

# **Transportation Safety Testimony**

## **Opposition to 12-Foot Lane Requirement in Transportation Bill 2025**

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Jenna Berman, and I am writing as a private citizen in strong support of the 2025 transportation funding package, with one critical exception. While I write in my personal capacity and not as a representative of the Oregon Department of Transportation, my perspective is informed by nine years of work in active transportation at ODOT, focusing on transportation safety and design issues.

I urge you to reconsider the provision requiring all freight routes to maintain 12-foot travel lanes. This requirement contradicts current safety research and could prevent implementation of proven safety improvements that serve our communities well.

### **Real-World Evidence from Philomath**

Here in my part of the state, we fought hard to install 11-foot travel lanes in Philomath, Oregon. It was our first project with narrower lanes, and we faced significant resistance. Critics worried that trucks would struggle to navigate safely through the reduced width.

Since that project was completed, I have spent countless hours standing roadside, carefully observing traffic patterns. What I've witnessed directly contradicts the concerns that drove opposition to our project. Trucks of all sizes—from delivery vehicles to large freight haulers—navigate these 11-foot lanes without any apparent difficulty. Drivers aren't swerving, aren't struggling to stay in their lanes, and aren't creating dangerous situations. The roadway functions exactly as designed, safely accommodating all users including essential freight traffic.

This real-world observation aligns perfectly with what transportation professionals know from research: 11-foot lanes can safely accommodate freight while providing significant safety benefits over 12-foot lanes.

### **The Safety Science is Clear**

The relationship between lane width, speed, and crash severity is well-established in transportation engineering. Wider lanes encourage higher speeds, and higher speeds lead to more severe crashes for all road users. The physics are undeniable—greater impact forces mean more devastating injuries and fatalities.

A groundbreaking 2023 study from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health—the largest research ever conducted on lane width and safety—provides conclusive evidence. Researchers found that "roads with 10–12-foot lanes at 30-35 mph speed limits have a significantly higher number of crashes compared to those with 9-foot lanes." They discovered that "increasing to 12-foot lanes did increase the risk of crashes, most likely due to drivers increasing their speed and driving more carelessly."

While I understand our state roads carrying essential freight traffic won't be reduced to 9 or 10 feet, extensive research demonstrates that 11-foot lanes improve safety without hindering truck travel—exactly what we've observed in Philomath.

## **Professional Practice is Evolving**

Transportation professionals nationwide are moving toward context-sensitive design that includes narrower lanes where appropriate, because the safety evidence is overwhelming. The current trend in transportation engineering prioritizes designs that balance all users' needs while maximizing safety outcomes.

A blanket 12-foot lane requirement would strip transportation engineers of the ability to use professional judgment and apply current safety research to design decisions. It could prevent implementation of proven safety improvements and eliminate the design flexibility that has served Oregon communities well.

## **A Path Forward**

While I understand concerns about freight mobility that likely motivated this provision, Oregon has a strong history of balancing multiple transportation needs. We can continue doing so without mandating design standards that compromise safety.

The evidence from Philomath—and from research nationwide—shows we can maintain freight mobility while prioritizing safety. I urge you to remove or modify the 12-foot lane requirement to allow engineering judgment based on context and current safety research. Let our transportation professionals continue using their expertise and the latest safety data to design roads that serve all users safely and effectively.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work on this critical funding package.

Sincerely, Jenna Berman

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### **Sources:**

- Lane Width - NACTO

- <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/narrower-traffic-lanes-in-cities-could-help-lower-risk-of-traffic-related-collisions>