

December 27, 2019

To:

Karen Swirsky

The City of Bend

Transportation Planning Department

RE: The 2040 Transportation System Plan

Good Afternoon Ms. Swirsky,

I am writing in regard to the 2040 transportation plan for the City of Bend. According to the local radio stations, comments are requested prior to the end of the year.

After reviewing the transportation plan, I would reject the entirety of the plan as a “whole” and then request that the plan go back to the committees for review. First, the City has done little to nothing to help deal with the high cost of rent and living in town. There are solutions that have not even been considered or used by the City (but since that is not part of this letter, I digress). The truth is that increasing financial burdens on the citizens of Bend, especially now (in light of the political drama going on), is detrimental and I would not recommend adding to the burdens of the taxpayers who pay to keep the City running. As there are projects which should be complete, the focus should be on priority projects for the vehicular commuters in town and not the pedestrian / bicycle community (as that is a luxury that can come later on). Additionally, many of the proposals made in the transportation plan will have a massive negative socio-economic impact on Bend and we certainly do not need more problems for the people living here (especially not worse gas mileage). I understand that traffic is an issue and have made it a priority in many of my past communications with the City, but the lack of appropriate planning and care has led to the hodge-podge of problems throughout the City you are trying to deal with now and it is my opinion that many of the recommended plans will only serve to make that worse.

I am also very concerned about the City’s “priorities”. There are roads in Bend, Oregon, that I believe are within the City limits that have potholes and risers busting through the pavement that are over 1 foot tall. There are incomplete roads that lead to dirt near major schools. The City has spent a lot of money constantly re-paving Reed Market, NW Crossing, and Mt. Washington (where the wealthiest in the City live), while the more suburban neighborhoods go completely ignored for years. The City is slamming in construction in tight-knit areas without consideration for future road-widening or having developers share in the cost (against City code). Businesses and the people working here are suffering from a high cost of living and traffic jams next to locations where national retail chain restaurants have gone out of business. Now, the City wants to put in Pedestrian bridges? The bus system has to stop in the middle of major access roads to load and off-load passengers because the City has not built properly designed turn-outs. The parking throughout Bend is atrocious and the City wants to put in modernized pedestrian bridges to act like a major metropolis without even improving its parking infrastructure like a small town. This is extremely poor design planning and worse, evidence of a severe misuse of the public funds.

Furthermore, some of the projects being suggested are further “half”-attempts at short-term fixes. We do not need to keep wasting our money on more short-term fixes. If the citizens are to be financially tax-burdened, especially to the point of losing their homes, the least we can do is consider long-term solutions and begin making those changes, now. I understand that the City has historically not listened

to the majority of people who live here, taking votes from a minority / biased sampling of the citizens, but I would ask the City to please suspend moving forward on these projects until some additional efforts are applied to the transportation plan with the first and foremost concern being: the flow of traffic (which naturally encompasses safety, commerce, pedestrians, etc.), and nothing else. Next, I would recommend that the City price this work out to [a] company [companies] that is not some company making promises they cannot keep or over-charging the city simply because they can.. Furthermore, I would like to see the City offer to contract out [at least some of] the work to a non-prevailing wage source to complete this work, especially where the Citizens have already [recently] paid.

While I did not cover every topic (because almost everything needs addressed). Below are my comments on the most important plans (to try and keep this short as it is already longer than I intended):

Project C-19 / Project S-1: Reed Market / Bend Parkway modifications:

I have reviewed the planned changes in this area and am not sure that it sufficiently identifies the traffic congestion problem. Part of the congestion occurs as a result of 4 lanes of traffic being condensed before, during, and after the bridge crossing. The bridge was built sufficient to handle the load in that area, but the North-bound off-ramp from Highway 97 is a problem (insomuch as there should be no left hand turn located there), and access to the West-bound bridge from the Southbound 3rd street is another issue. I have made recommendations, but would appreciate seeing the TSP stop consideration of changes there until that is more properly planned out and with additional engineering input. The fact is: no matter how many extensions to the on/off ramp are added, traffic will still be congested due to the North-South lights along 3rd street backing up cars trying to get through. The impact construction will have on the business commute in Bend could be detrimental considering the time it takes to complete any transportation projects in Bend when coupled with a lack of long term solutions.

