

OREGON METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION CONSORTIUM: 2021 TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

The Oregon MPO Consortium (OMPOC) is a partnership of Oregon's eight Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), working together on matters of mutual interest and statewide significance and representing approximately 70% of Oregon's population. OMPOC has long advocated for increased investment in active transportation and transit; a safe transportation system for all Oregonians; and lowering transportation related greenhouse gas emissions.

OMPOC supports congressional leaders and the Biden Administration's bold transportation and infrastructure bill and the clear acknowledgment that these types of investments can put people back to work, rebuild our economy, help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve the quality of life for all Americans, particularly those harmed by previous policies and investments.

OMPOC feels that not only is the need obviously great, but that the time is right to turn many of the themes already reflected in the Moving Forward Act and President Biden's Build Back Better proposal from principles into policy and action. Themes aligning with OMPOC's transportation priorities are:

1. Robustly fund multimodal transportation projects and transportation planning
2. Use transportation investments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector, improve safety on our roads, and improve the resiliency of our transportation system
3. Ensure that transportation investments prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion by identifying and addressing systemic barriers to ensure improved outcomes for everyone, particularly people of color, who have historically been underinvested in or harmed by transportation funding and policy.
4. Invest locally and support local engagement, direction, and planning of the transportation system
5. Improve transit access, impact, and help build more transit projects across the country
6. Ensure smaller MPO needs are included in policy and programming decisions

OMPOC encourages the policies and actions below to address each priority.

1.) Robustly fund multimodal transportation projects and planning

Oregon's MPOs demonstrate the power of transportation investment to help nurture, grow, and support communities and economic development and we have long supported efforts to increase transportation funding. Now, more than ever, those efforts are needed to help put people back to work, building a more efficient, affordable, greener, transportation system that helps everyone access the transportation system they need. We support all proposals on the table to increase transportation funding.

In particular, OMPOC supports policies that will:

- Implement increased long-term, stable funding that supports maintaining and upgrading the federal highway and transit system
- Fund multi-modal transportation projects, through formula funding and competitive grant programs such as RAISE and INFRA. Increase the maximum award amount allowable per grant.
- Simplify applications for discretionary grant programs by creating an online application and benefit-cost analysis (BCA) process so that small, rural and limited-capacity agencies can more easily access federal funds

- Provide dedicated funding for complex, multi-modal, hard to finance bridge projects such as the proposed Projects of National and Regional Significance grant program
- Incorporate innovative financing mechanisms, including Build America Bonds and the TIFIA program, recognizing that these provisions are helpful adjuncts to, but do not replace the need for, robust federal funding
- Support state and local efforts to pilot and implement innovative funding mechanisms such as congestion pricing and mileage-based user fees and federal transition away from the gas tax
- Increase the federal share of funding on transit projects and roadway projects in order to jumpstart building back better and put people back to work
- Dedicate funding to support the facilitation and transfer of orphan highways¹ to local ownership and to ensure that the condition of and infrastructure on these roads reflects their current use

2.) Use transportation investments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector, improve safety on our roads, and increase the resiliency of our transportation system

Oregon's MPOs are focused on making our transportation system safer, more affordable, and more accessible. At the federal level, there are key areas where federal help is needed in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase the resiliency of our transportation system, and improve safety.

Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In the US and in Oregon, the transportation sector is the largest greenhouse gas contributor. Any meaningful action on climate change must involve the transportation system.

There are many meaningful policy actions that will help address climate change through transportation policy. In particular we support policies, and additional funding, to:

- Reinstate performance metrics that require the tracking of greenhouse gas emissions, as outlined in the Moving Forward Act, and develop new metrics to track vehicle miles travelled as key indicators of state progress in tackling climate change
- Increase investments that will reduce transportation related greenhouse gas emissions through alternative fuels and electrification of the transportation system including electric vehicles, micro mobility options, and zero emissions transit vehicle infrastructure
- Update Buy America, consistent with local, federal and state goals to streamline the purchase process and enable the purchase of cleaner transportation equipment while supporting good paying American jobs.²

¹ "Orphan highways" are roads that were once farm-to-market highways and state highways that connected population centers, but now serve as roadways that include businesses, transit, neighborhood centers, and main streets. As a result they are no longer safe for the day-to-day use they have, becoming a place with higher conflict between cars and active transportation users. Creating a new fund to prioritize making the roads better reflect their current, urban uses is vital to meeting climate, safety, and economic development.

