

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Transportation on HB 3065

March 16, 2021

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council opposes HB 3065-5, though we do support some elements of it. We would like to see this legislation revised to more clearly prioritize effective congestion reduction through pricing and multimodal corridor investments in the Portland Metro region.

The transportation choices in this legislation will powerfully shape the future for the region. This is a critical moment. If we keep going as we have for the last fifty years - trying to manage congestion by expanding highways to accommodate more and more vehicles driving farther and farther - we will lock ourselves into a future of gridlock. Example after example shows widening roads leads to more driving and back to the same congestion problem - just with more vehicles stuck in it.

Meaningfully addressing congestion requires reducing vehicle miles traveled as the region grows - while still moving more and more people and goods. Reducing vehicle miles traveled also provides enormous co-benefits in improved air quality, safer and healthier trips, reduced greenhouse gas pollution, and more access for more people. We will get this done by getting smarter about how we use the existing space in our corridors, not by building infrastructure to accommodate more and more vehicles. We must focus our investments on efficiency, not on expansion of the existing inefficiencies.

The only tool known to actually reduce congestion in both the short and long term is congestion pricing. This approach charges relatively low prices when there is little road demand, and charges higher prices at times when the demand is higher. This causes some people to take their trips at another time or using a different mode, which frees up space on the roads for the people who need to use it. This approach is most effective when there is a meaningful difference between peak and off-peak. It is also made more effective when the revenue is used to make it easier to get around the region without driving, by making it easier to walk, bike, and take transit.

HB 3065-5 opens the door for ODOT to fund a number of significant highway projects around the region, and it also ties up the revenue from road pricing to pay bondholders for construction of those expansion projects. This undermines the ability of the region to develop an effective systemwide congestion management system.

If the pricing revenue is dedicated to repaying construction bonds for all of these big-ticket projects, it will be much more difficult for the region to deploy the tools that we know actually work. The region's drivers will be stuck in traffic, *and* they'll be paying more for it. There are two ways that tying pricing revenue to bond repayment makes it harder to reduce congestion. First, the more revenue that the road pricing is required to generate to pay off

bonds, the less ability the region has to price off-peak road use lower. This makes people less likely to shift their driving to a different time, and congestion is not reduced as much. It also means that people have to pay more to be stuck in traffic. Second, the money is not available to invest in making it easier to get around without driving. This means that people who might shift their trips to biking, walking and transit cannot do that, so they have to keep driving, which means more traffic.

We must preserve the full power of pricing to be deployed in a congestion pricing approach. This will allow congestion pricing to be used to its full effect, and revenue to be invested in addressing diversion and increasing non-single-occupancy vehicle options. Under this approach, revenue can still be spent to address seismic and safety issues and provide needed connections, but those projects can be right-sized to fit the demand on a priced road, instead of overbuilt to accommodate the demand of an unmanaged, inefficient approach.

A congestion management approach that prices the roads strategically and invests the revenue to make it easier to get off the road will provide the region not only with less congestion and more predictable travel times, but also with cleaner air, safer communities, better access to opportunity, and a more stable future climate.

This legislation also includes the jurisdictional transfer of 82nd Avenue, one of ODOT's long-neglected urban roadways, transferred to the City of Portland with only a quarter of the money necessary to bring the roadway up to the standard at which it should have been maintained all along. Oregon Environmental Council supports this transfer, but it must come with sufficient investment to bring the road fully up to standard.

We appreciate the requirement to create an income-based approach to tolling, which is a welcome effort to address inequity through transportation policy. We also support the inclusion of the labor agreement language, and are encouraged to see this effort to bolster ODOT's support of labor.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and would be happy to work on solutions.