

Date: May 11, 2021

To: Members of the Oregon Joint Committee on Transportation

From: Paxton Rothwell, Sunrise Movement PDX

Report on Alternatives to Freeway Expansion for Congestion Relief and Climate Justice

Note: This report is an addendum to the written and verbal testimony delivered to the Joint Committee on Transportation on May 11, 2021.

Staffers and Legislators,

HB 3065 directs ODOT to continue their disastrous freeway expansion projects in the Portland Metro Region that will fail to solve the problem of congestion and will pass on an overbuilt and indebted highway system to future generations that will already be suffering in a warmed world with frequent natural disasters. You cannot build your way out of congestion or the climate crisis - but you can direct ODOT and funding toward projects that will *actually* benefit the people of Oregon in the long term, I suggest you start now.

Let me be crystal clear here: expanding freeways will never solve congestion. I grew up in Suburban Los Angeles and experienced induced demand first hand. I recall a new freeway extension being completed when I was in middle school and witnessed a truly free flowing brand new freeway. But 4 years later, when I was able to drive, I was stuck daily in crippling congestion on that same exact freeway. Induced demand is pervasive and it will thwart all of your planned freeway expansion projects - *so don't do them*.

So what could some actual solutions that tie lower carbon emission to reduced congestion be? I'll mention a few below that have either been researched, suggested, or are easy enough to comprehend that most Oregonians (and hopefully the legislature) can get behind at least some of them. Please also take a look at my list of resources at the end of this report.

Solutions that marry lower carbon emissions with reduced congestion:

1. **Revitalize the passenger rail industry in Oregon.** Rail uses 2/3rds less energy than a car or truck and gets people off of our crowded highways. In Portland and the Willamette Valley, we have a unique chance to reuse this existing infrastructure to revitalize track side communities, move people around efficiently, give people more transit options, and begin to solve the climate crisis. The East Coast and Europe have a robust rail system that is reliable - Oregon should too. Rail is also much easier to electrify than individual cars or trucks, so this solution can eventually be carbon neutral or negative.
2. **Expand Public Demand Response Transit.** Rural and suburban areas of the State often go overlooked when it comes to providing adequate public transportation. In order to realize Oregon's emission goals the State needs to fund accessible transit for all.
3. **Expand frequency and reliability of Urban transit systems.** Public transit is an asset to all metro areas of the State, but only when it is available to use. A bus or train that runs less frequently than every 15 minutes is practically unusable. People use their cars mainly because they can start their trip whenever they please. If our current level of service for public transit remains unchanged in the coming years, it will grow increasingly harder to get people out of their cars and onto a bus or train.
4. **Implement a Road User Tax as soon as possible.** Funding from the gas tax is dwindling as electric cars and fuel efficient cars increase in popularity. The best and most equitable way to fix this funding gap is to charge all road users per mile for using the state highway system. This has the added benefit of increasing the cost to drive a car. Any increase to the cost of driving will encourage people to use alternatives to driving or drive less in general - this is a good thing for emissions, the climate, and Oregonian's physical and mental health. This further incentivizes drivers to choose another mode of transit to get to their destination and will also increase demand for the expanded rail and transit systems I previously mentioned.

5. **Remove Parking Minimums.** Mandated parking minimums trap us into a cycle of building more parking in places where we don't need it. While the ideology of parking minimums came from a well-intentioned place (not putting the burden of providing parking space on the City), the staggering availability of parking continues to encourage unneeded driving. Humans are a species that respond well to a scarcity mindset, so if parking is readily available, society as a whole will not think that there are too many cars. But, if parking were limited, society would respond with fewer trips taken by car.
6. **Charge For Parking.** The notion that you can store a large piece of personal property on someone else's private property or on the City's public right of way and pay absolutely nothing to do so is ridiculous. Free parking as a right is subsidizing poor driving habits which do not encourage people to take alternatives to driving to complete their trips. Charging for all publicly owned parking spaces (on street and off street) will disincentivize driving or car ownership and help push the private sector to build more walkable and accessible neighborhoods.
7. **Cancel the Interstate Bridge Replacement project.** Instead build the Common Sense Alternative to the Columbia River Crossing which was dreamed up back in 2011. This project calls for the addition of local bridges over the Columbia and to Hayden Island to improve pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and local traffic flow and leave the freeway to through traffic. This solution would increase the resiliency of our river crossing between Washington and Oregon, help to reduce emissions, and would provide a plethora of options for crossing by bike, foot, car, train, bus, or light rail. The notion that the Oregon/Washington border is only spanned by 2 freeway only bridges is preposterous and does not reflect the ideology of diversity that both Oregon and Washington demand.
8. **Transform Land Use.** Pressure the State to adopt a transformed Land Use law that truly prioritizes walkable neighborhoods that are connected to transit so that we stop perpetually repeating the mistake of building block after block of disconnected and car dependent neighborhoods. Transit works if people can

access most of their needs within a 15 minute walk, so we need to purposely steer the market to build walkable and transit oriented neighborhoods.

