

November 17, 2017

Dear Chair Baney and Members of the Oregon Transportation Commission:

The members of the Metro Council and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) would like to take the opportunity to provide input on the current on-going discussion of the proposed funding scenarios to develop the 2021-2024 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

The Portland metropolitan region wants to continue to convey our region's recommendations regarding the ODOT funding programs and funding levels being considered for the 2021-2024 STIP. As the largest urban area in Oregon, the region has unique transportation challenges which frame our comments around how we desire to see federal and state transportation dollars invested. We appreciate your consideration of our communications concerning the ODOT funding programs over the course of the fall and the greater level of transparency and stakeholder engagement in the development of the 2021-2024 STIP. Based on what we understand as the ODOT staff funding recommendation being considered, the Portland metropolitan region would like to express some key concerns and reiterate outcomes we desire to see from transportation investments made in our shared transportation system.

1. Invest discretionary revenues in a moderate Enhance Highway program between the \$24 million and \$124 million options, and invest additional discretionary revenues in the ODOT Non-Highway and Safety funding programs

The Portland metropolitan region is unique to other urban areas of Oregon because of our region's rapid and continuing population and employment growth. The region is also keenly aware that other parts of the state see the growing traffic congestion in the Portland region a barrier to the statewide economy. Recognizing these factors, the region sees a value in having an Enhance Highway program to support the advancement of strategic capacity enhancements to the highway and freight system. The region also supports seeing project development activities be eligible use for these funds.

Rather than choose between carrying over Enhance Highway or Fix-It levels from the 2018-2021 STIP cycle, the region would support a funding level for the Enhance program between \$24 - \$124 million. However, it is the desire of the region that the difference between a middle-level of investment and the \$124 million proposed at the top end of Enhance Highway program be invested in the Non-Highway, and Safety funding categories.

The region has already expressed a desire to see further investment of discretionary funding in the transportation strategies which are the most effective in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We see this being accomplished by investing in the existing Non-Highway programs, particularly the Non-Highway Enhance and the Transportation Options program. The increased investment would not only support achieving statewide goals and implementing the region's strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles to combat climate change, but is also consistent with the Oregon Transportation Plan policies, which prioritizes and directs investments to lower-cost, efficient, and effective solutions before expanding the capacity of the highway system.

2. Increase local input opportunities and the importance of enhancement priorities within the proposed leverage programs.

The Portland metropolitan region supports using federal and state dollars efficiently and effectively by “leveraging” the opportunities for joint Enhance and Fix-It projects. However, we do not want to see the result of efficiency and effectiveness preclude consideration of local priorities for enhancements that also support the state transportation system. As currently proposed, the Enhance Highway, Safety, and Active Transportation leverage programs may significantly limit the opportunities to nominate local priorities and narrows the universe of opportunities for active transportation, safety, or highway enhancement investments. The region sees this as a concern and requests the OTC consider incorporating a prioritization factor reflecting local priority in the different leverage funding programs.

For example, a priority of the Portland metropolitan region is to see comprehensive investment in urban arterials. While these facilities comprise only 12% of our region’s lane miles, 73% of our region’s fatal and serious injury crashes occur on these facilities. Despite state, regional, and local policies supporting Vision Zero type goals, fatalities and serious injury crashes have recently been increasing. Often these state-owned urban arterials in the Portland region do not rise up as the priority for the next set of investments in the various asset management databases for Fix-It programs. Because the Fix-It program will serve as the basis for determining what transportation projects or facilities will be eligible for leverage funding, the region is concerned the urban arterials will continue to fall further behind. These urban arterials need a comprehensive set of multimodal improvements to make the facilities safe and functional for all users while also accommodating greater demand. The region desires to see all the leverage programs include criteria which factors in local priority. This way those urban arterials, which are often rated just outside a ranked list of priority Fix-It projects, could be emphasized and advanced for funding with a local priority factor in the leverage program. This local priority factor could be flexible and discretionary to respect the different local priorities across the state, while also supporting the efficiencies of the leverage programs.

3. Have all ODOT funding programs create a “shelf” list of projects ready for programming in the STIP.

As mentioned in our September comment letter, the Portland metropolitan region desires to see comprehensive deliberation of where to apply new or unexpected revenue when it emerges. Currently, with each STIP cycle, the ODOT Fix-It programs develop a list of “shelf” projects prepared to receive funding if new or unexpected funding emerges. While the region supports maintaining this system, other parts of the region’s transportation system have significant gaps and needs, which warrant consideration for new revenue. The region continues to request the OTC consider having the funding programs beyond Fix-It, particularly the Non-Highway Enhance, Safety, and Transportation Options, create a “shelf” list of projects and programs which would allow for the OTC and stakeholders to have a meaningful discussion as to how to expend unexpected revenue when it emerges.

4. For funding dedicated to addressing transportation safety, allocate these funds to where they will be the most effective at reducing serious injuries and fatalities.

The OTC is considering a proposal to create a leveraging program with the additional dedicated safety funding provided by HB2017. Again, while the region supports the efficiencies of leveraging, the use of

the dedicated state safety funds for leveraging may not fund the projects most effective in reducing crashes that result in fatal and serious injuries.

The region desires to see the new HB2017 funding further invested in the All-Roads-Transportation-Safety (ARTS) program because of its data driven, jurisdictionally-blind approach to determine the highest crash locations most in need of funding. The ARTS program provides great benefit to both rural communities and urban areas across the state because of the focus on reducing the most impactful crashes – those that result in fatalities and serious injuries.

Recognizing that the OTC has a desire to see the stakeholder committees engaged directly in the 2021-2024 STIP development while also balancing a desire to be fiscal stewards, the region requests if the safety leverage proposal moves forward, the criteria for the safety leverage program not be limited to state facilities, and rather be allocated using the ARTS approach.

Furthermore, because of the growing number of crashes resulting in serious injuries and fatalities in the Portland metropolitan region, we also request the OTC further invest in the Safety funding category, beyond the amount provided through HB2017, either through the approach suggested previously regarding the funding level for the Enhance Highway program or through another means.

In conclusion, the Portland metropolitan region wants to thank the OTC for considering our comments and providing the opportunity to work together on our metropolitan and statewide TIP. We want to continue this collaboration to achieve our mutual goals. The region urges the OTC to continue engaging stakeholders throughout the development of the 2021-2024 STIP and further engagement with the MPOs individually and through the Oregon Metropolitan Planning Organization Consortium. In representing the Portland metropolitan region, we desire to thoroughly deliberate the options which will fund many transportation projects of mutual interest. We look forward to the opportunities to move forward together.

Sincerely,

Craig Dirksen

JPACT Chair

Metro Council District 3

CC: Region 1 Area Commission on Transportation