

Jonathan Maus ([00:00:00](#)):

Commissioner Hardesty, thanks so much for taking the time to talk with me. I appreciate it.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:00:04](#)):

It's such a pleasure. I appreciate you giving me the invitation and us having this opportunity. It's our first sit down since I've been transportation commissioner.

Jonathan Maus ([00:00:12](#)):

Before we get into some of the meatier stuff, I was wondering if you would be willing to just share a little bit more about yourself. I think quite a few folks, especially since that nice special on OPB, quite a few folks know about your naval service. I think a lot of people know about your civil rights activism and then of course, more recently getting into politics.

Jonathan Maus ([00:00:37](#)):

But is there anything you can share about Jo Ann Hardesty that's maybe a little more of ... Do you have a cat? Do you garden? Is there anything like that that you could share?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:00:47](#)):

I have plants. And I'm happy to say I've been able to keep my plants alive through COVID. I don't have pets because prior to COVID I was never home. I'm single. And so I think it would be wrong to have a pet and never be home. Of course, since I've been home all this time like most people, I've thought about a pet, but I also know that the reality of my life is that I'm always going to be really busy.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:01:17](#)):

Let's see, personally, I love to travel. International travel is my favorite and any place that's warm is on the top of my list. I'm planning to go to the Philippines because I have a friend who just built a co-housing unit in Manila. And so I look forward to those kind of experiences. That's what feeds my soul is travel and immersing myself in another culture and other people's experiences.

Jonathan Maus ([00:01:45](#)):

Well, I appreciate that. Thanks.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:01:46](#)):

You're welcome.

Jonathan Maus ([00:01:48](#)):

Speaking of immersing one's self in a culture, coming over to city hall for me, I was having a lot of memories, thoughts and some emotions about the years past. I think I first came into this building probably in 2005, much different time. This bright-eyed, very naive blogger person that was just starting to observe and document what was going on here.

Jonathan Maus ([00:02:11](#)):

And it really occurs to me that I've just been coming in here so much less even before COVID. I think there's a lot of reasons for that, we're not necessarily going to get into, but one of them was actually

just deferring a bit to a lot of the other issues that really rose up. We were dealing with these in this city, policing issues, homelessness, affordability, a lot of really intense issues.

Jonathan Maus ([00:02:34](#)):

And I was kind of like, "Okay, that's okay, if cycling is not top of mind." But I think for, I would say, at least over 10 years or so, I feel like cycling has really sort of left the building. I wasn't coming in mostly because there was nothing to come to city hall for. I just wasn't coming into the city hall because there wasn't a lot going on.

Jonathan Maus ([00:02:55](#)):

And I think about that, I think about how in years, what sort of happened is in some ways, bike has sort of become a four letter word to some degree in this building. And for a city that has this rich legacy and it was America's cycling capital for so long, I feel like that energy and that culture is not really as strong as it used to be.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:03:19](#)):

And I think it's coming back though.

Jonathan Maus ([00:03:20](#)):

Well, that's what I was going to ... So go ahead-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:03:22](#)):

I think it's coming back, and I think it's coming back from necessity not because people are like getting more excited about bikes, but really because of necessity. We're in a climate crisis. And what we're seeing with the weather extremes is that we're not doing anywhere near enough to actually reduce our automobile vehicle miles traveled or reduce greenhouse gases. And the bottom line is that unless we start acting much more aggressively, we're doomed.

Jonathan Maus ([00:03:52](#)):

Right. On that note, I think our peak in Portland, at least for the US census, for cycling was 2014. We hit this high water mark of 7.2%. Most of any big city in America pretty-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:04:05](#)):

Still seem pretty low, but yeah-

Jonathan Maus ([00:04:06](#)):

Well, yeah, that's a US census number and there's a lot of debate about how accurate that is. But it's the most standardized way we can talk about it. Certainly, if anybody listening to this, there's a lot more than 7% of Portlanders biking around on any given day.

Jonathan Maus ([00:04:19](#)):

So we reach that peak in 2014 and like I said in my initial comments that reflect some of my feelings about how cycling is perceived in Portland among the sort of elected leadership and in city hall, it's flatlining gone down.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:04:33](#)):

Of course, you had Earl Blumenauer as a city commissioner who had a bike pin everywhere he went, right?

Jonathan Maus ([00:04:40](#)):

True. And there's nobody like that in city hall at the moment.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:04:43](#)):

That's right. You do not have someone who bike in day breathe morning, noon and night. So that's the reality of where you are. And that was 2014. You said the last time you felt there was this real big push.

Jonathan Maus ([00:04:56](#)):

Yeah, 2010 or so. But yeah, for the most part.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:04:58](#)):

I got here in 2019. And as you know, when I got here in 2019, all my bureaus were First Responder bureaus with the exception of the police. So I spent my first two years really immersed in what do I do around making sure we send the bike First Responder to the right incident at the right time? And in January, I was given the opportunity lead PBOT.

Jonathan Maus ([00:05:24](#)):

I want to get to that, but kind of back to that note, I asked someone at PBOT for some data just to get a little bit more numbers. And so from 2010 to 2019, Portland added over 23,000 drive-alone commuters. So 2010 is also the year that it spiked up for a lot of people moving to Portland. We just started ... Tons of people come in here, right?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:05:42](#)):

Yes, yes.

Jonathan Maus ([00:05:43](#)):

And you look at the numbers, we added over 23,000 drive-alone commuters. Again, this is all US census. But we only added 2,500 bike rider. So as you said, about the climate change and the climate crisis, that's really, as you know, the opposite of what we need to do to reach a lot of our goals. And that happened despite all of Portland's legacy and our best efforts.

Jonathan Maus ([00:06:02](#)):

So I'm curious what your thoughts are on why you think when people move here or even people that live here now, why are more people choosing to drive instead of choosing to bike?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:06:12](#)):

Because honestly, we don't charge people for the use of our roads with automobiles. People get a free ride and that free ride is going to end relatively soon. And that's the reality. When Sam Adams was mayor, he promised us that we could build apartment complexes with no parking because people who came would ride public transit or be on their bicycles.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:06:35](#)):

And instead what happened was people who moved here brought their two cars and their bicycle, and they clogged up the freeways daily and they used their bikes for recreational activities. So we were sold something in 2014 and beyond that just wasn't realistic. In fact, I just had this big fight yesterday, not a fight at council, but a deliberation about whether or not it made sense for us to allow the MAC Club to build an underground garage in an apartment complex that's two blocks from the MAC Club.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:07:10](#)):

And then they get to decide whether they're going to rent out their spaces or make them free for MAC Club members. I was pretty appalled that that was even a consideration because right now, they don't pay anything. They have free parking on that parking lot. They don't pay on street parking. And it is one of the areas with the most perfect public transit opportunities around.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:07:35](#)):

The decisions that are made at city council level a lot of times aren't based on what's in the best interest of the community, but it's really what's based on what business interests have been able to get their needs met above what would work better for most people. I wish I could say it was not that way, but as I've been here for only three years and even decisions that come to me, sometimes I'm like, "Where did that come from?"