² Currently meeting Buy America is unattainable because there are no manufacturers that meet the required thresholds for various low greenhouse gas emissions purchases including cleaner fuel school buses, street sweepers, bicycles for bike share systems, and school bike safety education fleets.

Based on Metro's Climate Smart Strategy, we know that the most important thing we can do to reduce greenhouse gas emissions created by our transportation system is to encourage more people to take transit and walk or bike, rather than drive. Those systems are only viable options for people when they are affordable, efficient, and available. Decades of underfunding our transit system and our active transportation system have made it difficult for many people to choose to walk, bike, or take transit. We urge Congress to work to increase the funding available for transit capital, transit operations and service, and walking and biking projects, in order to give people true climate-friendly options.

Increase the Resiliency of Our Transportation System

The last year has made it clear how vulnerable our state and local transportation system is to natural disasters. As the understanding and concern of a possible Cascadia subduction zone earthquake increases, we must prepare our system for withstanding and supporting recovery post-earthquake. We also need to fund and support responses to wildfires, landslides, flooding, and other natural disasters, and planning to increase our resiliency and improve recovery. There are many ways the federal system interacts with bridges, roadways and other infrastructure that are critical lifelines in case of natural disasters and other emergencies. We ask Congress to advance resiliency as a key outcome in federal grant programs, dedicate funding to support capital projects to improve resiliency, and acknowledge that resiliency needs differ across the country, from flooding and coastal degradation, to earthquake preparedness, to fire safety.

Last year our region experienced unprecedented wildfires within close proximity to our urban areas. We recognized failures within our transportation system in the midst of the crisis as our notification systems and evacuation routes were bombarded with desperate users. Research and experience also demonstrate that climate change and natural hazards have a disproportionate effect on historically marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), people with limited English proficiency, people with low income, youth, seniors, and people with disabilities, who typically have fewer resources and more exposure to environmental hazards, and are, therefore, the most vulnerable to displacement, adverse health effects, job loss, property damage and other effects.

We need dedicated funds for planning, interagency coordination, maintenance and capital improvements to strengthen current emergency routes and identified lifelines. This type of coordinated, multi-jurisdictional planning is complicated, expensive, and valuable because it helps jurisdictions identify and prioritize needs. Identified needs include the reconstruction of critical bridges, and shoring up critical connections across the region to help provide emergency medical treatment, food, water and services after natural disasters. These are big projects that emerge from multi-disciplinary collaboration of emergency management with transportation planning, engineering, operations, transit, port, and public works staff. Local jurisdictions and emergency management agencies need to integrate community resilience building into their planning efforts, which often requires funding beyond what is available. This also means including all communities in this work to ensure that a broad cross section of community voices are represented and provided meaningful opportunities to shape the outcomes.

We encourage the federal government to support these types of planning projects with resiliency planning grants, and to help fund the projects that are prioritized through these coordinated planning efforts to make our region's transportation system more resilient. Investing now will also help accelerate response and recovery times within the region and help ensure equitable outcomes.

Improve Safety

The last ten years have seen a significant increase in the number of people being hit or killed on our roadways. We believe that the federal government should be a partner to local, regional, and state governments that are working to protect lives. OMPOC supports the American Jobs Plan investment of \$20 billion to improve road safety for all users, including increases to existing safety programs and a new Safe Streets for All program to fund state and local 'vision zero' and 'towards vision zero' plans and other improvements to reduce crashes and fatalities, especially for people walking and biking. With the number of people killed while walking or using mobility-assistive devices skyrocketing — increasing by 45 percent over the past decade — we must ensure adequate funding to address long standing need. In addition, we also support:

- An increase in Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) dollars so that jurisdictions can undertake complex, multi-modal safety improvements
- Sub-allocation to local jurisdictions of Highway Safety Improvement Program dollars, to enable local jurisdictions to address safety needs, particularly as the rate of fatal and life-changing crashes on local roads continues to increase
- An update of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices to prioritize and reflect the safety and mobility needs of multimodal users on US roadways and streets

3.) Ensure that transportation investments support improved outcomes for everyone, particularly people of color and low income populations, who have historically been underinvested in or harmed by transportation funding and policy

