



SKATS

## SALEM-KEIZER AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

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January 6, 2022

Chair Robert Van Brocklin and Commissioners  
Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC)  
355 Capitol Street NE, MS #11  
Salem, OR 97301-3871

Chair Van Brocklin and Commissioners:

### **Re: SKATS MPO Recommendations on the Use of IIJA Flexible Funds**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input regarding the roughly \$400 million of IIJA flexible funds and how they should be used to meet Oregon's transportation priorities. This additional funding is a historic opportunity to make important investments in Oregon's transportation needs and priorities, and we appreciate that the OTC is asking to hear many voices – including the MPOs in the state – on this topic.

The OTC is requesting input on the following two primary questions:

- Given the investments already made in the STIP and the federal infrastructure bill, how should the OTC allocate flexible funding to best advance the OTC/ODOT Strategic Action Plan and the state's transportation goals?
- What are the specific priorities for investment of funds in public and active transportation?

In response to these questions, the SKATS MPO has four recommendations:

**Recommendation 1** – Expand existing programs and/or develop new programs in the STIP that can direct funds towards active transportation (sidewalks, sidewalk infill, bicycle projects), public transportation and safety projects, especially in communities with a higher proportion of BIPOC persons.

**Recommendation 2** – Provide capital funding for the development and construction of transit centers to make transit more efficient, convenient, comfortable, and safe for all riders.

**Recommendation 3** - To assist Oregon’s metropolitan areas achieve state and local emission reduction requirements, provide either additional funding or a new category of program funding in the STIP which would be available to local jurisdictions for projects that reduce GHG emissions (including projects that link active transportation and transit).

**Recommendation 4** - Add funds to the Enhance category in the STIP. Allow applications for Enhance funds on both state and local facilities of regional and statewide importance that can demonstrate advancing one or more of the Oregon Transportation Plan and Strategic Action Plan goals.

This letter provides additional information about each of these recommendations and examples of specific projects within the SKATS MPO area if IIJA funds were allocated in this manner. We also describe how these recommendations and projects align with the goals and outcomes of the OTC’s **Strategic Action Plan (SAP)**, the Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP), and Governor Brown’s Executive Order 20-04.

### **Recommendations supporting the SAP Goals of Equitable Priority**

According to the 2020 Census, the BIPOC community comprises about one-third of Salem’s population. The SKATS MPO and local jurisdictions have a long track record of funding projects that directly benefit BIPOC residents and communities for traveling to work, school, shopping, and other trips. The map of past and current transportation investments in Salem-Keizer in the last 20 years shows an extensive number of completed and planned projects – such as new sidewalks, sidewalk infill, new bicycle facilities, dozens of mid-block pedestrian safety crossings, and transit enhancements and amenities – throughout SKATS, but particularly, in the northeast and central neighborhoods of Salem and Keizer where there is a higher proportion of the BIPOC community and lower income households. However, there remains a sizeable backlog of needed active transportation and safety projects in these neighborhoods and the funding available to SKATS and our local jurisdictions limits us to develop only a small number of these projects in any 4-year STIP/MTIP cycle. At current funding levels, these communities can expect to wait many years before meeting their needs for a well-connected pedestrian-bicycle-transit system.

- ❖ **Recommendation 1** – Expand existing programs and/or develop new programs in the STIP that can direct funds towards active transportation (sidewalks, sidewalk infill, bicycle projects), public transportation and safety projects, especially in communities with a higher proportion of BIPOC persons.

Lower-income households are generally more reliant than other groups on public transit for their travel needs. Salem-Keizer Transit (aka Cherriots) is focused on expanding service on its Core Network that serve the most heavily used bus routes and also help reduce congestion on those routes. Cherriots is developing a new long-range plan to guide the development of a transit system that serves all residents including those that rely on transit for most of their trips. As part of this work, Cherriots is currently engaged in the planning and design of a new transit center in south Salem followed by a transit center for

east Salem (possibly next to Chemeketa College). The costs of these transit centers are likely to be around \$8 - \$10 million each, which makes them out of reach for either the MPO or Cherriots to fully afford without outside funding assistance.

- ❖ **Recommendation 2** – Provide capital funding for the development and construction of transit centers, in order to make transit more efficient, convenient, comfortable, and safe for all riders.

### **Recommendation supporting the SAP Goals and Strategies for Reliable Funding, Investments in Active Transportation, Reducing VMT, and Reducing Greenhouse Gases**

The SAP’s goal of Sufficient and Reliable Funding includes the following statement: *“We must change today’s funding model to one that invests more money in alternative transportation options, including bikeways, pedestrian routes, and public transportation.”* In addition, the SAP’s goal #3 (Reduce our Carbon Footprint) includes the action of *“Adjust investment programs to invest in lower emission projects (e.g., bike, walk, transit).”* Following almost two years of development, the city of Salem is scheduled to adopt a new *Salem Climate Action Plan (CAP)* in 2022, with the objective of reducing local level GHGs by 50 percent by 2035 and being carbon neutral by 2050. A major strategy in the CAP is for the city and Salem-Keizer Transit to coordinate their efforts with the objective of increasing transit ridership four-fold. Land use changes (as a result of the “Our Salem” update to the city’s comprehensive plan) will promote higher density housing and mixed-use developments, especially along higher frequency transit routes (Cherriots’ adopted *Core Network*) with a related strategy of completing Salem’s sidewalk network within ½ mile of transit routes. The Salem CAP includes 176 strategies in total, 42 of which are land use and transportation strategies and actions including many with an equity-based focus.