Project S-2: Moving the rail system vs a bridge:

I appreciate that the City is looking into this proposal that I and many others have been making for some time. The concern is about the City's planning and financial analysis of this project. Many years ago, the citizens of Bend were told there was going to be a bridge here and that \$31 million was going to fund the bridge¹. Then, that was "clarified" and only \$18 million was going to fund the bridge. Then, the citizens were told that there was no way to build a bridge for only \$18 million. This is very concerning. This is a 3-way intersection that is starting to see more and more usage and that the citizens have already spent a considerable amount of money to improve. First, we need to know that the City is finding an alternate funding source, not double-taxing the citizens for planning problems that occurred only 10+ years ago. Second, the financial impact for shutting down this area of road (on the economic transportation alone) is going to be detrimental. It took the City many more years than planned to complete Reed Market's build-outs before and the consequences range from vehicular damage on cut / unfinished roads, to delays, to lack of access to roads through Bend. This impacts schools, shipping, and mail delivery – but it impacts the citizens who live here and those costs must be accounted for, both in concern to their direct, financial impact and the social impacts. That said: I previously recommended, and continue to recommend completely re-routing the train around town. As I have previously notified the City, the average cost for re-routing a railroad is about \$1 - \$2 million per mile of track². A 30-mile

¹ [Bulletin Article, 2006](#)

² [Railway Construction, 2019](#), [Compass International, 2017](#)

re-route would actually be less than, or comparable to, the current cost of building a 4+-lane bridge over Reed Market at the railroad, would solve a massive amount of problems elsewhere in town, open up new access points throughout Bend, and it could be constructed so that it does not interrupt traffic. The only bridge / crossing would be across Highway 20 which could either be a signaled stop (since Highway 20 is not overly heavily travelled), or something simpler like a bridge that is co-funded by the State of Oregon.

Project C-14: Reed Market & 15th Street Upgrades:

This is very concerning after the \$31 million transportation charge to the citizens of Bend that included upgrading this round-a-bout from before, the extended time it took to complete, and the subsequent drop in speed limits going from 15th street East along Reed Market that have almost negated any benefit there was to improving transportation flow in the first place. We, the citizens of Bend, rich or poor, do not want to continue to be taxed for the same intersections over and over again, have our lives put on hold for poor implementation of improvements, and go through 4 more years of heartache trying to use the main arterial that Reed Market Road has become during construction. Poor planning in transportation with a “shotgun” short-term fix is what caused these problems in the first place and it is not going to be remedied by failing to address the causality that has lead up to the current status of the City’s transportation grid.

Project M-2: Parrell road upgrade:

Why? Parrell road has been an alternative to 3rd street for a very long time and does not see a “lot” of traffic, but sufficiently helps off-set the traffic from 3rd Street. Spending money to fix a road that is in good condition or expand bike lanes (where bike lanes already exist), is an additional waste of taxpayer resources. Furthermore, it pushes traffic onto 3rd street and if I’ve learned anything here in Bend in the past 25 years, it’s that the City will do road work along multiple roadways that are near one another (presumably to optimize resources) inadvertently making it a nightmare for people to use ANY of the alternate routes. People rely upon Parrell road for their commute to work and school and interruption of this road affects countless neighborhoods, puts out a lot of folks on the South end of town who are already enduring transportation hardships and for now, the road needs to be left alone. I understand that there are not sidewalks along every inch of Parrell road: it is not needed at this time. 3rd Street, running one block of Parrell road and in parallel, has sidewalks for that entire stretch of road. (And, until the City comes up with a plan for clearing sidewalks during snow vs. making the businesses do it ... and keep the roads cleared, this would be an ineffective use of taxpayer money).

Project C-9: Wall and Revere works

If you are planning on streamlining the traffic – the railroad just East of that will continue to be a problem and this will be expensive and another add-on burden for the citizens at a later date. I would like to see this project reconsidered until all factors are properly considered.

Project C-17: Powers road pedestrian / bicycle improvements at Parkway

Again – we do not need to put a greater burden on taxpayers to fund more bicycle access. Every single Parkway crossing does not require a bike path. Furthermore – there is a light at this intersection. It already allows people to cross. The over-capacity is a failure to have more East-West access points, which did not help when the City cuts off other roads or continually uses a 2-1 lane consolidation

methodology which IS the cause for bottlenecks. Furthermore, this is counter-intuitive planning: 1) If you were to improve the ease of turning transitions, such as a Southbound off-ramp – you lose the benefit of better controlling “safe” pedestrian / bicycle crossings; 2) if you add a covered bridge for pedestrian crossing you make it more difficult for the handicapped, and bicyclists still do not have a stream-lined path over (safer, but not efficient); and 3) any road construction you do here, on top of the expensive work already performed, creates a long-term bottleneck for the citizens of Bend and folks passing through and adds to the financial burden. This needs to be re-considered.