Jonathan Maus ([00:08:01](#)):

Yeah. That issue with the MAC and their parking structure and where they're going to park brings up a really important issue about PBOT revenue and where the revenue comes from. And so you're quite aware, I'm sure, that there's this real tension between PBOT and the fact that so much of their budget comes from parking fines, parking citations, and fossil fuel vehicles driving and being used. Yet that's, again, not in line with what we need to do to face the reality of what's happening with the climate and other issues.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:08:31](#)):

The two biggest things I learned when I first got PBOT was that we had a \$4 billion maintenance backlog and that we were over-reliant on DOTI sources for our funding. I directed PBOT before this next budget process to come back during this next budget process with a plan to actually start shifting us away from those revenue streams.

Jonathan Maus ([00:08:55](#)):

And that's the pricing options and equitable mobility plan, which I think passed in October?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:09:01](#)):

Well, it came to council in October as a report.

Jonathan Maus ([00:09:06](#)):

Thank you for that's an important clarification-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:09:08](#)):

Yes, it is.

Jonathan Maus ([00:09:08](#)):

... because I know with that resolution, it said nine months from this date, PBOT staff has to come back, and maybe Bureau of Development Services and Planning, whoever else might be involved, they have to come back with a list of sort of implementable strategies and really some more tangible ways to execute on this stuff. So we've got eight months to go.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:09:27](#)):

That's right.

Jonathan Maus ([00:09:27](#)):

I know your people are working on this. So what do you think will emerge when they come back?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:09:41](#)):

I think they're going to come back with a proposal that's going to make some people lose their mind because they are going to be ... What we're going to be proposing is that they pay the true cost of maintaining our roadway with their three-ton vehicles that they're driving every day. And the reality is some people can afford to pay more. My concern is making sure that we're not exacerbating the inequity for low income people and other communities who, again, they get pushed out to the edges and then they have to come back into the city to their minimum wage jobs.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:10:17](#)):

And so the plan would be, and I don't know what it's going to look like yet, because PBOT is still working on it. But the vision is that we're going to implement a funding strategy that will charge people maybe different prices, different time of day for utilizing parking meters and parking garages, starting to have the conversation about the SmartParks.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:10:37](#)):

Now the SmartParks, there was a vision around the city owning SmartParks, which is to make it easy for people to come downtown to spend money. But we need to reassess whether or not that is an appropriate use for the city of Portland. I think maybe we should sell the garages if in fact we're only using them to accommodate downtown businesses because there's enough surface parking downtown right now.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:11:00](#)):

So I don't know that ... Long term, I see us getting out of the parking business. Short term, I see us starting to actually make entities pay for the use of the road. So I give you another example, utilities tear up our streets all the time. And there's nothing that actually requires them to come back and help with the maintenance. I think that's ludicrous that we allow people to tear up our streets so they can make money in their private enterprise, and yet the maintenance falls on the taxpayers.

Jonathan Maus ([00:11:30](#)):

And I wonder if in talking about this maintenance backlog, because I know that's a figure for you that really weighs heavily in your mind because you bring it up in any conversation of revenue. And I've

certainly heard it so many times through the years from PBOT, from different PBOT staff, but it occurs to me, especially as we're thinking about potentially, and maybe this is just me, but maybe more transformational shifts, things that really change the status quo in the future, which I think we need. I won't put words in your mouth, but let's just say that there's growing urgency and maybe political feasibility around bigger changes.

Jonathan Maus ([00:12:00](#)):

So when I hear about this big maintenance backlog, all I think about is, well, you know why there's a big maintenance backlog? Because the system is dominated by car use and cars are so heavy. They put a lot of wear and tear on the roads. They require every single bridge to be open and every street to be open all the time, and cars are getting heavier and heavier with EVs and the trucks are getting bigger.

Jonathan Maus ([00:12:19](#)):

So, have you ever connected sort of like this dedication to fixing this maintenance backlog with some of your other goals, which is to dramatically reduce the amount of people driving? And do you think that's sort of a good political way to talk about that and say, "Hey, one way to reduce maintenance is to just maybe shut down some of these streets for people to drive on so they last longer and we could build cheaper streets and paths if we don't have such heavy vehicles on them"?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:12:44](#)):

Well, let me just say, if we would actually fix the streets that we annexed way back when I lived in East Portland, you can go off any main street and you are in potholes and gravel. The wintertime is the most dangerous time to be a pedestrian in East Portland because it's dark all the time and the streets are horrendous.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:13:08](#)):

And so part of it, yes, maybe that we have allowed cars to use the roads unimpeded forever. But the other part is the city has never kept its promise when it annexed both Southwest and East Portland into the city of Portland. And that is what I'm dealing with now. So I'm dealing with a legacy of false promises made by the city to East Portland residents and Southwest Portland residents. And that's a priority for me because it's not like we fixed it and then it's an ill repair. We've never fixed it in the first place.

Jonathan Maus ([00:13:42](#)):

Right, and to go back to what you're saying about the pricing strategy work and how you say that people may lose their minds, maybe you just stumbled upon a good way to frame that making people pay a bit more to use the roads in their cars by saying, "Hey, there are some places where people are getting around in the mud, essentially."

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:14:06](#)):

That's right.

Jonathan Maus ([00:14:06](#)):

I'm going to just stick that in there.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:14:06](#)):

No, I think you're right. And the bottom line is, again, staff is working their heart out to figure out how do we slowly move this forward. Because as you know, ODOT is coming up with their own pricing scheme. So I'm terrified that what's going to end up happening is once again, governments won't talk to each other and the public will wake up one day and find out it costs \$50 every time they drive their automobile out of their driveway.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:14:31](#)):

We have to make sure that we're coordinating this in a way that, again, doesn't overburden low income people. And actually the other thing that we should be doing as we think about the whole mobility issue, I still say bus ticket should be automatic for all school kids. There's no reason why we don't have free transit for school kids.

