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Date: March 16, 2022

From: Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation

To: Eugene Public Works staff

Re: **Suggestions for street improvement bond measure renewal**

Dear Eugene Public Works colleagues,

As you develop options for a bond measure the Eugene City Council could refer to voters in November, we offer the following suggestions.

1. A street improvement bond...

Our community has many unfunded needs: housing, schools, safety, etc.

During the 2008 mayoral election race between Jim Torrey and Kitty Piercy, Eugene's backlog of street repairs—"potholes"—became a prominent campaign issue. In response, new city manager Jon Ruiz and public works director Kurt Corey formed a street repair task force to find a way to address the concerns of voters.¹

The result was Eugene's first street repair bond measure, which was designed to:

- raise funding,
- to address a widely perceived need,
- in a way that voters / taxpayers could trust.

But the very success of the last three bond measures in reducing the backlog of streets needing reconstruction has rendered street repair less critical. Meanwhile, other issues have grown in such importance that the City Council has adopted ambitious goals, plans, and policies:

- **safety,**²

¹ BEST executive director Rob Zako was a member of that original task force but only recently joined the Street Repair Review Panel.

² Adopted in November 2015, the **Vision Zero Resolution** sets as official policy the goal that no loss of life or serious injury on Eugene's transportation system is acceptable.

Adopted in March 2019, the **Vision Zero Action Plan** identifies high-crash corridors and calls for other actions to improve safety. <https://www.eugene-or.gov/4270/Vision-Zero>.

Building a successful community by bringing people together to promote transportation options, safe streets, and walkable neighborhoods.

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- **active transportation**,³
- **efficient transportation options**,⁴
- **equity**,⁵ and
- **climate change**.⁶

Times change: the bond measure should evolve to respond to needs today and tomorrow.

Although it is not realistic to fund all our community's needs all at once, it does make sense to broaden the scope of the bond measure to address our most pressing needs for our streets, as well as for off-street paths. We suggest terming the measure a "street improvement" bond:

- **Street:** As in the past, the bond measure should focus on city-owned local streets ... but also include some funding for off-street multi-use paths.
- **Improvement:** To reflect changing times, claim a partial victory on repairing streets and shift more towards improving them.

2. To fund critical unfunded needs...

The first bond measure embodied a promise from the City to voters / taxpayers: *If you approve higher taxes for specific purposes, you can trust that we will do so.*

Back in 2008, the critical need was potholes. And even though the City of Eugene was already directing much of its share of state and local gas taxes to maintain streets, it wasn't enough. Thus, voters were given an opportunity to fund a critical unfunded need.

³ Adopted in February 2017, the **2035 Transportation System Plan** sets a goal of tripling the percentage of trips made on foot, by bike, and via transit by 2035 (from 2014 levels). <https://www.eugene-or.gov/3941/2035-Transportation-System-Plan>.

Developed in 2017, the **Move EUG: Active Transportation Strategy 2017–2021** helped coordinate efforts towards the active transportation goal. <https://www.eugene-or.gov/2594/MoveEug-Active-Transportation-Strategy>.

⁴ First presented in March 2012, **Envision Eugene** is based on seven pillars, including to "promote compact urban development and efficient transportation options." <https://www.eugene-or.gov/760/Envision-Eugene>.

⁵ In June 2021, the City convened the **Sustainability Equity Panel** to look at transportation and housing policy because these are key to reducing the climate impact of human activity, but these have also historically been areas in which the exclusions faced by marginalized groups are institutionalized and perpetuated. <https://www.eugene-or.gov/4719/Eugenese-2021-Equity-Panel>.

⁶ Adopted in 2014 and updated in 2016, the **Climate Recovery Ordinance** sets a goal to reduce community fossil fuel use by 50% of 2010 levels by 2030. <https://www.eugene-or.gov/3210/Climate-Recovery-Ordinance>.

Adopted in Summer 2020, the **Climate Action Plan 2.0** states: "Emissions from transportation fuels make up 53 percent of Eugene's local emissions. Transportation emissions are primarily from the local combustion of gasoline and diesel fuels used in vehicles. High impact practices in this bucket include fully implementing the Transportation System Plan, adopting policies that promote compact development, and increasing the use of electric vehicles." <https://www.eugene-or.gov/4284/Climate-Action-Plan-20>.

One consideration is that state and local tax revenue from fuel and motor vehicle use cannot be used to fund off-street paths or sidewalks.⁷ But there is no such limit on the use of property tax revenue from GO Bonds.

Today, the most critical unfunded transportation needs are those that address the City of Eugene's goals in its plans. Yet some of those needs have few, if any, other potential sources of funding. Funding from this street improvement measure could advance today's goals for tomorrow.

3. Providing broad benefits...

A tenet of the original bond measure was that if everyone pays, directly (property owners) or indirectly (renters), then most everyone should benefit. Thus, the first three bond measures have included specific lists of projects to be funded, in all parts of the community.

Increasingly, past bond measures have also funded active transportation. Today in line with more recent City goals, plans, and policies, the bond should fund “complete streets,” as well as off-street paths, to benefit those who drive and those who do not.⁸

The next bond should continue to provide broad benefits:

- **Geography:** Specific investments should be identified in each part of the city.
- **Mode:** Funding should go to support people who drive, ride the bus, bicycle, walk, or use a mobility device.

4. With a balance of accountability and flexibility...

It makes sense to continue the split between funding a specific list of projects while also setting aside some funding for projects too small to call out or for unanticipated needs and opportunities, for example, to match federal funds that otherwise would not be available.

We suggest continuing to allocate the majority—say, 75%—to street improvements in all parts of the community. Some of these projects may be just repairs or reconstructions. But where there is an opportunity for “complete street” improvements, those should be included in the project to ensure that taxpayers' money is used efficiently. Providing a concrete list will continue the general purposes of the bond measure, updated for today, and provide voters / taxpayers with specificity and confidence in where their tax money will go.

⁷ Section 3a of Article IX of the **Oregon Constitution** provides that “revenue from taxes on motor vehicle use and fuel ... shall be used exclusively for the construction, reconstruction, improvement, repair, maintenance, operation and use of public highways, roads, streets and roadside rest areas in this state.” https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/Pages/OrConst.aspx.

⁸ Roughly 1 out of 4 Oregonians does not have a driver's license. According to the Oregon DMV, almost 3.1 million Oregonians are licensed to drive. <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/dmv/pages/news/factsstats.aspx>. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Oregon has a population of over 4.2 million people. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR>.

We suggest allocating the remaining funds—say, 25%—for active transportation, for unanticipated needs, or to match federal grants. Setting aside such funding will provide flexibility.

5. At the same tax rate.

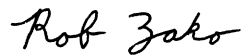
Finally, taxpayers don't like tax increases, or taxes at all.

But renewing an existing tax—at the same rate—does not impose the same burden as adding an entirely new tax, or significantly increasing the tax rate.

Although there might be arguments for increasing or decreasing the tax rate, the most prudent approach is to just keep the rate the same and work with the money thereby made available.

On the other hand, if there are significant unfunded transportation needs not addressed by the bond measure, it would be reasonable to look at ways to address those. But a campaign to address new needs or to significantly increase funding would need to be undertaken more deliberately with more lead time, and better when we are not in a pandemic, with economic uncertainty and war. Perhaps sometime. But not this time.

For BEST,



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