

July 7, 2020

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

Metropolitan Policy Committee
c/o Paul Thompson
Lane Council of Governments
859 Willamette, Suite 500, Eugene, OR 97401

Re: Need to act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation

Dear members of the Central Lane MPO policy body:

We are writing to you as policymakers responsible for our regional transportation system.

We know that Oregon is already experiencing statewide impacts of a changing climate:

In August 2018, Portland and the Willamette Valley experienced some of the worst air quality on the planet owing to smoke from wildfires near and far. Ranchers in southern and eastern Oregon reported significant economic losses caused by lack of water from a low winter snowpack and a hot and dry summer. Climate change touches all corners of Oregon, but our frontline communities are most vulnerable. These include the economically disadvantaged and those who depend on natural resources for their livelihood: rural residents including Native Americans.¹

Oregon is no longer gaining ground in its greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts. Emissions from electricity and gas use stayed flat or declined while transportation emissions are rising.²

We know what we need to do.^{3, 4} Indeed, we in Oregon have since the late 1980s.⁵ Now scientists are telling us we are almost out of time.⁶ We need to roll up our sleeves and act.

Regionally, we need to transform to a multi-modal, low-carbon transportation system:

- **Transportation actions:** Make it more attractive for people to carpool, ride the bus, bicycle, use an e-scooter, walk, telecommute, etc. and less attractive to drive alone.
- **Land use actions:** Encourage compact mixed-use development in central areas and close to major transit corridors to result in fewer or shorter motor vehicle trips.

At your last meeting, you discussed your desire for more funding for such transportation actions and that Central Lane MPO doesn't have authority to take land use actions.^{7, 8}

One can always lament the lack of money. But especially in this time of COVID-19 with budgets stretched thin, it is risky to expect more funding any time soon. Rather we need to do as much as we can with the funding we have.

Moreover, while Central Lane MPO as a body might not be authorized to *decide* land use, you can certainly *discuss* land use, aiming to coordinate separate actions taken by cities and Lane County. Indeed, under federal law MPOs are required to undertake a "continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3-C)" planning process.⁹ In particular, federal regulations explicitly call on MPOs to consider land use as it relates to transportation.¹⁰

Although there are many actions we could take, we urge you to prioritize these four:

1. **Compact urban development:** Public transit cannot cost-effectively serve urban sprawl. And investments in active transportation serve only those who live, work or shop close enough to take advantage of them. Although Central Lane MPO cannot *decide* on where or how to do transit-oriented development, missing middle housing or ADUs, you can and must *discuss* the need for such development as part of a “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C)” planning process, communicating with your separate councils and boards. Moreover, cities and Lane County can make such decisions—without the need for any more funding.
2. **Parking:** When we reduce the number of motor vehicle trips, we will need less parking. Begin planning for that now by reducing or eliminating minimum parking requirements and by charging parking for more of its full impacts reducing the supply and increasing the cost of developable land on our community. Moreover, revenues from parking can be reinvested in other transportation options.
3. **Active transportation:** We have heard that at current funding levels it could take decades to build out planned pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. We don’t have that long. Invest all available resources in supporting safe and practical active transportation, considering tactical urbanism^{11,12} to implement improvements faster. When offered funding to support people driving more, say thanks but no thanks, as it would take us in the wrong direction.
4. **Integrated planning and measuring:** The next update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) must *address*—if not necessarily *decide*—not only transportation but also land use and climate change, as the three issues are inextricably interrelated. Moreover, the plan must provide for regular measurement to know how successful we are in meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets.¹³

We the undersigned call on you to not just talk the talk but to walk the walk—quickly.

We will be watching and supporting you in this shared journey.

In haste,

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State Representative (2001–2019)

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Steering Committee Member, Downtown Neighborhood Association

Planner, Cameron McCarthy Landscape Architecture and Planning

¹ *Fourth Oregon Climate Assessment Report*, Oregon Climate Change Research Institute, January 2019, www.occri.net/ocar4.

² *2018 Biennial Report to the Legislature*, Oregon Global Warming Commission, www.keeporegoncool.org/reports.

³ *Central Lane Scenario Planning Final Report*, June 2015, www.lcog.org/367/Central-Lane-Scenario-Planning.

⁴ *Oregon Statewide Transportation Strategy (for Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions)*, March 2013, www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Planning/Pages/STS.aspx.

⁵ In 1988, Gov. Neil Goldschmidt created the Oregon Task Force on Global Warming (OTFGW), charging representatives from 12 state agencies to review current scientific knowledge, to assess global warming impacts on Oregon, and to report on how state agencies proposed to respond. In 1989, the Legislature adopted Senate Bill 576, directing state agencies to develop a strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% below 1988 levels by 2005. In 1990, OTFGW reported that climate change was a “serious threat” and recommended nine general actions the state should take. In addition, ODOT proposed five actions, including actions to make the transportation system more energy-efficient and to coordinate land use with transportation; and DLCD proposed six actions, including actions to support compact urban growth and energy-efficient forms of transportation. See *Report to the Governor and Legislature*, OTFGW, June 1990, digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:12803.

⁶ “The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a shocking report *Global Warming of 1.5°C*. An equally accurate but more evocative title could have been *We’re Almost Out of Time*.” The Brookings Institution, 10/16/18, www.brookings.edu/opinions/were-almost-out-of-time-the-alarming-ipcc-climate-report-and-what-to-do-next.

⁷ Metropolitan Policy Committee, 6/4/20, Item 6b: LCDC Report, www.lcog.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_06042020-670?html=true.

⁸ Metropolitan Policy Committee, 6/4/20, Minutes, www.lcog.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/3158?fileID=11671

⁹ 23 U.S.C. §134(c)(3), www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/23/134.

¹⁰ “The MPO shall consult, as appropriate, with State and local agencies responsible for land use management, natural resources, environmental protection, conservation, and historic preservation concerning the development of the transportation plan. ...” 23 CFR §450.324(g), www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/23/450.324.

¹¹ “European countries have also embraced tactical urbanism, an action-based approach using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions, to promote alternatives to public transportation and private cars.” COVID-19 made cities more bike-friendly—here’s how to keep them that way, World Economic Forum, 6/19/20, www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/covid-19-made-cities-more-bike-friendly-here-s-how-to-keep-them-that-way.

¹² A Tactical Urbanist Response to COVID-19, TransAlt, 4/8/20, medium.com/@TransAlt/a-tactical-urbanist-response-to-covid-19-3f15f81f47c7.

¹³ LCDC has set a target for the Central Lane area to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from light vehicles by the year 2040 by 20% per capita below 2005 levels. See OAR 660-044-0025: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Targets for Other Metropolitan Areas, oregon.public.law/rules/oar_660-044-0025.