Jonathan Maus ([00:14:51](#)):

Well, that brings up another thing I want to talk about. Last month, Boston elected a new mayor, Michelle Wu. She took the bus on her first date of work and it was not a photo op. This is someone who has been in politics and has been filmed and photographed on bikes and on transit. She's legit when it comes to that. One of the first things she did was introduced an ordinance that would have a considerable amount of fair free transit service in the city.

Jonathan Maus ([00:15:15](#)):

Is that something that you're looking forward to doing as you get your legs under you in terms of running PBOT?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:15:23](#)):

Let me just say that TriMet gets a bucket load of money. And they don't need the fares. That's the thing, they don't-

Jonathan Maus ([00:15:31](#)):

So why don't they do? People have been clamoring for that for a long time. Why can't we even bring back Fareless Square?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:15:36](#)):

I think the good news is that the new general manager at TriMet seems to be much more open to collaboration and regional opportunities than the previous general manager and the one before that. So I'm hopeful right now that we're at a place with new leadership at TriMet. With all the big transportation projects, Metro TriMet and the city have to work really closely together because otherwise, we will end up with a funding mechanism that will just ... People will just lose their minds because it will not make sense to folks.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:16:18](#)):

If you say to people, "Look, if you're driving during peak times, then it's going to cost you twice as much to drive during peak times as it does during non-peak times." That's easy to understand, where you say to people, "If you park here, it's going to cost you X. But if you park over here, it's going to cost you X more." That might get it a little more complicated.

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:37](#)):

Well, you're saying people are going to lose their mind at the thought of raising more money around parking or raising more money around driving. And I agree, it's going to take a huge education effort from the city of Portland, partly because they're currently still, which was really shocking to me, even like the week of COP26 offering free parking downtown.

Jonathan Maus ([00:16:56](#)):

So at the same time you're telling me that, there's going to be this huge educational battle. Your own bureau is sending out that, "Hey, everybody come down and park for free." So we're sort of like pushing further-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:17:06](#)):

Yeah, that was like the 4th of July weekend, which is something I understand they've done forever. And who knows? I'm new to PBOT so all I can say was it was something that they asked me. We traditionally do this for the 4th of July weekend. And normally, it's because, what, we have fireworks downtown. We have lots of activities. And of course, there's a lot of public transit to come downtown.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:17:29](#)):

But yeah, I did not want to stop that as my first year as PBOT director for something they've done like for a long time. But you're right, it's kind of inconsistent with our values around reducing vehicle miles travel.

Jonathan Maus ([00:17:44](#)):

And on a similar note, in terms of subsidizing transit, I want to switch a little bit and talk a little bit about bike share. When bike share first started being talked about in Portland. I think it's actually 2007 I did the first story. The former mayor had gone to Lyon France and brought back a rental bike. And it was just committed to doing it here. We were one of the first cities. Everybody was really excited about it.

Jonathan Maus ([00:18:07](#)):

It took us a while to actually get them on the ground, but they've been here now. I'm assuming you agree that they've sort of proven themselves as a transportation mode. Another big thing, the reason I bring this up is that the politics of the time necessitated that there was no public money spent on bike share. That was something that I guess from my perspective was just a non-starter. Nobody was even mentioning it, talk about people losing their minds, this new thing called bike share. So that was kind of the political reality of the time.

Jonathan Maus ([00:18:35](#)):

I think things have changed enough. It's been here, it's proven itself. PBOT themselves, in your own budget documents, call it a public transit system. PBOT spends many millions of dollars a year on street car operations and maintenance, but we still don't subsidize Biketown. And I think it's hurting the service. It means that the bikes can't get upgraded. We can't add bikes as often. We can't expand the service areas often, as you'd probably like.

Jonathan Maus ([00:19:02](#)):

So do you see a future where maybe you can broach that subject of saying, "Hey, we are going to put some city money into bike share, into Biketown. So we're not reliant on Nike and so that we can make the service really in our image"?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:19:16](#)):

So again, \$4 billion maintenance backlog does not allow me to think about how I invest in a private entity at the moment to provide additional services. So the reality is the general fund is very limited. And what do we fund from the general fund? We fund police, fire, 911 and parks. So I cannot, I will not ... Unless we can identify funding mechanism that makes sense for us to expand our multimodal transportation options, which is what I hope we're going to do.

Jonathan Maus ([00:19:51](#)):

Well, beyond general fund stuff, at this point, PBOT wouldn't go out for a grant necessarily to expand Biketown. Is that something you'd like to see change? You think it's time to invest in Biketown using maybe other federal grants, stuff like that?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:20:07](#)):

Well, we now have Biketown. We've also got the electric bikes. We've also got scooters. So we have a multitude of multimodal transportation options for folks. I don't think Nike needs us to subsidize them to make Biketown work better.

Jonathan Maus ([00:20:23](#)):

But you think Nike is doing a good job of keeping the system going?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:20:26](#)):

I think they're doing a decent job. I haven't received any complaints at my level yet.

Jonathan Maus ([00:20:31](#)):

So speaking of a biking system, I know you and I have already talked about the Hawthorne Paint and Pave Project. The paint is dry. The pavement is smooth. It's all done. The city just opened it up.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:20:50](#)):

Yeah. We got so many more to come.

Jonathan Maus ([00:20:52](#)):

So we're not going to go back and talk about that. But I do think that it brought up an important thing about direct bicycle access on Portland's main streets. There's that middle section of Hawthorne. There's Mississippi, there's Belmont. Sandy is a really intriguing street that I think in the future, we could have this conversation again. Even 82nd Avenue, which you could potentially be in charge of relatively soon.

Jonathan Maus ([00:21:17](#)):

But it brings up that important issue, I think, of how can this city create bike access on these main streets so that people can safely do the thing we all say we want them to do, window shop, access things without having to come from side streets. And just to kind of sharpen this a little bit, in 2019,

PBOT's own bike coordinator who'd been here for 30 years, he pinned a lot of the sort of blame for the flatlining of bike usage on what he calls a hidden bicycle network that Portland has put so much focus on side streets and neighborhood greenways.

Jonathan Maus ([00:21:53](#)):

And in order to encourage bicycling, you have to put it out there in front of people's face. And part of the way you do that, he was thinking, is you can put it on main street. So I'm just wondering where do you come down on that issue? Do you see a future where Portland is going to build bike lanes in Alberta, bike lanes on Belmont, bike lanes on Sandy, bike lanes on 82nd? How do you see that issue?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:22:18](#)):

Well, I don't see us having any resources to actually go and we make many of the streets.

