

Submitter: Dr. Christopher Hale
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation Reinvestment
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2025

My name is Dr. Christopher Hale. I'm a board certified Emergency Medicine Physician, who grew up in Oregon, graduated from OHSU, and who has been working in Oregon ERs for 13 years.

While I strongly support the provisions that will provide greater funding to make streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists, there is one provision that appears to have been snuck in under the radar, which will greatly worsen safety. The provision would ammend current law as such:

"ORS 366.215 is amended to read:

366.215. (1) The Oregon Transportation Commission may select, establish, adopt, lay out, locate, alter, relocate, change and realign primary and secondary state highways, except that the commission may not reduce the width of an existing motor vehicle travel lane on an identified freight route to less than 12 feet."

I'll point out that ODOT's own Highway Design Manual currently recommends 11-foot lanes.

There's nothing in the current design guidelines that would PREVENT a wider lane if needed.

But current guidlines also allow transportation and safety experts to have the flexibility to reduce lane size, if doing so would still allow adequate freight movement AND enhance safety.

But if this provision goes through, it would MANDATE 12 foot lanes, or WIDER, throughout the state, regardless of the on-the-ground conditions.

It has been repeatedly studied, and repeatedly proven that wider lanes cause people to drive at faster speeds, regardless of posted speed limits. Increased speed leads to increased deaths. Reducing lane widths reliably reduces speeds.

It's also been repeatedly shown that a large proportion of traffic fatalities occur at intersections. Even when pedestrians and cyclists are following every traffic rule, and staying within designated bike lanes and crosswalks, the greater the distance they need to travel to get across an intersection, the greater their danger. The wider you make the lanes, the greater the distance pedestrians need to travel before they reach safety.

To be clear, these “identified freight routes” are not limited to major freeways like I-5 and 205. These include roads that run through areas of our cities where people on foot live, work, and play every day. These roads go directly in front of people's houses, and directly next to schools. They include Tualitan Valley Highway, McLaughlin, and Powell.

Let me talk about Powell for a moment. For years, my wife and I have biked our young children to and from school, crossing Powell four times a day. It's the most dangerous part of our trip. My wife and children have nearly been hit by vehicles on Powell as a direct result of people driving too fast. Multiple people die on Powell every year. One of those people died directly in front of Cleveland High School, only a block from where my wife and children had their close call.

To their credit, transportation experts in the Portland Bureau of Transportation have been actively looking for ways to implement safety features on these streets, in order to fulfill their commitments to Vision Zero, and to save lives.

But if this provision remains, it will TIE the hands of the experts who know the real-world, on-the-ground details of these streets and intersections, who COULD make appropriate safety decisions if they still had the power to do so. It would prevent any recourse for the Oregonians who live along these streets, and are witnessing their neighbors die year after year along these roads.

I strongly urge you to strike this provision. Striking this out will have absolutely NO negative impact on freight. It simply keeps in place the current flexibility to allow transportation design experts to still meet the needs of the freight industry, while simultaneously protecting the lives of everyday Oregonians.

Thank you,
Dr. Christopher Hale, MD