
Transportation Bill - please incentivize bikes as vehicles of climate action

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To: Rep.KenHelm@oregonlegislature.gov, Sen.ElizabethSteinerHayward@oregonlegislature.gov
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Dear Rep. Helm and Sen. Steiner Hayward,

First, thank you for your work in service to Oregonians! I'm writing as a resident of your districts, here in Comm. Malinowski's district of Washington County, but this message is also for the Joint Committee on Transportation.

I'm grateful for Gov. Brown's swift decision to join other states in a coalition to protect the earth's climate, in response to the US having been withdrawn from the Paris agreement.

But I feel Oregon's transportation bill doesn't go far enough to reflect our state's commitment to attain climate goals.

Two things in the transportation bill show a potentially costly disregard for facts about looming climate change & of induced demand caused by road widening:

— the sales tax on new bicycles, which are a climate-friendly mode. Taxing bicycles does not signal a move toward attaining climate change goals.

— road widening projects in densely populated areas, allowing even more passenger cars, widespread use of which is proven to be expensive & bad not only for long term health, but short term health as well: [click for ODOT crash stats \(PDF\)](#). Cars are also the mode responsible for clogging up roads, which slow down freight.

I'm concerned bike commuting is mistakenly being seen as political, rather than simply a mode choice that along with public transit, creates a transportation system far superior to the one we're growing out of, that left people dependent on driving automobiles even when they can't or don't want to. Today, in the unincorporated suburban area I live in, I don't own a car but commute on foot or bicycle, or take the bus or train. It's great having non-car options. I do often wish these options weren't in second or third place to private cars.

I don't think all my neighbors know it's doable, but according to a recent study done by Washington County, many who live or work here have already switched or want to switch to non-car modes. So I'm asking for your help to make these modes even better, safer from cars, & included across the state with a vision & end result of quelled demand for expensive new freeways & widening.

I realize it's tough to break through perceptions that cars are safe, fast, comfortable, kind, friendly, fun, etc., and especially that they represent "freedom." The 4th of July car commercials will start airing on TV soon; these ads are of course carefully developed & paid for by businesses profiting by using those ideas and ideals.

But Oregon's small business bike shops are also trying to survive and make at least some profit, without the benefit of huge government subsidies. They're serving a growing population of people waking up to the value of living in a multi-modal society (not to mention the freeing feeling of riding bicycles). I've been hearing bike shop owners assert that a bike sales tax will harm this burgeoning industry, which hurts the mode as a whole. A tax on them is like allowing those Trees of Heaven (an unlikely name for a weed) to overrun neighborhood gardens. What would happen if the city didn't work to manage those huge weeds or spread the word of their threat as in [this City of Portland article](#)?

I'm glad so many studies have come out showing that people riding bikes already have lots of "skin in the game" (a phrase I've come to abhor in this context for its concrete meanings). We are paying for livable & clean transportation infrastructure through property taxes and our rent, which also bundles in costs of parking whether we own cars or not. Unfortunately, too many would-be bicyclists or walk-to-the-bus transit users who are paying into our green infrastructure are too scared of speeding cars & distracted drivers to use it. Meanwhile, those same studies also show that individuals using cars are doing so far too cheaply, due to aggregate subsidies that could be going toward congestion-relieving bus service or more usable bike infrastructure.

I wish we would turn the tides on this. I'm sure lots of kindergartners who'll otherwise live to experience horrible effects of climate change, wish we would too.

I don't want to find out what our climate will look & feel like in fewer than 20 years if dependence on the prolific use of passenger cars—particularly those fueled by gasoline—is ignored. So I ask your help in my request to the transportation committee members CC'd here, to please at least remove the sales tax on bikes from the transportation bill. Please signal that you promote bicycles as a good & helpful climate action.

From out here in the bike lane, thank you for your voice of support.

Sincerely,
Naomi Fast

Also CC'd: Legislators from neighboring districts, state & local bicycle advocates