Jonathan Maus ([00:22:23](#)):

Well, let's say we do. Let's say funding wasn't a problem.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:22:26](#)):

If funding wasn't a problem ... Let me put it this way. One of my goals with PBOT is to create some car-free areas in every part of the city. As far as bicycles are concerned on 82nd Avenue, my direction to PBOT is let's do this different. Let's make this a model for how you bring community together at the beginning of a project, have the community engaged in envisioning of what it looks like and make sure that the community who's there today gets to stay there when the improvements are done.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:23:03](#)):

So PBOT, they've been tasked with really doing this in a way that is counter to the way government traditionally does these kind of projects. And I can tell you at the very beginning, it was like, "Well, we got this federal money that we've got to spend here. But that's federal dollar, so we got to go ..." And I'm like, "That's fine and dandy." However, my values are is that this will be a community driven process and the community will actually work with us to develop the design, to tell us what the safety improvements are that they want to see. And they will work with us from the beginning and they will be working with us throughout the process.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:23:44](#)):

Now, I know that Oregon Walks has a contract to do community engagement and [inaudible 00:23:50] as well around 82nd. And I said to both of those groups, so why are you guys doing your own community engagement process? What we need is to bring all those groups together because I don't want community groups, one community group over here developing a plan, a community group over here developing a plan and then me at the city trying to figure out how do we combine these.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:24:12](#)):

So I'm looking forward to us coming back with a timeline that actually gives the community certainty about where to weigh in, how to weigh in, what the issues are. And that's what they're working on right now.

Jonathan Maus ([00:24:25](#)):

That sounds good. And I know one of your key priorities is you always talk about giving people a stronger voice in city hall, hearing from people, transparency in the process. But there's something though that been sort of nagging at me a little bit, which is, if you look at the city's modal committees, there's a bicycle advisory committee, there's as a pedestrian advisory committee, there's a freight advisory committee and maybe some others I'm missing, but those are the three sort of big ones that I'm tracking.

Jonathan Maus ([00:24:51](#)):

I've been talking to people that are in those and leaders of those. And I talked to some from both the pedestrian one and the bike one who are really burned out and thinking of leaving. And this has been a recurring thing for years because they just don't feel like they have enough teeth. They don't have a strong enough voice to give oversight into, in their case, biking projects that are really biking and walking-centric.

Jonathan Maus ([00:25:12](#)):

So again, as we're coming up to this big, huge investment in 82nd that you're talking about, how can you make sure that the city can give its own advisory committees more oversight and more voice and more teeth in these projects?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:25:24](#)):

Well, honestly, I think we need to do an assessment of every advisory committee the city has because honestly, I don't know any of them that actually get a return on their investment. It's like I've primarily focused on police advisory committees. And I can tell you that it's only one way communication.

Jonathan Maus ([00:25:43](#)):

Well, I'm glad you mentioned that because in my opinion, there is one that does have teeth and has proven in my opinion to have a really outdo influence and that's the freight advisory committee. And it's more than a hunch in my opinion because I think your predecessor did a lot of stuff with office of civic life. And they actually did go through and they changed some of the by-law requirements for all the city advisory committees. So it included the modal committees at PBOT.

Jonathan Maus ([00:26:10](#)):

And of course, guess what? The freight committee, since it's not volunteer, these are people from corporations that are being paid to sit there. Some really powerful people, it turns out, the head of the PBOT. One is also on the ODOT one and all this stuff. They got a carve out. They did not and are not following the by-laws currently. They got a former commissioner to sign a letter that said their committee ... And I saw a lot of people I knew for years on the bike committee and the pedestrian committee were forced to term out because that was part of the new by-laws is saying, "Hey, we want to get new blood in here. It was great. Sounds good."

Jonathan Maus ([00:26:45](#)):

But the freight committee hasn't followed that. They have people on there that have been on there for decades.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:26:49](#)):

That didn't make a lot of sense.

Jonathan Maus ([00:26:50](#)):

They have a special carve out and they said, well ... They found this idea that, well, the city is doing a freight master plan. So we need this expertise in here. And to me, it just really seemed to exemplify that imbalance in power of the modal committees. And I think as we look forward to some of these big conversations, personally, Commissioner Hardesty, I think you're going to want to have a better oversight from some of these modal committees. There's a lot ...

Jonathan Maus ([00:27:17](#)):

And I know you respect people that come and volunteer. There are a lot of really smart people on these pedestrian bicycle advisory committees. So that may be an issue that comes up again. I don't know if you can look into that or maybe if your office or PBOT has looked at maybe rethinking how those committees work. Maybe they're all joining into one and we have an Oregon Transportation Commission. But for PBOT where it's-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:27:39](#)):

I can tell you, what I know now is we have way too many advisory committees. And I have not looked at it yet because of course, hands have been a little filled for the last couple of years or so. But I am concerned about any committee having an outweighed voice, especially as we do these generational transportation improvements. When we talk about 82nd avenue, we're talking about a generational project.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:28:07](#)):

So what I would like to do, and I have not gone through and say how many advisory committees advises PBOT and what are they? I think that would be a first step. I do know that the freight advisory committee thinks that they're the boss of us because I've had that conversation with someone from that committee who said, "We're supposed to be at the table." And I went, "No, I was elected. And when it's time for a table to be developed, you will be invited to it. But no, the buck stops here."

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:28:37](#)):

And they were just appalled that I would actually even have an idea and not talk to them first. So again, I think the good news, and I think this is what your members should know. The good news is this particular city council have four people who are elected by the people in the city of Portland, grassroots, small donor campaigns. So we have three fairly brand new people who don't know yet what they don't know.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:29:04](#)):

I would really encourage your members because every bureau at the city of Portland has an impact on biking and safety in this community. And so I would encourage your members to reach out, build relationships with them because as you know, I can have all kind of great ideas but I need two more votes in order to actually make something happen.

Jonathan Maus ([00:29:26](#)):

I appreciate that. And I guess keeping on that theme of needing votes, I'm hoping to switch gears a little bit to something that I've been really fascinated about for a while now. And it's been interesting and intriguing to see you start to make these connections around traffic violence and gun violence. Why do you think traffic deaths, which as folks know we're facing record amounts of them here in Portland, why do you think they don't get as much attention as gun deaths?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:29:54](#)):

Well, because PBOT doesn't send out a press release every day after a tragedy like that and say, "If we just had more people, we could prevent this from happening." I say that kind of in jest, but it's absolutely true. As you know, I say from my bully pulpit constantly that we are suffering severe vehicle violence and it's leading to death for way too many people.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:30:19](#)):

East Portland has the highest number of high crash quarters. And again, it goes back to this deferred maintenance, this \$4 billion backlog in maintenance. I have worked very hard to make sure that we start investing in those areas that we haven't. And luckily, I got \$450,000 more to invest in that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:30:38](#)):

I think that's one part of it, but I think we're coming up on a year anniversary of a tragic event in Southeast Portland where a man sort of went on a vehicular rampage, killed someone, injured several people-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:30:50](#)):

Injured several more people, yeah.

