

September 13, 2022

The Honorable Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon
900 Court Street, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Cc: Interim Senate Committee on Rules and Executive Appointments

Re: Oregon Transportation Commission Appointment Process and Nominee

Dear Governor Brown,

Oregonians have time and time again demanded strong climate goals. To meet these, Oregon needs leaders who are visionary, climate-smart, and capable of and committed to taking our state's transportation system in a new direction. We need leaders connected to the needs of diverse communities across the state and who understand the power of these communities to effect change when they're meaningfully engaged.

Oregonians demand real transportation solutions. Transportation is our state's highest greenhouse gas emitter contributing to climate change and the second highest cost for households after housing. The stealth epidemic of traffic violence costs Oregonians lives and livelihoods. And an estimated one-third of Oregonians don't even drive.

Beyond our climate impact from transportation, Oregon's families, workers, and businesses deserve better. We demand access to a complete transportation system that is safe, reliable, affordable and accessible, and which helps us meet our economic goals.

We know you understand the need for transportation to evolve in the 21st Century. Your Executive Order 20-04 directed state agencies to reduce and regulate greenhouse gas emissions, including those from transportation.

Mindful of these considerations, we ask you to reconsider your current Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) appointment process and nominee.

1) The OTC needs visionary, climate-smart, and diverse leadership in a time of crisis and change.

Heat domes. Wildfires. Traffic fatalities. Congestion. Gentrification. Inflation. This is no time for business as usual. The OTC should be leading the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) into the future, with an unswerving commitment to equity, innovation, and inclusion, leaving behind the costly, deadly, unfair, fossil-fuel dependent systems of the past.

The OTC should also reflect the growing diversity of Oregon and the diversity of people who depend on transportation. Oregon's transportation future must be decided by people who represent more perspectives and more of Oregon's communities.

Even Oregon's historically highway-oriented ODOT is embracing the need to do business differently with its Strategic Action Plan, which prioritizes system modernization, racial equity, and sustainable funding.

Visionary, climate-smart leadership is essential to achieve ODOT's strategy.

2) Your current OTC appointment process fails Oregonians.

The OTC is one of the most powerful unelected decision-making bodies in the state. Every appointment is critical and should be carefully considered, focused on the urgent need for leadership for change, and carried out transparently.

The process for making this appointment thus far has failed to meaningfully engage stakeholders and local jurisdictions, including those who have been effectively engaging with the OTC in the last few years, and undermines Oregon's ideals of open and transparent government.

It is time not to double down on the past, but to look to the future with more inclusive, representative transportation decision-making.

3) Representation matters.

Replacing outgoing Commissioner Alando Simpson, a Black business owner from ODOT Region 1, with a white, retired legislator from Region 2 fails to ensure that the OTC is representative in as many ways as possible, including age, race, ethnicity, income, and geography. Over half Oregon's population resides in the Greater Portland Metro region and billions of dollars are planned for transportation investment in this area in the next decade.

This appointment continues the outdated legacy of appointing only people who regularly get around by private vehicle, ignoring representation of those who are locked out of that opportunity by disability or poverty. It fails to incorporate the concerns of youth and older adults about their own needs for transportation and for their future in an increasingly dire climate crisis.

At this moment, when Oregon is grappling not only with a rapidly escalating climate crisis and an increasingly deadly system, but also taking on enormous debt for large investments and finding new funding to pay for the system, we need new approaches and new ways of thinking. We need commissioners who look forward, who listen to the needs of more people, and who are ready to do the difficult work to reform the system and resolve key regional investments.

The proposed appointment would make the OTC less diverse in every way, and would impede implementation of ODOT's strategic action plan.

4) Pause the current OTC appointment process.

Oregonians will not accept regressive investments in transportation any longer. It is time for the OTC to better represent Oregonians and our needs.

We ask you to pause this process. Do not go forward with this rush appointment. Let the next administration make the decision.

5) The OTC needs to be reformed.

We are eager to see guidelines put in place to ensure that the process to appoint members to the OTC is more open and robust and to institute reforms to ensure the OTC is representative of and responsive to the needs of all Oregonians.

We are in discussions with state legislators interested in seeing the OTC better represent and serve the interests of all Oregonians and the needs of the future.

We are grateful for your consideration and welcome further conversation about this issue.

Signed,

Brett Morgan, 1000 Friends of Oregon

Rob Zako, Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation (BEST)

Vee Paykar, Climate Solutions

Chris Smith, No More Freeways

Sara Wright, Oregon Environmental Council

Ashton Simpson, Oregon Walks

Sarah Iannarone, The Street Trust and The Street Trust Action Fund

Vivian Satterfield, Verde