

Subject: HB 3065-8 amendment
Hearing Date: May 11, 2021

Co-Chairs Beyer and McLain, members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

Portland Forward opposes HB 3065-8, and asks that you not approve this legislation. Portland Forward is an intergenerational group of activists working towards a sustainable, equitable, and just future for our region and we know that vision is not possible with freeway expansions that are unjust, inequitable, and environmentally disastrous.

Although the -8 amendment to HB 3065 makes a minor improvement compared with the -5 amendment in the form of Section 35, the essential premise of this proposal is still wrong.

The Oregon Transportation Commission currently has authority to implement "value pricing" on the Portland area freeway system, granted by HB 2017 of the 2017 legislative session. Through variable tolls, applied when needed during peak traffic periods, existing congestion can be greatly reduced, and peak freeway capacity can actually be increased. Value pricing was supposed to have been submitted for Federal approval before the end of 2018, but the OTC and ODOT dragged their feet and submitted an incomplete application.

Now, in an unfortunate reversal, proponents of freeway expansion construction projects are proposing to sell bonds, widen freeways, impose tolls, and pledge those tolls for repayment of the construction bonds. HB 3065-8 will destroy Oregon's opportunity to implement "value pricing" in an equitable and environmentally positive manner, resulting in wasteful expenditures on unnecessary construction, accompanied by traffic diversion to local streets along with higher than necessary tolls on our freeways, resulting in inefficient utilization of freeway capacity.

"Value pricing" must be implemented and evaluated before going ahead with freeway expansion. This is the only environmentally sound approach to dealing with congestion.

Revenues must only be spent on a pay-as-you-go basis, and spent for purposes that actually provide alternatives to single occupant auto travel. Bonds for construction will further bog down ODOT in debt, consuming gas tax revenue along with unnecessarily high toll revenue.

Already, the OTC claims not to have enough revenue for basic maintenance, blaming the Oregon Legislature for diverting too much revenue into new construction. Value pricing, from tolls imposed at the lowest necessary rates needed to control congestion, would still generate a significant revenue stream that could be spent for better purposes, while also freeing up gas tax revenues that have been legislatively directed to new construction.

Sincerely,
James Ofsink
President, Portland Forward