Jonathan Maus ([00:30:51](#)):

... really scared a lot of people. In my recollection, that is actually, and correct me if I'm wrong, I feel like that's kind of when you started making that really strong connection to traffic violence, which it's great. And I think adding that into the way you see policy in your lens is going to be important. I think you and I would probably be talking about that in the future and maybe get back to it here, and it's great to talk about that. But can you point to something that you've done in this year that would make a tragedy like that less likely to happen today?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:31:19](#)):

Yes. One, we have changed curb cuts so that cars can no longer park up on a corner. And I'm not going to give you a number because my staff will go crazy. Feel free to check with my staff, but we've actually prioritized a significant number of intersections that have had high crashes to actually make sure that cars can't park all the way up to the corner. I lived in Baltimore. We never could park up to the corner. Most major cities, you don't park up to the corner. But we have committed to prioritizing making those intersection improvements.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:31:58](#)):

The other thing that we're doing in high crash areas is actually changing either lighting or walkways off a division. We did a recent improvement where the traffic light actually gives pedestrians a head start like 5 or 10 seconds before automobiles are able to go. I was like, "Oh my gosh, how come we don't have

this everywhere?" It's new technology. So as we continue to make improvements, streets improvements, we're going to be making sure that we put those kind of improvements in as well.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:32:30](#)):

But the other thing is, is we have to slow down automobiles. Bottom line is automobiles go way too darn fast in residential areas and very congested residential areas. I used to live on 166 in Stark, and it was the most dangerous place to try to catch the bus every morning in the dark to come to work. It was terrifying because, A, the cars were extremely fast. If it's raining and dark and the buses wouldn't even stop. If in fact they could see you trying to get across the street, it wouldn't stop.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:33:05](#)):

So because I live in East Portland, people don't have to tell me about how dangerous it is to walk and bike in East Portland. And you want to talk about lack of bike lanes and lack of infrastructure, that's why.

Jonathan Maus ([00:33:17](#)):

I was really intrigued to see the pilot project you did in Mount Scott-Arleta neighborhood, where you actually use some of the traffic calming techniques that the city has, these barrels and signs and sort of barricades, to put those in the street. But you weren't doing it ... Well, it will slow people down, but you were sort of doing it in the way you framed it with saying, there's gun violence here. People are escaping with vehicles. They're shooting from cars. Let's make this connection and use a transportation tool to impact gun violence.

Jonathan Maus ([00:33:44](#)):

And I saw the media. A lot of people laugh at that. They think it's absurd. And of course, you get attacked quite a bit, way more than a lot of other public officials, and people pounced on that.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:33:55](#)):

Yes, they did.

Jonathan Maus ([00:33:56](#)):

And I know it's a pilot project, so can you tell me any more about how it came about, maybe what the next steps might be for that?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:34:02](#)):

I think the most important thing is that the neighborhood came together, identified a problem, and then they reached out to my office and said, "We think if we did X, Y, Z, it would actually calm the neighborhood and people would feel safer." We did not come in and say, "Let us put barrels all over your neighborhood." The good news is that we are in a process now of having a community do a complete a survey, because again, this was a pilot project. This community identified that this is a problem, and we believe this is the solution to this problem.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:34:40](#)):

And so we worked with them, how can we help you? I think it's a model for making sure that community understands that they have a role in solving these community crises that we're in. Government can't do it all. And so I'm appreciative when community members come together and work together and say,

"How do we do that? What do we do? Everybody can't have a police officer on every corner, so what do we do?"

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:35:10](#)):

And yes, I saw the abuse that I received via social media and otherwise about the barrels, and it's fine. I don't mind when people beat me up, but those neighbors are so grateful that, A, city hall listened and B, they were willing to try something that was not what we would normally do. And I'm looking forward to getting those survey results back to find out. And what I'm hearing over and over is that the community is really satisfied with this.

Jonathan Maus ([00:35:40](#)):

So you work with the community to do that project. But you've worked with Dr. Jonathan Jay from School of Public Health in Boston University. And isn't that his sort of his realm, is tying public health outcomes and violence and crime with placemaking and transportation? Can you tell me anything about the work you've done with him and what we can expect from that?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:36:02](#)):

Absolutely. We have him under contract with the Office of Public Safety Transition. He's working directly with Mike Myers. I brought him in two years ago to do a series of workshops with Multnomah County, the DA's office, the sheriff, and the police chief, so that we'd all would have the same language around how do you reduce violence. As you mentioned, Dr. Jonathan Jay is an expert in community violence reduction programs. And so he's been able to share with us his experience and studies across the country in several communities that have actually implemented things like if you have a vacant lot, if you make it green, if you have an area where pedestrians don't feel safe, if you make it car-free and create community gathering spaces, it reduces violence.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:37:04](#)):

What we know is that, and Dr. Jonathan Jay will tell you this, what we know is violence is created when ... What he says is violence happens in places that lack government investments, immensely right.

Jonathan Maus ([00:37:17](#)):

And it reminds me, so it sort of reminds me of your work on Portland Street Response. And I want to switch a little bit to policing here. There are so many intersections between policing and transportation. So looking at your work on Portland Street Response, which for folks that aren't from Portland, is like a non-armed alternative to the Portland Police Bureau so people can get out in the street and respond to serious calls but they don't have weapons, they have special training.

Jonathan Maus ([00:37:41](#)):

And you've definitely pushed for that and made that connection when it comes to sort of the more classic enforcement in policing. But given what you're saying around traffic violence and placemaking, I just wonder if you've thought about how to have that Portland street response model but at PBOT, like a PSR for transportation, if you will.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:38:02](#)):

Oh, already working on it.

Jonathan Maus ([00:38:03](#)):

We have parking enforcement officers already there. So, could they possibly look for people without license plates or people that are parking in the wrong spots or whatever else folks might be doing? Are you looking into sort of maybe mimicking Portland Street Response in the transportation realm? What can you tell me about that?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:38:21](#)):

Well, I can tell you that I am working to get the law change in Salem so that we do not need a police officer to read camera footage of red light camera footage. There's really no reason for us to have a sworn officer to read those traffic citations. So once we get that accomplished in Salem, and this will be my third try. First couple of times there were walkouts, so we didn't get it completed but I'm confident that we'll be able to get it done in a short session next year because it is a priority for several folks.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:38:58](#)):

So once we get that done, then yes, I'm really thinking about how do we expand what we do? Because right now what we do is only we move abandoned automobiles and check to see if automobiles are stolen. And so in PBOT, is there a need for additional, maybe a civilian traffic force? Maybe. I am definitely open to that opportunity, but what I do know is right now, we're still waiting for the red light cameras.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:39:31](#)):

The vendor has been ... I think we may actually end up having to fire this vendor and get another one. I know supply delays are a big issue all around everywhere, but this particular vendor has been extremely unresponsive. So, I keep trying to light the fire. We need more of those.

