

Date: April 15, 2021  
To: Members of the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation  
From: Tyler Frisbee, Deputy Director of Government Affairs and Policy Development  
Subject: JPACT Federal Policy Agenda

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## **I. What we've done in the past for a policy agenda**

JPACT typically adopts a federal legislative policy agenda in addition to regional project requests. In recent years, that agenda has focused on supporting increased multimodal investment, local flexibility and funding, investments in safety, transportation investments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and resiliency. The goal has been to support federal level policy that better aligns with the needs and goals of the region and help position jurisdictions in the region to better compete for federal funds.

## **II. How we're proposing updating the agenda this year**

During the Trump-Pence Administration, there was considerable uncertainty surrounding federal transportation legislation and the obligation of already-appropriated dollars. Reflecting that reality, JPACT's policy agendas focused on making sure that appropriated federal funding was actually obligated.

The situation has changed, however. As we have discussed previously with JPACT, Oregon's congressional delegation is extraordinarily well-positioned to help bring federal monies home to the region and to advance federal transportation policies that support and amplify our successes in Oregon and the greater Portland region.

In addition to the support of our congressional delegation, President Biden's Build Back Better Plan seeks to jumpstart economic recovery with a specific focus on surface transportation infrastructure. The White House has repeatedly emphasized that they want to invest significantly in transportation infrastructure and to use those investments to tackle climate change and racial disparities, and to support job creation. The legislative vehicle for the Build Back Better agenda, and how it intersects with transportation authorization, is not entirely clear at this point, but the need for clear, consistent policy requests from the Portland region remains no matter what legislative process takes shape.

Given the new political landscape, regional and local staff have been working with our lobbying teams to identify potential updates to the JPACT federal transportation legislative agenda. Greater Portland should continue to push for federal policies that help us take advantage of work that we have done, and that help us fund identified needs across the region. For example, we are seeing increased federal interest in the nexus between transportation and climate change, the connection between housing affordability and transportation, and the impact of transportation funding and policy on communities of color. JPACT has historically supported federal policies and funding initiatives to encourage

better tracking, analysis, investment, and support within federal programs to link transportation and land use, encourage multi-modal approaches to transportation, improve safety, and improve outcomes for people of color. We are well situated to support and leverage the federal governments interests in these areas: JPACT's work on the Regional Climate Smart Strategy and the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan mean that the region can point to clear strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our transportation system and improve outcomes for people of color in our region, as well as strategies to reduce congestion and support land use outcomes.

In addition, several issues have emerged or gained increased visibility in the past few years that staff believe are worth highlighting as part of legislative policy agenda. For example:

- Given the need for new infrastructure funding mechanisms, and the engagement of local partners in pricing conversations, staff are recommending that the region continue to encourage federal flexibility and possible federal funding to support state and local VMT and pilot pricing projects. This is intended solely to allow local jurisdictions to pursue pilot projects with support from the federal government, not force or require any jurisdiction to do so.
- As conversations progress around the I-5 Replacement Bridge, the region will want to support the Bridges of National and Regional Significance Program to ensure that there will be significant federal funds dedicated to that project.
- As the region looks for upgrades to our transit system that are systemically focused, such as the Enhanced Bus program, we should encourage the FTA to support and fund these types of improvements rather than solely focusing on large capital projects.
- As many cities and counties are struggling to fund safety, maintenance, and operations on state-owned roads that run through their communities, staff recommend that the region continue to advocate for a federal "orphan highway" program to dedicate federal dollars to address improvements and jurisdictional transfer of state-owned facilities where desired and feasible.

Finally, given the wildfire and landslide issues the region has experienced within the last year, and the regional planning we have undertaken to be better prepared, staff recommend that the legislative agenda highlight the need for investments in resiliency planning, infrastructure upgrades and emergency operations.

### **III. Next Steps**

Regional and local staff have been working on drafting and updating a legislative agenda to have it ready soon for JPACT approval. Staff's goal is to have a regional policy agenda by the end of May so that JPACT members can meet with our congressional delegation as the Build Back Better framework and Transportation Authorization framework become clearer. After a discussion of priorities at JPACT's April meeting, staff will be returning to JPACT in May with a written policy agenda for JPACT's consideration.