

**TESTIMONY OF
METRO COUNCIL PRESIDENT DAVID BRAGDON
PORTLAND, OREGON REGION**

**BEFORE THE
US SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT
AND PUBLIC WORKS**

TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2009

2:30 P.M.

**“ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH LAND USE
AND TRANSPORTATION POLICY IN THE PORTLAND, OREGON REGION”**



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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, I am David Bragdon, President of the Metro Council, the popularly-elected metropolitan planning organization in the Portland, Oregon region.

Our 1.4 million residents are typical Americans. We get a few more inches of rain, our consumption of beer is in the upper quartile, and we recycle more of our garbage than most Americans do, but we're roughly average in most other statistical respects. Like most Americans, most Oregonians get around by car.

Yet, there is evidence that our greenhouse gas emissions are stable or being reduced. If in many ways we are typical Americans, how is it that in this one important way we are trending in a different direction than the rest of the country?

We think there are two key reasons: First, although most people get around the Portland area by car, *we are not forced to do so*, and many of us can take advantage of other choices: a good transit network and the ability to bike or walk.

Because of those choices, transit ridership grew at twice the rate of population growth between 1990 and 2000 and by more than 13 percent last year. And, people in the Portland region are seven times more likely to commute by bike.

The second difference is that although we drive, we simply drive less. There's a reason why: we don't have to drive as much. We take care of more of our needs – work, shopping, entertainment – closer to home than people can do in regions where jobs and housing are dispersed farther apart.

Our regional strategy originally was developed to save money, revitalize existing neighborhoods, reduce air pollution, and preserve agricultural lands. Fortunately, it has become a strategy against climate change as well.

There are three simple elements to the strategy:

- One: An Urban Growth Boundary prevents wasteful urban sprawl. Rather than spending tax dollars extending new roads, water, sewers and other services farther out, we make more efficient use of existing development and infrastructure.
- Two: We use a variety of tools to concentrate development, particularly around transit lines, and to encourage neighborhoods which have a mixture of uses.
- Three: While continuing to invest in and maintain roads, we used a combination of state, local and federal funds to construct more than 60 miles of light rail and to operate an extensive bus network. We also invested in lanes and trails to accommodate

thousands of commuters on bikes, who otherwise would be in cars at far greater expense to the taxpayer and themselves.

The results of this strategy are starting to show:

- We are growing more compact: Nationally the land consumed for suburbanization outstrips the growth in population by a factor of two or three. The Portland area is consuming new land at a rate equal to or less than the rate of population growth.
- We are the 24th most populous metro area in the nation, but rank 8th in transit ridership per capita. Bike usage has grown three-fold across our major downtown bridges in a decade, and the Brookings Institute ranked us the 5th most walkable region in the nation.
- The Portland region's per capita vehicle miles traveled has been trending downward for more than a decade. Also, our average trip length is shrinking. As a result, according to the Texas Transportation Institute's Urban Mobility Report, the impact of congestion per motorist is far less than in other metro areas and less than our size would suggest.
- Our population drives 20 percent less per day than people in other large metro areas, which means, according to CEOs for Cities, about \$1.1 Billion a year in savings on fuel, auto maintenance, insurance and other costs.

Our experience offers two lessons for our fellow Americans:

First, our nation cannot successfully address climate change without reforming our transportation system. And second, we cannot successfully reform our transportation system without improving the way our communities are designed, and reducing the need for people to drive. We can't simply reform the "supply" of transportation; we have to reduce "demand" – and the way our communities are laid out is a major determinant of demand.

Changing fuels and reducing emissions from vehicles are good efforts as far as they go, but they will not get us the change we need unless we also reduce miles traveled.

Which brings me to how this committee can help.

Since Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton proposed construction of canals, the federal role in transportation has been hotly debated. One thing not debatable is that whether it was President Lincoln signing the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862 or President Eisenhower signing the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the federal influence on transportation is far-reaching. Even though zoning is a local matter, mid-Twentieth Century federal policy to fund new road

and sewer and water infrastructure and facilitate home mortgages shaped the auto-oriented land use pattern now prevalent in localities throughout the country. Those development patterns were not produced by a free market, but are the result of implicit and explicit federal, state and local expenditures and regulations. Your committee has the chance to reshape those influences for the next fifty years.

This committee is uniquely situated to address climate change through transportation reform. Just as Senator Moynihan and this Committee used the 1990 update of the Clean Air Act to create aspirations for the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, you can use climate change legislation to set goals which can be addressed in the upcoming transportation authorization.

Take full advantage of this opportunity:

1. Link the planning requirements of the pending climate change bill to the planning requirements of the upcoming transportation bill. In our region, we are already undertaking to model the greenhouse gas impact of transportation projects.
2. Link your Highway Bill to the Transit Bill which will emerge from the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. Use the transit bill to essentially create carbon off-sets for the highway bill.
3. Reduce administrative obstacles that prevent localities from using Surface Transportation Program funds for non-highway uses, and overhaul the federally-mandated design standards which often require the most expensively engineered solutions.
4. Include an aggressive program to address metropolitan mobility in the transportation bill. Urban regions provide the nation's biggest opportunity for reductions in transportation-related greenhouse gases – give them the tools to do so.

The Americans of the Portland region will do our part for our country, but we need the Senate's leadership. Thank you for the opportunity to participate today.