Jonathan Maus ([00:39:47](#)):

On that note though of automated cameras, it's such an important issue because, well, you support them. I think a lot of people have followed you in sort of converting into thinking that they work and the data certainly backs it up. PBOT has got great data. They lower speeds, they lower deaths. But recently, you actually called out and said, "Hey, I'm going to be working with PPB chief Lovell to get this on." Do you really think he's going to support it? Are you confident that he's going to support it, that the Portland Police Association is going to support this?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:40:15](#)):

No, of course not. That's why I politely asked him to join me in lobbying at the legislature. I know always that Portland Police Association will be our opponent in any changes that we try to make in Salem. But they were our opponent when we put the ballot measure on a ballot to create the first truly independent police oversight board. They didn't like it. They tried to stop the changes that we made in Salem last legislative session. As a former legislator, I can count to 31 and 16, so I will work very closely with our legislative delegation. And again, they're pretty confident and the police will always be the opposition. So, it's okay.

Jonathan Maus ([00:41:00](#)):

And one thing I think that people get wrong about you a lot is that you've never called for completely abolishing all police. You want sort of a better, a more strategic police force, different kind of training,

those sort of things. And I'm curious when it comes to transportation since that's an issue I'm really interested in how you see that playing out. What is the ideal role for armed police officers, the Portland Police Bureau in transportation safety?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:41:26](#)):

A, I think we should make sure that police are not chasing people. There was a recent, horrible accident because the police were chasing people for a misdemeanor crime. The reality is that the question becomes what is the role of police in our community? And honestly, the police role is to solve crime. And police always show up after crime has been committed. They don't have the capacity to stop crime before it happens, and I want them to focus on that.

Jonathan Maus ([00:41:58](#)):

So you're saying that the PPB, the police do have a role in transportation safety issues, but it needs to be more strategic, more focused, maybe a lot smaller footprint.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:42:12](#)):

A much smaller footprint. Now that Chief Lovell has agreed that they're no longer stopping people from minor traffic infractions like a light out or something like that. So if they're not doing that, then the chances of police interacting with people in their vehicles should be really minimal.

Jonathan Maus ([00:42:31](#)):

Well, you say this in the same week that the Portland Police Bureau held a press conference about the high number of traffic fatalities. They put out one of their veteran sergeants of the traffic division who went up in front of everybody and painted a very scary picture of not just the deaths that are happening on Portland roads but tied it directly to their lack of number of police officers to be on the roads.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:42:56](#)):

I am so tired of that rhetoric because here's the bottom line. The bottom line is Portland police today have over 800 people, 800 sworn officers. When the chief tells me only 400 are available to respond in 911 calls at any given time, the logical next question is what does the other half of your workforce do? The fact that I have not been able to get answers to that question is very troubling.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:43:27](#)):

I hear from the public a lot that the police show up and say, "Well, they defunded us. So we are not going to be able to investigate this. We don't have enough people." If those people works for me, they'd be fired because a public servant who goes out and whines to the public about their lack of resources should not be a public servant.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:43:46](#)):

So we have a police force that doesn't, that for the very first time is being held accountable to a budget, being held accountable to outcomes, and they don't like that. So I am not anti-police. I tell abolitionist, I won't live long enough to see abolition. And if you want to work for it on that, fine. But let's work on accountability now. If you want to keep working towards abolition, cool. I'm cool with that because I just won't be around. I'll be long gone by the time that happens.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:44:16](#)):

And so people like to frame me as anti-police. And let me tell you, if Portland Police Bureau was really interested in traffic fatalities, why did they not call PBOT or me as the transportation commissioner for this press conference?

Jonathan Maus ([00:44:29](#)):

Well, another thing that occurred to me as I watched and I listened to Sergeant Engstrom at that press conference was that he continually broadcasts the fact that they have very few officers to enforce the laws, and how they have very few people to stop you if you're drunk driving, very few people to stop you if you're speeding. Now I wonder, if you think that's a mistake, do you think it makes our roads less safe to have the head of the traffic police saying there's basically nobody out there, we're not going to catch you?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:44:56](#)):

I think the police are playing a dangerous game. I think that police are trying to convince the public that they just can't do anything. And I'm kind of appalled that they can't take more than two calls a night with 400 plus, 800 sworn officers. I have said to Chief Lovell over and over again over the last year and a half, "Chief, you are the boss. You can assign people anywhere, right? You don't need specialty units."

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:45:22](#)):

And that's the other thing. Specialty units gets more money. This is about money. Every officer is a traffic officer. Every officer has the ability to write a traffic citation. And so I am appalled that the police continue to use the crises that we're experiencing and the fact that they keep trying to say to the public, "We just don't have enough people." Well, guess what? If you can't do your job with \$240 million, that maybe you are in the wrong profession.

Jonathan Maus ([00:45:54](#)):

Moving on a little bit, but at the same note of another agency that's been difficult to work with when it comes to transportation at times or let's just say challenging ... Yes, I do want to talk a little bit about ODOT. As we were talking about before we hit record here, there's a lot of money coming down the pike.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:46:09](#)):

Yes, there is.

Jonathan Maus ([00:46:10](#)):

Thanks to the Biden infrastructure package. The ODOT folks, what they've said to me is there's a pretty good chunk of change that's probably going to be heading Portland's way. Obviously, I think we're going to compete really well for some of the big discretionary grants. But fundamentally, ODOT controls these purse strings for the most part, a lot of them.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:46:26](#)):

Well, unfortunately, it's the Oregon Transportation Commission that will control a lot of it too.

Jonathan Maus ([00:46:30](#)):

Exactly. Do you trust them to make good decisions?

Jo Ann Hardesty (00:46:34):

Well, let me just say that I am always concerned when people are making decisions about Portland without Portland being in the room. And so I'm going to do everything I can in my position to make sure that if there are committees that are deciding how these dollars are spent, that I get to be a part of it. If there are hearings where we're talking about how these dollars will be distributed, I want to make sure that I'm ... I am an active transportation commissioner. So, I'm making sure that I'm on top of it.