There is a growing awareness of the negative impacts of past transportation investments toward the BIPOC community and low income populations. The Moving Forward Act incorporates several concrete steps that the federal government can take to help transportation agencies consider the impact of projects on people of color and low income populations, and to create better understanding of the impact that decades of underinvestment and harmful investments have had on communities of color and low income populations. We support the policies in the Moving Forward Act that will:

- Require racial justice analysis in tolling/pricing, grant applications, and the national freight and highway system. This analysis should include both wealth development opportunities resulting from contracting and property ownership as well as how investments improve outcomes for the system user.
- Increase apprenticeship funding and workforce training for the construction, maintenance, and operations of transportation systems
- Require grant applications to discuss alignment with needs of BIPOC communities; and
- Propose incentives in the Capital Investment Grant program for increased density and a range of affordable housing options near transit stations, in order to increase the availability of high quality, transit-accessible affordable housing
- Provide support for local anti-displacement efforts that, in tandem with Capital Investment Grant projects, address the impact of transit investment of households and minority-owned businesses.

The region also supports the American Job Plan proposal to allocate \$20 billion for a new program that will reconnect neighborhoods cut off by historic investments and ensure new projects increase opportunity, advance racial equity, and environmental justice, and promote affordable access.

4.) Invest locally and support local engagement, direction, and planning of the transportation system

Cities, counties and regional agencies are often uniquely suited to develop, engage with, or identify the transportation needs of the people they serve. Recent transportation authorization bills have acknowledged that a one-size fits all policy does not work across a country as vast and diverse as the United States, and that local funding with appropriate accountability is likely to result in transportation investments that are tailored to local needs and challenges.

We ask that any transportation authorization bill:

- Increase the proportion of sub-allocated formula funds to local and regional jurisdictions, including Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ), Transportation Alternatives Program and some portion of Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) funds
- Support local and state flexibility in developing, piloting and implementing projects
- Provide federal financial assistance in bringing orphan highways up to a state of good repair and transferring ownership to support better safety, transit, and economic development outcomes
- Require local and regional support for proposed changes or designations to the National Highway System
- Increase CMAQ funding amounts while maintaining support for attainment areas to ensure their attainment status is continually met.

5.) Improve transit access, impact, and help build more transit projects

As our metropolitan areas grow, we are more dependent on efficient, reliable, convenient ways for people to move. Increasing the accessibility, frequency, reliability, and speed of transit systems is a key priority as we work to expand the reach and access of transit as a viable option statewide. In addition, we know that increasing transit ridership is critical to reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and reducing transportation related greenhouse gas emissions. Transit is also an economic and social lifeline for many people of color, who are disproportionately likely to be dependent on transit and also have inadequate transit access. We call on Congress to make the following legislative changes to support a more comprehensive approach to improving transit systems, and ensure that federal funding keeps up with current need:

- Increase the maximum federal contribution to Small Starts projects, and expand Small Starts project eligibility to include systems improvements, rather than just specific bus lines
- Recognize the past performance of agencies in delivering Conservation Innovation Grants projects on time and on or under budget when making risk assessments and setting contingency levels for New and Small Starts projects
- Support multimodal projects that combine transit system improvements alongside significant safety and access improvements
- Support driver recruitment, training and retention
- Accelerate the transition away from diesel buses to upgrade facilities and infrastructure necessary to purchase, accommodate and maintain zero emission bus fleets
- Advance the future of mobility by leveraging innovative, transferable and technology agnostic solutions for extended payment, an improved travel experience for all customers, and data frameworks for assessing impacts, improvements and efficiencies in transportation

- Provide funding to support the development of affordable intercity and intercommunity public transportation options to allow greater access to good, services, and employment opportunities that are too often lacking in smaller communities

Tax Incentives and Transportation

People make decisions based on convenience, safety, accessibility, and affordability. While the tax code itself often unfairly impacts people of color, tax incentives, particularly those applied at the employer level, can help make accessing different transportation options more affordable for everyone. OMPOC supports efforts to:

- Create parity between the employer-tax benefit for transit and parking
- Increase the current limit for the Bicycle Commuter Act, to better reflect the costs of bike commuting
- Make it more affordable for individuals to electrify their commute, whether that commute is by vehicle or by bike

OMPOC deeply thanks the Oregon delegation for their work on behalf of the state of Oregon and we look forward to supporting you as best we can in our joint efforts for a more sustainable, more equitable, and more accessible transportation system.