

Press Release

For Immediate Release
March 30, 2022

Media Contact:
Sara Wright, Oregon Environmental Council
saraw@oeconline.org or (971) 353-7962

Representative Khahn Pham, State Representative, HD 46
Rep.KhahnPham@oregonlegislature.gov

Oregon Transportation Commission Decision Prioritizes Highways Over Community Safety

The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) met today to decide how to spend \$412 million in “flexible funds” from the federal government’s Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act. The decision does not deliver on the Oregon Department of Transportation’s (ODOT) stated goals or respond to the overwhelming public demand for smarter transportation investment.

Public comment the OTC received over the last three months asked them to put this one-time federal money toward projects that make it safe and practical for people to bike, walk, and take transit – making it safer for both pedestrians and drivers - to get around their communities. Community members and elected officials from all over the state called for investments in safety and access that their communities need in order to thrive.

ODOT’s [Strategic Action Plan](#) calls for actions in 2022 to “Apply GHG emission standards in making ODOT investment decisions” and “Adjust investment programs to invest in lower emission projects (e.g. bike, walk, transit).”

The OTC adopted a final “scenario” for the flexible funds that does recognize a need for greater investment in public and active transportation - for example, sending more money to Safe Routes to School, a grant program that currently can only fund barely a quarter of the community projects that apply.

However, the scenario does not go far enough to fill deep community needs. It also still allocates \$50 million dollars to the “enhance highways” category of spending, underlining the missed chance for OTC to use these one-time federal funds to make ground on sorely needed climate-forward community investments.

###

“Today’s OTC decision on how to spend the \$412 million in flexible funding from the federal IIJA package was a lost opportunity. In this moment when communities are suffering from high gas prices, climate change, and lack access to transportation, we need to be doubling down on safety, orphan highways, public transit, bike-ped, and local transportation projects, not more of the same business as usual.” - Representative Khanh Pham

“Public engagement is at the heart of land use planning, and the Oregon Transportation Commission consistently heard from Oregonians the need to start investing in walkable, rideable, and accessible transportation options in every corner of Oregon, rather than invest in expensive highway projects. While the proposed OTC budget show progress in the right direction, it doesn’t reflect the overwhelming testimony Oregonians provided, and it’s clear the voices and priorities of Oregonians aren’t being translated into policy” - Brett Morgan, 1000 Friends of Oregon

“As young people living in rural Oregon, we know that our communities are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. In order to create a livable future for our generation and those to come, every single one of our leaders must take bold climate action that reduces greenhouse gases. While the OTC has heard our pleas for a transportation system that prioritizes active transportation and public transit, today they refused to take the necessary steps to ensure that our futures are ones in which our generation can thrive. We cannot continue doing what we’ve always done, yet the OTC continues to fund the status quo and worsen the climate crisis.” - Ukiah Halloran-Steiner (16), Sunrise Rural Oregon

“With today’s vote, the OTC has failed us once again. By choosing to fund the status quo of providing millions of dollars to fossil fuel infrastructure, they have chosen not to invest in projects that prioritize communities that have historically been ignored in Oregon’s transportation system. They have chosen not to invest in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are running out of time. We need more frequent public transit, and safe infrastructure for active transportation, not freeway expansions. We need bold climate action and we need our leaders to protect our futures.” - Robin Sack (16), Sunrise PDX

“In the name of ‘balance,’ Oregon continues to chase large road-widening projects without evidence that these actually reduce congestion for drivers while underinvesting in the safety of people not driving.” - Rob Zako, executive director of Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation (BEST)

“To truly act equitably, the OTC needs to start directing a major percentage of all future transportation funds to under-resourced climate and equity programs that can help us meet our state’s goals and improve the lives of Oregonians most impacted by transportation burdens like safety, air pollution, lack of safe and accessible transportation options and so much more.” - Victoria Paykar, Climate Solutions

“The Oregon Transportation Commission squandered the opportunity to reduce congestion, provide cleaner air, lower carbon emissions or our dependence on fossil fuels by channeling tens of millions of dollars into roads and freeways instead of green infrastructure. Climate leaders don’t widen freeways, and votes like today’s demonstrate that our state’s appointed officials are simply disinterested in pursuing climate leadership through transportation policy as demanded by community advocates across the state.” - Aaron Brown, No More Freeways

OTC and ODOT must move further faster to transition us from the status quo that's harming communities and the planet. That said, we're excited to learn more about the Innovative Mobility Pilot Program intended to help Oregon's communities meet their immediate transportation needs with urgency and through an equity lens." - Sarah Iannarone, The Street Trust and The Street Trust Action Fund

“Our communities need affordable, safe, convenient options for getting around, and we need to make sure that our transportation investments support a stable future climate. Incrementalism won’t get us there. We need big changes in the way we spend our money.” - Sara Wright, Oregon Environmental Council