

To: ODOT Region 1 Transportation Coordination Task Force

From: Metro Councilor Carlotta Collette

RE: Comments on ACT options

Date: September 12, 2012

Over the past several years, I have participated in numerous discussions about the issues we are addressing in this Task Force. The opinions I am expressing here are not only my personal opinions, but I have made a sincere effort to reflect the opinions of the elected Metro Council, which I represent on this Task Force and which in turn represents the 1.5 million people in the metropolitan area, as well as members of the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT) and numerous people that I've spoken with in rural Clackamas County. Because JPACT did not take a vote on the number or structure of ACTs to serve ODOT Region 1, I am not expressing these opinions as those of JPACT. They do represent the opinion of a majority of JPACT members.

These conversations revolve around at least two fundamental needs:

1. The opportunity for communities with similar conditions, whether suburban, rural, small town, large city or in between, to be able to work together to address their unique and common transportation needs, and
2. The ability to present those needs to the Oregon Transportation Commission so important projects can be better understood by the Commission and prioritized for funding and implementation.

There is a perception, and I believe it is accurate, that the metropolitan Portland area as it is served by JPACT meets the first of those needs for its members. As a federally mandated metropolitan planning organization, JPACT does meet regularly to address the urban transportation system we share, and we do collaborate on a Regional Transportation Plan that includes prioritized projects for which we jointly seek funding. We are required to design that system from a multimodal perspective so that as our transportation system grows we do not violate air quality and other standards set by the federal government to protect the health of our citizens and reduce traffic congestion. The elected Metro Regional Government staffs JPACT and provides a significant amount of the planning budget for the entity out of its general fund.

There are certainly communities both inside and outside the metropolitan area that have expressed concern that JPACT doesn't provide enough representation for specific communities of interest. That is an issue JPACT has addressed in the past and will continue to address. If a metropolitan Region 1 ACT is formed, it makes sense that JPACT would be the core of that ACT with the addition of other members as required by ODOT's ACT membership guidelines. A strong case can also be made that JPACT itself should add members to better represent the makeup of our region as it has grown since JPACT's formation. That is a parallel conversation to the one this Task Force is having.

It is also clear from discussions over nearly a decade now that the non-Metro parts of Clackamas County do not feel they have the opportunity to meet regularly to discuss *in productive ways* their particular transportation needs. I am only familiar with this need as expressed by Clackamas County. Other counties may have the same need.

Clackamas County does have a coordinating committee similar to that in Washington County where rural, suburban, small town and large cities of Clackamas County meet regularly to address their needs. Over the years, the county has made an effort to make the Clackamas County Coordinating Committee more inclusive, such that it now includes in addition to cities, also hamlets and villages, special districts and several agencies, not all of whom are voting members. This county coordinating committee identifies its transportation priorities both inside and outside the Metro district. For the section inside the Metro district, county representatives deliver those priorities to JPACT for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan.

What neither JPACT nor our outlying communities in Region 1 have is direct access to the Oregon Transportation Commission, its modal committees or ODOT management to voice our concerns directly and make our case for project priorities and funding. Only Area Commissions on Transportation have that access.

I believe this is the genesis of this Task Force. There are institutions in place – JPACT and the county coordinating committees – to address the first need for communication. The ODOT transportation project selection processes, both STIP and Connect Oregon, provide opportunities to bring our communities together to discuss our unique and shared needs, and jointly develop project priorities. Each ODOT process has a slightly different structure. Both can be improved by greater proportional representation, but with that improvement, each would function fairly well.

Access to the OTC to urge their understanding of and support for projects, therefore, is the key problem we need to address. **The majority of people with whom I have spoken consistently maintain that two ACTs will give us twice the access to the OTC and its modal and other committees.** This is the unanimous recommendation of the Metro Regional Government. Whether we deliver two separate messages to the OTC or one that we agree on, having two voices in that dialogue is better than none. Similarly, having two ACTs to go together or separately to Salem to lobby for transportation funding is better than none.

The overriding objective that everyone should share is that establishment of our ACTs should lead to broader support for new funding strategies to meet critical transportation needs. A two ACT system could create the base of support for two distinct sets of needs, that of the metropolitan area and that of the surrounding communities.

How the two acts could be shaped is a more complex question. **Our view is that a version of 2A can best be adapted to serve region 1.**

1. **MPO or Urban ACT:**<sup>1</sup>There is a clear need and support for an urban ACT centered on JPACT with the possible addition of adjoining communities who have specifically asked for that access. This is consistent with one of our Task Force’s “Desired Outcomes,” that existing efforts that already work well should not be impeded. The Portland region has a very successful track record of collaborative transportation decision-making. The formation of a metro area ACT should reinforce and support that mechanism to integrate policy development in the Regional Transportation Plan with various project funding opportunities.
2. **Non-MPO ACT:** There has also been a long-standing request for an ACT that would serve those parts of Clackamas County outside the Metro District. This area of Clackamas County has far more residents than many of the other ACTs in Oregon. Its transportation needs, while interwoven with both the urban communities and other communities to the north and south, are also specific to southern and eastern Clackamas County and its economy. A second ACT would serve this area of Clackamas County as well as other communities that share the commute shed around the Portland region and who may wish to join such an ACT.

Finally, if only a single ACT is formed it must include fair representation for the urban part of our region. The Metro area has 1.5 million residents, fully 89 percent of the population of ODOT Region 1. Hood River County has 1.3 percent of the Region 1 population and is 50 miles from the edge of the Metro region. Any structure that does not give the vast majority of Region 1 citizens a weighted voice is simply unfair.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to the Task Force discussion on September 22.