Jo Ann Hardesty (00:47:07):

My briefing says we will get probably about 10% of whatever comes into the state, which doesn't sound that big, but it will help. And it will help us do some of the stuff that we desperately need to do like the safety improvements.

Jonathan Maus (00:47:21):

And so you don't have to do these quick build things, which is great. Really grateful that you got that \$450,000 in the latest budget adjustment. But I'm also a little bit disturbed that as with these record fatalities, we're still doing little quick builds and an amendment budget instead of the really higher price, bigger capital things that might move the needle. So, I want to leave that there but-

Jonathan Maus (00:47:53):

So talking about the ODOT funding that's coming down the pike from the federal government, that's sort of hypothetical at this point, that process is just starting. But you are also involved in ODOT with some stuff that's definitely not hypothetical that's moving right now. And I'm talking about two freeway expansions in the Portland area. Your predecessor, as leader of PBOT, was very vocal about the I-5 Rose Quarter, which is a freeway expansion and surface street project right there in the Lloyd District. Your predecessor made a big thing about walking away and put a stop work order or something I don't think PBOT has ever done on a project, just literally walked away and did a press release and everything about it.

Jonathan Maus (00:48:32):

My sense is you haven't been as vocally opposed, number one. I just want to get your pulse on that. But also, is that stop work order still in effect? Where are you at in terms of interfacing with ODOT right now on that project?

Jo Ann Hardesty (00:48:46):

And so for the Rose Quarter project-

Jonathan Maus (00:48:50):

Rose Quarter, we'll get to the other one.

Jo Ann Hardesty (00:48:51):

So for the Rose Quarter project, my goal when I was assigned in PBOT was to work my way back to the table, because what I know is if you're not at the table, you're for lunch. And so with the Rose Quarter project, I met with ODOT first and their staff and learned about their processes. Then I met with the

Albina Vision Trust. Then I met with the principal of Harriet Tubman Middle School and was just about to then close that loop when the governor called and convened a small group of us, because the goal of course, is to get an IGA, intergovernmental agreement, that allows me to be able to come back to the table.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:49:30](#)):

That was a painful process, but we ultimately came out with a design that we could support. That was a different design than the one ODOT was pushing.

Jonathan Maus ([00:49:41](#)):

And speaking of that and what they're pushing, I see them playing this game of trying to sort of bifurcate that project into the caps over the highway and the surface street stuff, and then have the freeway expansion sort of separate. I'm wondering, and I think it's pretty clear to me that ODOT is going to compete really well for potentially some of this federal money. And because of all the work that folks have done in fighting that I-5 Rose Quarter project and even yourself in terms of making it very clear that they have to invest in that community differently, there's a good chance they'll get that chunk of change and they'll use it to build maybe bigger caps over the highway, more robust that can hold the kind of development the groups like Albina Vision Trust want.

Jonathan Maus ([00:50:22](#)):

So, if ODOT does that and they're able to build even bigger caps than they have proposed now because there's new federal money, but they still expand the freeway like they planned on, would you call that a win? Would you support that?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:50:35](#)):

Well, I do not support adding freeway lanes. If there's an expansion, it will be because of whatever the high speed entity is that will move bodies between Portland and Vancouver. I'm interested in high speed bus, high speed rail, whatever that is. I have no interest, none, in expanding a freeway capacity. And I know that that's a big fight on the other side of the road because they want as many lanes. They want 20 lanes. So that will be the challenge.

Jonathan Maus ([00:51:11](#)):

And so like you said, the other big one is the I-5 expansion in North Portland that's going to go over to Vancouver. ODOT likes to call it the interstate bridge replacement. I don't like that name because it's a five-mile freeway expansion and I think they need to be honest about that. Again, like the Rose Quarter, you have expressed concerns about that project and you've been very engaged in it. But the current iteration of that is looking a lot similar to that old one in terms of the administrative and political inertia around it, the actual designs. That one is looking very similar to the Columbia River crossing, and yes, you've expressed some concerns about that. But do you worry at all that you're putting too much trust in ODOT and if they can address your concerns, you're going to end up voting to support it? How do you balance your concerns with-

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:52:28](#)):

So far, they have shared no designs. So it's kind of hard for me to say I'm going to support or not support something without seeing any kind of designs.

Jonathan Maus ([00:52:38](#)):

But isn't that part of the game they play, is they try to get you far enough along so that there's been so much investment and you get that inertia without showing the designs?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:52:46](#)):

See, I don't have to ... If in fact once I see a design and it expands freeway capacity without the stipulation that I had, which is if it's not about high speed something or other, that should be the only expansion. ODOT is the big griller. They're accustomed to only caring about freeways. And it is my job and my role to make sure that they remember that there are people that are going to be impacted by these decisions that we make. I will never have any shame about walking away from a table if I feel like the state has actually been dishonest in their dealings with the city.

Jonathan Maus ([00:53:30](#)):

And one reason I asked that is because I was reading your statement about the fall budget process, which again, you expressed a lot of very serious concerns about, but in the end you supported it. And I was reading that statement thinking in my head, I wonder if someday I'm going to read the similar statement from Commissioner Hardesty about why she supported freeway expansions in Portland. She's super sorry everybody, but she did it because there's been a lot of good work done and blah, blah, blah. Are you willing to walk away if they don't address your concerns?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:53:56](#)):

I am very happy to walk away. My bottom line is that poor people should not pay more to come back into the city for their minimum wage jobs. That's one, that's a deal breaker. The other thing is, is that again, we're adding ... The goal should be to reduce demand and reduce single vehicle travel. That should be the goal. Can't get ODOT to say those words. They continue to say tolling and other things, but congestion pricing is vital for that freeway project.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:54:32](#)):

And again, we got to make sure that ODOT, I know, will say whatever they need to say because ultimately they are the big dog. But I am the big dog when it comes to the city of Portland transportation. So if I feel like they are being dishonest or not in fact living up to what they said, I have no qualms about walking away.

Jonathan Maus ([00:54:52](#)):

So speaking of being the big dog, it's kind of amazing to hear you say that since the way you talked to me when I first talked to you when you first got this, it certainly wasn't that tone. So that's interesting to hear, but you're heading into a really tough reelection coming up. And I feel like in the past several months, this is just me sort of reading what you've been doing, that you've been leaning into transportation as an issue, the transportation sort of local culture and community, if you will, a little bit more than ever.

