



Mid-Willamette Valley Area Commission on Transportation

A local advisory body chartered by the Oregon Transportation Commission

Chair
Councilor Ken Woods, Jr.
City of Dallas

Vice Chair
Mayor Cathy Clark
City of Keizer

December 22, 2021

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

SUBJECT: MWACT Comments/Recommendations for Use of IIJA Flexible Funds

Chair Van Brocklin and Commissioners:

The Mid-Willamette Valley Area Commission on Transportation (MWACT) is vitally interested and supportive of the state's goals of advancing a multi-modal transportation system. Roads and transportation facilities that serve regional destinations, such as the Oregon Coast and Central Oregon pass through our three-county area, so we must deal with regional and pass-through traffic as well as addressing our local transportation needs. We were, and continue to be supportive of the themes established by the OTC for the 2024-2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) which include increased funding for public and active transportation, support for Fix-it investments, and support for Enhance Highway investments.

Your Commission will be considering various options for allocating funds made available by the IIJA. You have asked for input from various stakeholders - including the state's Area Commissions on Transportation - on priorities for how these new federal transportation funds should be spent. Specifically, you have asked MWACT to address three questions, the recommendations from each will help inform the development of scenarios by ODOT and your Commission. Our input on your questions follows.

"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?"

MWACT has, on several occasions provided the OTC with our project priorities – projects that are already included in the STIP and advance the goals of the Strategic Action Plan. These projects include:

- **I-5/Aurora-Donald Interchange Reconstruction** – the importance of this project in advancing state goals is demonstrated by its inclusion in the HB 2017 – Keep Oregon Moving legislation. This project will improve freight mobility and safety in the I-5 corridor. It is currently only partially funded and providing the additional funding to construct the final solution, a Diverging Diamond Interchange, results in reduced impacts to the community, and will be a significant benefit.

- **OR 22W/OR 51 Interchange** – this intersection in Polk County, which is also inside the boundary of the Salem-Keizer metropolitan area, is an identified in top 5% of safety issues in ODOT's Safety Priority Index System (SPIS). Much previous planning work has been completed by ODOT that establishes the need to replace this intersection with an interchange and design of an interchange is currently underway. Construction of this interchange will improve mobility and safety on this major statewide highway and freight route that connects the central Willamette Valley with the Oregon Coast. ODOT has funding currently to develop a solution at this location but there is no funding available for right-of-way acquisition or construction.
- **Newberg-Dundee Bypass** – MWACT appreciates past efforts by the legislature, OTC, and ODOT to complete Phase 1 of the Bypass and funds for partial development of Phase 2. The Bypass is an important connection that will improve freight mobility but will also be a significant benefit to Newberg and Dundee as reduced traffic will benefit economic development, traffic safety, and access in these downtown areas.
- **OR 18/Valley Junction to Fort Hill** – this project will address congestion and safety issues on this major state highway and freight route that connect the Willamette Valley to the Oregon Coast including the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde's Spirit Mountain Casino. Improvements in this section of highway will have the added benefit of decreasing traffic on Grand Ronde Road between OR 18 and OR 22. This road serves tribal facilities and housing for the Grand Ronde Community, including schools.
- **New Salem Bridge** – congestion on the bridges serving Salem are a local and regional problem. Both existing bridges need significant repairs and it is anticipated that the Marion Street Bridge would not withstand a significant seismic event. MWACT and the community are grateful to the OTC and ODOT for committing funding for a seismic retrofit of the Center Street Bridge however, even with that investment, the region is vulnerable. Completion of an additional Willamette River crossing, in addition to improving congestion, would provide system redundancy for local and regional traffic.

As stated above, the OTC and ODOT have shown their historic commitment to these "legacy" projects by their inclusion in the STIP. MWACT believes a commitment needs to be made to complete projects that have been identified as ongoing priorities that address multi-modal, safety, and mobility issues.

"Do the priorities expressed in 2020 – particularly strong support for public and active transportation and Fix-it – remain? Or have these priorities changed in some ways?"

MWACT has always expressed support for public transportation and Fix-it. In our area, provision of public transportation in rural areas is especially important. Services provided by Cherriots Regional and Yamhill County Transit Area provide important connections to the small cities and rural areas of our three county area. This is especially important for disadvantaged communities in our area that need access to medical, shopping, or other services.

MWACT also recognizes the critical need to support Fix-it programs that keep the system safe and in good operational condition. Pavement improvement, repairing or replacing aging bridges, landslide mitigation, etc. are all important functions that keep our multi-modal transportation system operating.

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MWACT supports needed investments to complete identified safety improvements on state highways in our area -- such as OR 99E and OR 219 -- that continue to have fatal and serious injury crashes.

“What are the specific priorities for investment of funds in public and active transportation?”

As stated above, MWACT strongly supports public transportation that provides services to our smaller communities and rural areas. We also support investments directed toward the Salem Area Mass Transit District (aka – Cherriots) which provides public transit in the Salem-Keizer metropolitan area.

MWACT is also supportive of active transportation as a way to reduce congestion and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Programs such as Safe Routes to Schools and prioritization of projects that support active transportation and improve safety and access for children is important.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important process that will help address transportation needs statewide and in our area. We look forward to further discussions with the OTC and ODOT staff as investment scenarios for the IJIA funds are refined and provided for additional comments.

Sincerely,



Ken Woods, Jr.
MWACT Chair

cc: MWACT members
Travis Brouwer
Cooper Brown
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Sonny Chickering
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