

Testimony to the Joint Committee on Transportation House Bill 3055

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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.

Co-chair Beyer, co-chair McLain and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. Oregon Environmental Council shares the concerns expressed by the City of Portland, Metro, TriMet, Multnomah County and the Port of Portland about the tolling provisions in HB 3055. We would like to see this language amended to clarify the important role of congestion pricing and multimodal corridor investments in effective management of congestion.

We know that the Portland metro region is growing, and will continue to grow. As we know from the experiences of cities all over the world, highway widening does not reduce congestion over the long term. We also don't have the money or the space to infinitely expand roads.

The only way to manage congestion long-term is to reduce vehicle miles traveled as the region grows - while still moving more and more people and goods. This will also provide us with enormous co-benefits in cleaner air, safer communities, better access to opportunity, and a more stable future climate. We will get this done by getting smarter about how we use the existing space in our corridors.

We can use our right of way more efficiently by pricing the use of the road in a way that encourages people to reduce or shift their trips to a less-popular time or to a different mode. In order to do that, the program has to be designed to send effective price signals, like charging more at peak times and nothing at off-peak times. This is a completely different design than a program designed to maximize revenue. In fact, a toll program designed around revenue to pay off a bond actually depends on vehicle trips to generate revenue. Oregon needs to be able to price the roads to manage congestion, not to pay off bondholders for expensive projects.

In order for the congestion management program to be effective, we also need to invest the revenue to help people get around by transit, biking and walking. This allows more movement of more people and more goods in more efficient and equitable ways, and opens up space in the roadway for easier, more predictable trips for the vehicles that really need to be there.

Oregon and the Portland metro region needs to make sure that we retain these essential tools to effectively reduce congestion. We need congestion pricing that pays for multimodal corridor investments. If the toll program's priority is to pay for freeway bonds, the program cannot be designed to effectively reduce congestion. The language must be revised to reflect that congestion management is at least as highly prioritized as collecting revenue, and it must not restrict the revenue's use to freeway projects only. We encourage you to make these changes to prioritize the needs of Oregon's communities

Thank you for your time.