Jonathan Maus ([00:55:21](#)):

And I wonder, to me it seems like that's more than just you sort of being more comfortable with the topic. I feel like you're doing that in a more intentional way. Is that what's happening? Do you see transportation and PBOT as a strong issue for you politically?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:55:36](#)):

Well, let me just say that I didn't ask for transportation. January 2nd, the mayor gave it to me. But like I do with any bureau that I have, first, I respect the expertise of the experts that work within those bureaus. And yes, because there's so many major billion dollar transportation projects, I've had to invest much more time in transportation to get up to speed, honestly, because I knew what I knew, but there's just so many things I didn't know. Having said that, this is not just a campaign tactic. This is because I have a bureau that has been neglected for a long, long time in the city of Portland, going back to the days of Vera Katz. And people don't normally say bad things about Vera Katz but that's when the maintenance backlog started, and it has never ever come down. So, it has not been a priority.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:56:32](#)):

And of course, now we're in a climate emergency and we have had the kind of severe weather, both the winter weather where we're snowed in for two weeks and then the summer at 117 degrees. So, transportation is vital to saving a climate. It's not vital to my reelection or it's not vital to my political career, but it's absolutely vital to saving a planet. And since the mayor gave me this opportunity, I'm just going to take it full force and see what I can do to make it better.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:57:05](#)):

And now that with the 82nd Avenue project, the I-5 bridge, the Rose Quarter is unclear right now since the contractors left. What's going to happen with that? I know that that is a major state concern, is that bottleneck there at the Rose Quarter.

Jonathan Maus ([00:57:20](#)):

Given all that, if those talks start happening, say there's a new mayor in 2024 and people start talking in those rooms, are you going to lobby for PBOT? Are you saying you like it now?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:57:31](#)):

I love it now. I did not like it before. I always thought that they were one of the best ran bureaus in the city of Portland. And I was always impressed when they came and briefed me on things that were coming in front of the council. But now that I'm an insider at PBOT, I just realized what incredible work they do.

Jonathan Maus ([00:57:50](#)):

And sort of on that note, we're almost done here, but when I look at PBOT and I look at the leadership at PBOT and sort of like the outcomes and the projects they're putting out and what they've done lately, I'm sort of struck by the difference in your leadership style and your willingness to make people "lose their minds" versus, I basically see the opposite at the top of PBOT leadership when it comes to this stuff. I feel like there's a lot of not wanting to upset the status quo and wanting to do nice little incremental things that keep the activists quiet but don't really upset the major or sort of balance of our roads.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:58:27](#)):

I'm going to push back on that because let me tell you-

Jonathan Maus ([00:58:29](#)):

Go ahead. I was going to ask you about it. Do you see it the same way?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:58:31](#)):

No, I don't see it that way because there are many small businesses that will tell you they would've died without PBOT's creativity and not charging them a penny to be creative about how do you have your business outside in a public space, in a public right of way. Nobody told PBOT to do that. PBOT went into that. I have seen creativity around the car-free streets where we've got community members painting murals on the street and it's being used. Again, nobody told PBOT to do that. That was visionary leadership.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:59:08](#)):

What I know is that during COVID, people had an opportunity to shine in ways that I think in a huge bureaucracy, people rarely get a chance to shine. And I have been really impressed with both the out-of-the-box thinking, the saying, "Well, don't worry about ... Even with a \$50 million budget shortfall, don't worry about it. No, we're just going to help you figure out how to stay in business." The testimonials from small businesses have just been incredible.

Jonathan Maus ([00:59:38](#)):

Well, those small businesses also got free use of the public right of way that they still aren't paying for. All those permits are free. Do you see that potentially ... I got to ask you that question since you brought it up.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:59:48](#)):

Well, yeah, no, no, no.

Jonathan Maus ([00:59:49](#)):

We're going to come do eventually on that space?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([00:59:53](#)):

No, we're going to end up having to have a policy in place about how we share the public right of way, and then who's responsible for its upkeep.

Jonathan Maus ([01:00:01](#)):

And I think you should also maybe give yourself a little more credit on that because I ... And I know COVID was what spurred it, but correct me if I'm wrong. You were already saying that you really supported and believed in car-free spaces. And I think that might helped spurred some of their interests there. But that's great, that's good to hear because I think we do need to be pushing the limits and staying really creative, especially with all the stuff coming down the pikes.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:00:24](#)):

And let me say Chris Warner, he just has that very calm exterior and he's very soft spoken. So, you may get the impression that he's someone that's not going to push. But I can tell you, he does what he needs to do behind the scenes to push in ways that he needs to push. And when he's pushed as far as he can, he comes to me and I push it the rest of the way. And we're a good team. We worked very well together.

Jonathan Maus ([01:00:52](#)):

That's good to hear. Just looking forward a little bit here, I wonder if you could ... I was struck by, I was sort of reading the introduction of the bike plan and I was talking to somebody before I spoke with you that was involved with making it. And they said, "There's a really great statement in there about a vision, about a vision of Portland in the future, talked about bicycling being a fundamental pillar of the city and everywhere you look."

Jonathan Maus ([01:01:15](#)):

So I'm just curious, from your perspective, you could wave magic wand. I don't want to hear about maintenance backlog or funding, okay? Suspend that. But if you look walking in your neighborhood, what would be sort of like the perfect scene, the perfect Portland street of the future? How would it feel and look like?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:01:35](#)):

Well, in Montavilla next to one of my favorite restaurants and coffee shops, there is a car free area that on Sundays has live music, [inaudible 01:01:50] hours. So live music, farmer's market is just down the road, another block. To me, that's an ideal. It's a walkable neighborhood. You can walk to live music. You can get your basic needs met. You can meet with neighbors. You can get fresh produce in your own neighborhood. I think Montavilla actually really represents for me what an ideal neighborhood would be. It's walkable. It's bikeable. It has a lot of pedestrian traffic, and it has activities that you can do without necessarily having to spend money.

Jonathan Maus ([01:02:34](#)):

But how would you change it for the future to make it even better?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:02:38](#)):

I'd create more of those. I think every community deserves a space that's a community space where people can just gather and be, and build community.

Jonathan Maus ([01:02:50](#)):

Is there anything that we didn't talk about, that you want folks to know?

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:02:55](#)):

I don't know. Man, we talked about a lot of stuff. It's the longest interview I've done in a ...

Jonathan Maus ([01:03:00](#)):

Well, Commissioner Hardesty, I really appreciate your time and your willingness to talk.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:03:04](#)):

It is absolutely my pleasure. And I thank you for it. And I know we'll have many more conversations as we move forward because transportation is going to be the big deal for the next five years moving forward, no doubt about that.

Jonathan Maus ([01:03:15](#)):

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Great. Thanks.

Jo Ann Hardesty ([01:03:15](#)):

Thank you.