadership is something to be proud of, we still face significant resiliency challenges which threaten every category of infrastructure and therefore, our overall wellbeing. Oregon is particularly vulnerable to a major seismic event.
- It is of critical importance that we make seismic improvements to our infrastructure. In recent years, understanding of seismic risks in Oregon has shifted. Previously, it was believed that a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake event would rock parked cars, but we now know that it could shift buildings off their foundations.
- The state's infrastructure must be built resiliently and sustainably to protect Oregonians from the impacts and aftermath of a disaster. At-risk infrastructure needs immediate attention. This includes following the Oregon Resilience Plan, which calls for the development of a mitigation policy and retrofit plan for vulnerable infrastructure. Taking proactive steps will save taxpayers money in the long run. For every \$1 dollar spent on disaster mitigation, \$6 dollars is saved in emergency repairs and replacements.
- One of the key solutions in the Report Card is to improve our infrastructure's ability to withstand a major seismic event. We need strong leadership, extensive planning, and robust funding to prepare our infrastructure to be resilient. We must prioritize investment in Oregon's bridges to protect the transportation network in the aftermath of a major seismic event.

- Combined with the need to improve our seismic resilience, the funding for bridges is critically low. Although funding already designated has improved funding for bridge infrastructure, the condition of Oregon’s bridges will continue to decline, and existing funding levels will not be enough to maintain the aging bridges. Bridges are a critical lifeline connecting one community to another.
- ASCE advocates adequate preparation for the future, including building our bridges to seismically sound standards and ensuring they enable the seamless movement of goods and people. It is important that we continue to identify infrastructure options that can accommodate the future needs of our state.

In closing, I want to thank you, the members of this committee for the opportunity to speak today on this most important piece of legislation. I’m happy to answer any questions, if necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

William A. Wallace