The ultimate goal of transportation has to be to **reduce vehicle miles travelled across the board**. If alternatives to driving are available - people will drive less. If people drive less, safety will improve, emissions will decrease, and congestion will decrease. It will always come back to the fact that we need to drive less. A car is a wonderful tool to use sometimes, but our world is crafted to require its use for most trips. From our land use policy to our roadway infrastructure, it is plain as day to see that the *freedom of the car is treated with an immense privilege*.

These solutions are just some of those that would help lower the 40% of Oregon's emissions that come from Transportation. I would love to see what solutions could be dreamt up if the political pressure on ODOT steered them toward these sorts of solutions and not just toward never ending freeway expansions. I also hope you understand that this political pressure would also push the private sector to develop in ways that are less car-convenient.

We need diverse options for transportation, not just more of the same. I also am fully aware that a reduction in vehicle miles travelled goes against the oil and gas industry, the auto manufacture industry, the auto maintenance industry, and so many other car-centric industries that rely on the rampant overuse of cars. Simply put, a sustainable future for the human race is not possible if we do not start to dial back our addiction to the car and begin to reconnect with what it means to be human and travel. To many of us that means the ability to walk or bike to most places in our community that we need to go to. Hundreds of thousands of years of human transportation showed us that this is exactly what we are all made for. Just because the last hundred years have given us the technology to travel vast distances with ease doesn't mean that we should keep doing it in perpetuity.

A better and more transit equitable world is possible. But you must all think outside of the box to get there. The way the legislature and ODOT currently operate and think about transportation is extremely car-centric. American politicians have an addiction to the car. The American people, if given the choice, would not. We cannot get to where we need to be in regards to emissions without shifting our thoughts about transportation to not only be more inclusive of the alternatives to car travel, but wholesale ***start making it harder*** to drive a car in this State and this country.

I need you to be brave. I need you to be a real climate leader for your constituents. As I sit outdoors writing this in the Lloyd District of Portland I have seen 9 cyclists and 8 busses in the last hour go by me. In that same time, I have seen about 500 cars drive by. This issue will not go away by itself, so, for the air I breathe, I need you to act now.

People will not choose to stop using their cars until there are more ways to access alternatives to driving and the cost to drive and park a car increases to disincentivize its use and reflect the environmental and social costs of rampant car use.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this report. I am happy to work with you in future legislative sessions to try and craft policy that will actually reduce Oregon's emissions from the transportation sector.

Sincerely,

Paxton Rothwell

Resources:

- I. Passenger and Freight Rail
 - A. Portland Commuter Rail - <https://portlandcommuterrail.org/>
 - B. Climate Rail Alliance - <https://climaterailalliance.org/>
 - C. Solutionary Rail - <https://www.solutionaryrail.org/>
 - D. Washington State Amtrak Cascades Long Range Plan
 - E. Example of a Rolling Highway - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rolling_highway
- II. Congestion Relief on Highways
 - A. Common Sense Alternative to the CRC - <https://youtu.be/sPB1jtmHVkk>
 - B. Congestion Pricing in Central Cities - <https://ggwash.org/view/81219/what-is-decongestion-pricing-anyway>
 - C. Road User Tax - <https://www.ncsl.org/research/transportation/road-use-charges.aspx>
 1. Oregon does already have the OreGo program, but it is not popular whatsoever and, in my opinion, should be required for all newly registered cars in the State immediately.
 - D. Why Freeway Expansions Don't Work (Induced Demand Explained) - <https://youtu.be/2z7o3sRxA5g>
- III. Transit and Bicycle Infrastructure
 - A. An Increase in Bike Lanes = an Increase in Ridership - <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/01/climate/bikes-climate-change.html>
 - B. How to Increase Transit Ridership - <https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/transit-must-think-outside-the-box-to-rebuild-ridership/587674/>
- IV. The Real Cost of Free Parking
 - A. Parking Minimums Explained - https://youtu.be/Akm7ik-H_7U
 - B. The Many Costs of Too Much Parking - <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/11/20/the-many-costs-of-too-much-parking>
- V. Benefits of the Urban Growth Boundary and Walkability
 - A. Walkable Neighborhoods Save Money - <https://urbanistco.wpenline.com/want-reduce-reliance-foreign-oil-start-walkability/>
 - B. Four Benefits to a Walkable Neighborhood - <http://buildabetterburb.org/four-benefits-walkable-neighborhoods/>