



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

## Department of Transportation

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September 25, 2013

File Code:

The Honorable Steve Novick  
Commissioner, City of Portland  
1221 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. Suite 210  
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Commissioner Novick,

I heard your response to the question about a road diet on Highway 99W (Barbur Boulevard) at last week's City Club Forum, and thought some background and context would be helpful. There has been considerable discussion and analysis of this issue in recent months that you may not be aware of.

As you know, Highway 99W is a critical north-south corridor connecting Downtown Portland to Downtown Sherwood and neighborhoods in between. It's a road that has been identified by the City of Portland as a Major Emergency Response and Major Truck Route. It is a Seismic Lifeline Route that takes on double the traffic several times a month when a crash closes lanes on I-5. It is also a City-designated Bikeway and Walkway.

As part of discussions about the future of the corridor, some people have suggested a road diet on a portion of Highway 99W in Portland. The idea is to eliminate one northbound travel lane to make space for a dedicated bike lane in both directions across the Newbury and Vermont Bridges.

During deliberations of the Southwest Corridor Plan Steering Committee – a group of elected officials and agency leads working to identify and prioritize public investments between Portland and Sherwood through a comprehensive land use and transportation study – the road diet concept was discussed, but in the end was not selected for early implementation. ODOT and the City of Portland are participants in the plan, along with elected officials from Metro and local governments from throughout the Highway 99W corridor area.

Throughout the Southwest Corridor Plan's extensive public outreach efforts, improving walking, cycling, and transit options without reducing the capacity of Highway 99W has been a consistent message we've received from stakeholders. While there are different ways to quantify the impact of reducing a lane on Highway 99W, there would be an impact to Highway 99W as well as nearby city streets.

The Bicycle Transportation Alliance and others have requested that the road diet concept be advanced now, outside of the Southwest Corridor Plan. Doing so would leave out key stakeholders already at the table and disregard the comprehensive evaluation of high capacity transit options that will begin in October.

During the next phase of the plan, ODOT will work with members of the Steering Committee to ensure that transit options being developed provide a separate facility for people walking or biking on rebuilt Vermont and Newbury Bridges or a separate structure. This will allow everyone to be involved in the decision and improve the transportation infrastructure for all modes.

The Southwest Corridor Plan has gathered all stakeholders in the corridor to make decisions in a coordinated approach. If the Steering Committee were to decide to revisit the road diet concept for early implementation, the committee would need to reach consensus that a road diet would likely be good for all users. Any road diet proposal would have to consider:

- The use of crash data to quantify and prioritize safety problems
- The needs of all users
- The effect on nearby roads and neighborhoods
- The interests of local governments, businesses, residents and transit providers in the region

As a state agency, ODOT would need to make sure that any decision that affects the capacity on Highway 99W is consistent with direction from the Oregon Transportation Commission and State Legislators.

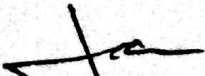
A question came up at the Forum about jurisdictional transfer of Highway 99W from ODOT to the City. Highway 99W is one of several highways in Portland sometimes referred to as "Orphan Highways"—highways built many years ago that today function more like city streets. Other examples include Lombard, 82<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Macadam. As Portland grows, more neighborhoods would like to see these routes operated more like a city street and less like a highway. They would like to see lower speeds, less focus on mobility and freight and more on local access and options for walking, biking and transit. The designation of these roads as highways can be a barrier to meeting these local objectives.

One way the City and ODOT have dealt with this issue is to transfer jurisdiction of a highway to the City, converting the route into a city road, and giving the City full control of design and operation of the roadway. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Grand Avenue, Interstate Avenue, and inner Sandy Boulevard are examples of past jurisdictional transfers. ODOT is open to executing additional transfers if an agreement can be reached with the City. Funding will need to be identified for improvements as part of any agreement. In the past, this has been accomplished through either a major federal investment in transit or one-time capital funding tied to a state transportation revenue package.

In the meantime, ODOT is investing over \$5 million in safety improvements in the corridor and has recommended another \$3.2 million to be funded in the 2016-18 timeframe. Funding is prioritized to areas with the worst documented safety problems. For example, ODOT installed a Rapid Flashing Beacon to improve pedestrian crossing safety near the Rasmussen Apartments just south of Hamilton Street in Portland—a location with a history of crashes involving people walking and cycling. There are no recorded crashes involving pedestrians or cyclists on the Vermont and Newbury Bridges over the past 10 years.

Thank you for your leadership on transportation issues. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason Tell", written over a horizontal line.

Jason Tell  
Region 1 Manager

Cc: Southwest Corridor Plan Steering Committee  
Matthew Garrett, ODOT Director  
Pat Egan, Chair, Oregon Transportation Commission  
Karmen Fore, Governor's Office