

August 30 2017

To:

Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler
Portland City Commissioner Chloe Eudaly
Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish
Portland City Commissioner Dan Saltzman
Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz

CC:

Susan Anderson, Director, Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability
Leah Treat, Director, Portland Bureau of Transportation
Mary Hull Caballero, Auditor, City of Portland
Oregon Transportation Commission

We write to ask you to remove the I-5 Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion project from the Central City Plan. We are Portland residents, local advocacy organizations, and civic leaders concerned that a half-billion dollar freeway expansion project will harm our air quality, damage our efforts to reduce carbon, and limit our ability to invest in underserved neighborhoods. Our concerns about the \$450 million project to expand I-5 through North Portland include:

Freeway expansion won't solve our region's congestion problem. Study after study has shown that freeway expansion projects do not ultimately relieve congestion—instead, research resoundingly indicates that freeway expansion encourages more driving, longer trips and more suburban sprawl. This has proven true in cities across the country, including Los Angeles, Houston, Seattle, Boston, and Denver. We see no evidence as to why this freeway expansion will be any different, and the city's own staff from the Bureau of Transportation have admitted in testimony that there will be little impact on recurring congestion.

Expanding I-5 at Rose Quarter won't meaningfully improve traffic safety. Portland's commitment to Vision Zero, passed with a unanimous Council vote in 2015, embarked us on a data-driven prioritization of resources to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries on our most dangerous streets. Yet this project is projected to result in a minimal reduction in collisions. It does not address the predominant source of Portland's epidemic of traffic violence – our "High Crash Corridors," where 51 percent of Portland's traffic deaths and serious injuries occur.

It's frustrating to see the city think about spending \$450 million on a highway expansion that won't address urgently needed safety issues where they are needed: the dangerous intersections and arterials near senior centers, elementary schools and transit stations, particularly in East Portland.

It's an unnecessary, expensive investment in outdated infrastructure. The projected cost of the expansion - \$450 million - is nearly twice what last November's Municipal Housing Bond raised, seven times the projected revenue of last year's gas tax, and represents a cost of \$700 for every Portland resident. A project with such a hefty price tag (and therefore, a hefty opportunity cost) should be providing significant, longstanding benefits to all the city's residents with investments that will produce the intended results. As documented above, even city staffers working on the project acknowledge the impacts on traffic safety and peak congestion traffic are of dubious benefit. The jobs produced by the construction of this project are also temporary and low in number compared to other infrastructure investments, particularly infrastructure for biking and walking.

Last, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has a well-documented and abysmal record of managing costs for massive freeway projects. There's every reason to believe this project will balloon in cost above half a billion dollars, as many other freeway projects have.

It's detrimental to the health of kids and families. As policymakers, you know that the air quality near Portland's freeways is among the worst in the nation (Mayor Wheeler told the Oregonian back in July that "[t]he state is moving the wrong direction [on air quality protections]; it's our responsibility at the local level to move forward.") Overwhelming scientific evidence suggests children growing up near freeways are more likely to develop cardiac disease, asthma and lung cancer. Widening I-5 will expose these children and their families to even more toxic vehicle emissions, particularly after the failure of efforts in the last Oregon Legislature to regulate toxic emissions from diesel engines.

In addition, this freeway expansion is located immediately adjacent to Harriet Tubman Middle School and in close vicinity to Boise-Eliot/Humboldt Elementary, schools where a majority of students identify as students of color, and where 60% are recognized by the district as economically disadvantaged.

It runs directly contrary to our adopted climate goals. Transportation emissions account for 40 percent of our total emissions, a fact outlined in the City of Portland's Climate Action Plan, adopted in 2015. The Climate Action Plan calls for a 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2040. If the City is serious about this commitment, then every transportation project built from today on needs to push the region towards a significant reduction in carbon emissions. And yet as with other freeway expansions across the country, this project encourages more driving and more carbon emissions, not less.

It's doesn't reflect Portland values. Portland has long pioneered innovative, environmentally friendly transportation, and this historical leadership is a key reason many of us choose to live and work here. Key decisions to reallocate funding for the Mt Hood Freeway towards the Banfield MAX line and to remove Harbor Drive in favor of the Waterfront Park remain bold, visionary decisions that even today guide the growth in our city. The I-5 expansion project is 20th

century solution that directly hinders the City's goals to create a greener, healthier, more equitable place. We think we can do better.

As advocates for more equitable, sustainable and efficient transportation, we ask the City for two things:

- 1) Remove projects #20119, #20120 and #20121 from the Portland Transportation System Plan and work with Metro to remove the same projects from the Regional Transportation Plan.
- 2) Adopt the one tool that has been proven to reduce congestion in cities around the world: road pricing. To use taxpayer dollars efficiently, we also ask that no decisions be made on expanding I-5 until after road pricing is implemented, giving us a good understanding of how much traffic can be reduced through significantly cheaper initiatives. In addition, any revenue raised from tolling should be reinvested to address equity concerns and explore congestion-free transit options to increase travelling capacity along the corridor and throughout the region.

Members of the City Council: It's not too late to stop the freeway.

We understand the challenges that City Council faces at a time of rapid growth and increasing automobile congestion. We also acknowledge that the actual policy solutions and infrastructure investments that will cost-efficiently, equitably, and sustainably address our congestion problems are not easy. However, should Council members choose a path forward on transportation investments that aligns with your commitments to Portland's equity, safety and climate goals, we pledge to support your work wherever we can.

Audubon Society of Portland
OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon
Community Cycling Center
Neighbors for Clean Air
Climate Justice Collaborative
350PDX
Oregon and Southwest Washington Families for Safe Streets
Depave
Eliot Neighborhood Association
Irvington Community Association
Portland Forward
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA)
BikeLoudPDX
Portlanders for Parking Reform
Portland Bus Lane Project
Urban Greenspaces Institute
Bozz Media
Cycle Portland

