



**Date:** Thursday, May 9, 2019

**To:** The Honorable Tammy Baney, Chair  
Oregon Transportation Commission  
Governor Kate Brown

**From:** Aaron Brown, No More Freeway Expansions Coalition

**Subject:** No More Freeways Statement Regarding ODOT Director Hiring

The No More Freeway Expansions Coalition wishes to thank the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) for this opportunity to comment on the job description for the upcoming hire for the next director of the Oregon Department of Transportation. Our coalition was formed nearly two years ago to oppose the Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion currently proposed by the Oregon Department of Transportation, and we helped steward a growing grassroots community movement to oppose freeway expansions across the Portland Metro Region. We helped organize thousands of community comments in opposition to the Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion, and intend to thoroughly track any discussions about the 217 expansion, the 205 expansion and any potential replacement of the I-5 Interstate Bridge.

Our coalition testified in front of the OTC last month urging the commission to reconsider these investments and to put pressure on ODOT to align their investments with community objectives towards reducing traffic congestion, carbon emissions, air pollution, and traffic fatalities. On each of these fronts, these massive freeway expansions proposed for the Rose Quarter, I-205, and Highway 217 represent nothing short of intergenerational theft. Asking future generations to pay decades worth of bonding necessary to build these mammoth concrete artifices to 20th century urban planning stands directly oppositional to any sane, coherent plan to reduce carbon emissions, improve air pollution, tackle transportation affordability, address traffic safety, promote public health initiatives or even tackle traffic congestion.

**There's no getting around this crucial fact - the decision of who to hire for the next head of ODOT is arguably the most carbon-consequential decision that the OTC will make in this young century.** A full 40% of Oregon's carbon emissions come from transportation, and it's the only sector of Oregon's economy in which greenhouse gases are on the rise. All of the studies about Oregon's carbon emissions unequivocally point towards the need for massive reform on transportation policy, investment, and governance if the state is going to have a chance of hitting our ambitious but necessary targets for emission reduction; this is true even with the



potential passage of the Clean Energy Jobs bill currently being considered in the Oregon Legislature. The commitment to “equity and diversity” in the job description rings hollow if the OTC isn’t committed to a fundamental reduction in carbon emissions, as its Oregon’s most vulnerable populations who will experience the wrath of climate change first, and experience it the hardest.

At current life expectancy rates, an Oregonian born today has a fifty percent chance of living to the year 2100. Given the overwhelming international consensus about the grave consequences of anything short of immediate and urgent action on climate change, it is imperative that the OTC rise to this challenge with the hiring of the next Director position. **Given this, we ask for explicit language in the ODOT Director job description in which the position is tasked with setting and executing specific, targets for emission and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction, particularly in the Portland Metro region as a top line priority for the hire.** We believe that developing a community-engaged Oregon decarbonization plan should also be incorporated as a Year One Critical Success Factor for the position.

There’s a false-assumption based into much transportation policy that we can tackle carbon emissions through a complete, widespread electrification of the state’s automobile fleet. It’s simply too energy intensive for Oregon to hit any meaningful carbon goals by replacing sixty gasoline-powered cars with sixty electric cars - profound changes in land use and transportation patterns that encourage more Oregonians to take shorter trips, to live closer to destinations, to see transit, biking, carpooling and walking as more viable options are nothing short of simply necessary, unless ODOT is simply uncommitted to providing a stable climate for the next generation. These profound changes will require substantial policy changes and massive investments in transit and commuter/freight rail that are fundamentally incompatible with ODOT’s current plans of multibillion dollar freeway expansions across the Portland Metro region.

We cannot overstate how urgent it is for ODOT to conduct a fundamental paradigm shift as an agency and develop different relationships with local jurisdictions to prioritize VMT reduction and land use reform. We’ve thoroughly debunked the ostensibly scientific reasoning that ODOT staff provided in justification for the Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion, and we are fully prepared to conduct similar sleuthing to identify shortcomings and slights-of-hand for the other freeway expansions across the region - and given the increased awareness that the threat of climate change represents to every aspect of our way of life, we expect our movement to only grow stronger over the months and years ahead. Fortunately, these reforms not only help us tackle carbon reduction goals, but are additionally complimentary in addressing numerous other local initiatives for public health, congestion reduction, equity and economic mobility.



**We apologize if some on the OTC or within ODOT’s higher rankings consider our stance that “the retirement of Oregon’s freeway industrial complex is nothing short of a moral obligation to future generations” to be hyperbolic, but to paraphrase a climate leader who has been harping on this for a while, it’s merely an inconvenient truth.** The sooner the OTC is willing to join us in conducting meaningful audits of this agency’s undeniable lack of accountability and transparency on initiatives to address traffic violence, traffic congestion, air pollution or carbon emissions, the better.

As OTC members, you took an oath swearing your commitment to public service and stewarding this agency towards better outcomes that benefit current and future generations of Oregonians. Our recommendations for changes to the job description come from a place of “benevolent antagonism” in which we ask the OTC to consider the current and future Oregonians who are counting on the Commission to provide for them a semblance of a normal life without climate change wrecking utter havoc on our planet. Regardless of your decision, our coalition will be there to push for a better future - and the weight of our moral argument will only be bolstered by the ever-strengthening storms, floods, droughts and fires that climate change is bringing to communities across Oregon, across the United States, and across the planet. We urge you to consider how this Commission should conduct itself through this hiring process knowing the dire consequences of anything short of unabashed, unapologetic prioritization of climate justice. The carbon emissions - and the fate of whether Mt Hood will have snow on top of it in decades to come - will be on your hands.

We look forward to working with the OTC and ODOT’s next Director towards these goals, whether in benevolent antagonism or in benevolent cooperation.

Aaron Brown  
No More Freeway Expansions Coalition