- ❖ **Recommendation 3** - To assist Oregon’s metropolitan areas achieve state and local emission reduction requirements, provide either additional funding or a new category of program funding in the STIP which would be available to local jurisdictions for projects that reduce GHG emissions (including projects that link active transportation and transit).

This recommendation supports the goals in the OTC Strategic Action Plan, the *Oregon Statewide Transportation Strategy* (for reducing GHGs), and Governor Brown’s Executive Order 20-04 “...to develop and implement programs that reduce emissions to reach the state’s GHG goals.”

### **Recommendation for Funding Local and Regionally Projects that Advance the OTP Goals of Mobility and Accessibility (Goal 1), Economic Vitality (Goal 3), and Safety and Security (Goal 5)**

The Oregon Transportation Plan is based on seven goals. The table below lists the SKATS MPO’s top priority Enhance projects on the state and urban transportation system. These

projects would advance mobility, economic vitality, safety, and security in the MPO and the Willamette Valley area and should be allowed to compete for IIJA flexible funds with other Enhance projects in the state.

- ❖ **Recommendation 4** – Add funds to the Enhance category in the STIP. Allow applications for Enhance funds for on both state and local facilities of regional and statewide importance that can demonstrate advancing one or more of the Oregon Transportation Plan and Strategic Action Plan goals.

<b>SKATS Area - Priority Enhance Projects</b>	<b>OTP Goals that would be Advanced</b>
<p>Ensuring full funding for the <b>seismic retrofit of OR22 (Center Street) bridge</b> over the Willamette River in downtown Salem. This was a named project in HB2017. The twin bridges in downtown Salem have the highest daily traffic volume on any state highway outside of the Portland metro area. A major seismic event affecting these critical bridges would have a devastating effect to travel and congestion, safety, emergency response, and the local and regional economies. The OTC needs to ensure that this project has sufficient funding for the seismic retrofit.</p>	<p>Mobility and Accessibility</p> <p>Economic Vitality</p> <p>Safety and Security</p>
<p>Provide construction funds for the <b>upgrade of McGilchrist Street</b>, which is the city of Salem’s top priority for transportation enhancements. The project is intended to revitalize an older industrial area (the 468-acre McGilchrist Opportunity Area, next to the Salem Municipal Airport) in south central Salem. The current condition of the road inhibits investment in the area. Additionally, the roadway lacks any provisions for pedestrians or bicyclists and experiences flooding during wet weather. With an improved McGilchrist, the area has significant opportunities for infill and redevelopment which would provide new jobs close to residential areas. McGilchrist Street is currently part of Oregon’s designated Critical Urban Freight Network, making it eligible for federal freight funding. To date, the city and SKATS have invested over \$14 million combined for environmental studies, preliminary design, right of way purchases, and an initial construction phase. To complete the project, \$15 million is needed for the final two phases of construction.</p>	<p>Mobility and Accessibility</p> <p>Economic Vitality</p> <p>Safety and Security</p> <p>Reducing VMT</p>
<p>The OTC adopted the Highway 22W Facility Plan in 2010, which includes <b>developing an interchange at Highway 22W and Highway 51</b> (Independence Highway) which is</p>	<p>Mobility and Accessibility</p>

a top SPIS site. Development of the interchange plan and design work has started, but funds will be needed to complete the right-of-way and initial construction phases.	Safety and Security
From Oregon's IIJA formula funds or national competitive funds, obtain the \$30 million needed to complete all phases of the <b>Interstate-5 Interchange at Donald/Aurora</b> .	Mobility and Accessibility Economic Vitality Safety and Security

Lastly, we believe that SKATS' recommendations described in this letter correspond very closely to prior input to the OTC from local agencies, ACTs, MPOs, other stakeholders and the public in 2020 as top priorities for the 2024-2027 STIP, namely:

- ❖ Support to increase **funding for public and active transportation to advance equity, address climate change**, and enhance accessibility and mobility for all.
- ❖ Support for **Fix-It investments** and reluctance to cut spending on **bridge and pavement preservation** to avoid accelerating system deterioration.
- ❖ Support for **Enhance Highway investments** to reduce congestion and **facility economic development**.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Cathy Clark, Chair  
Salem Keizer Area Transportation Study (SKATS) MPO

cc: SKATS members  
Travis Brouwer, ODOT  
Cooper Brown, ODOT  
Mac Lynde, ODOT  
Sonny Chickering, ODOT  
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