Project S-3: Bear Creek / Pettigrew Single Lane Round-a-Bout

Here we are: a perfect example of the type of low-level planning that is going to result in a need (later on) to expand, double-charging the citizens of Bend, including the cost to have to tear up the roads and does not take into consideration the importance of open-roads for 9-1-1 emergency services. The fact that the City is even contemplating a single lane round-a-bout in face of all the other problems caused by single lane round-a-bouts is beyond disturbing. I recommend a 2-lane round-a-bout at minimum and further oversight of a committee making “these types” of decisions (that will later just burden and hurt Bend).

Project M-14: Improving crossings of RR and Wilson/Franklin

First, why are we discussing this if there is a chance to re-locate the railroad? Let’s stop spending money on incremental or temporary fixes that become more of a headache and financial burden than they’re worth. Also, this does not need to be a major area of bicycle / pedestrian passing when the Scott St. to NW Colorado Ave is a very short distance North and provides sufficient access. Furthermore, until the City presents the type of pedestrian / bicycle bridge they are considering, given the historical over-broad use of money for wasteful projects (like stone / concrete construction vs. steel framing), and the additional vertical obstructions throughout the City – I would like to see this in greater construction detail before approving.

Project M-8/C-10/M-9: Improving bicycle /pedestrian crossings at Greenwood, Franklin, and Hawthorne

This is another questionable priority. These are some of the busiest intersections for commercial traffic and construction causes unnecessary delays and is extremely costly when this is already an extremely suburban / urban area with alternate routes. What needs to be studied or considered are signs encouraging people to go North and South of those two intersections for crossing. Additionally, I fail to see how the City of Bend justifies the installation of pedestrian / bicycle bridges over roads in a City that are dilapidated, full of potholes (damaging vehicles), and incomplete? If we are to discuss the term “priorities”, then let’s be serious about what is and is not a priority and properly within budget, starting with fixing the existing road system in Bend. I am not saying that the City does not try to keep up with the potholes – but it currently cannot keep up with those, the ice build-up, and the flooding. I would be interested to see if any of those issues have been “priority” addressed for existing infrastructure (because I know roads that have gone untreated for years) or whether or not the planning committees have considered the snow and flooding impacts?

Project M-9: Footbridge over railroad

WHY? Bicycles and pedestrians can cross the railroad without a footbridge. The bridge can use metal grating at these locations to allow for a smoother crossing for the disabled without constructing major,

expensive foot bridges. This type of “planning” worries me as to whether or not the transportation committee is wasting taxpayer dollars for “wild” or “resort/retirement” lifestyle planning without any sincere and reasonable effort to treat Bend like a “City”? Additionally, if there is a chance that the City will “finally” seriously consider re-locating the railroad – all of this would be an extreme waste of taxpayer dollars.

Mid-Term Projects, Project C-31 – Widening 27th Street

Here is another example of why we have to keep spending money, over and over again, and the problems are right back where they were: Widen 27th street, or don't. Every-time that road bottlenecks back into a 1-lane road, there are problems. It should have been adjusted to, and stayed at, 4 lanes (2 North, 2 South) with turn-off lanes throughout. Failure to do so has led to accidents and other problems. Please stop wasting our money on plans that follow in the footsteps of past failures that will just cost us more in the future.

Near Term Projects, Route 2:

It's nice to see the City trying to make access to affordable housing easier. However, the City has failed, on an epic scale, to take any actions which would encourage affordable housing and increasing the traffic and demand in these areas will only serve to raise the rental rates at those locations.

Furthermore, the City's planning, thus far, promises to set a massive tax burden on the properties within the City which will increase the city-wide rental rates and decrease renter's income. This is counter-intuitive, damaging, and a complete and utter disregard for the people who live in Bend. This type of thinking and planning HAS to stop.

Missing Projects, because the planning committees either disregarded the public or just did not prioritize properly:

- Completing Brentwood Ave to American Lane and creating a 3-way intersection / signal (or round-a-bout).
- Reed Market / Brookwood round-a-bout: Although the single lane West-side Reed Market (after the Highway 97 bridge) was a terrible idea and the single-lane-round-a-bout without consideration for extending Reed Market as a double-lane road was a bad idea: the round-a-bout has created a massive bottleneck. For a period of 3 – 4 hours every afternoon and 1 – 2 hours every morning (average 6 hours per day), Reed Market is getting backed up in every direction. Worse, the Eastbound lane before the round-a-bout is going up-hill, which, during winter, creates dangerously icy slopes and has resulted in a lot of flooding at the lower (Eastward) round-a-bout.
- Down-town Parking Garage: The City is planning dozens of projects for pedestrians and bicyclists and in doing so, is being extremely inconsiderate of the people who drive, live, and work in the City and pay for said projects (failing in meeting the fundamental, priority responsibilities). Additionally, the City's planning is counter-intuitive to the stated goals of making pedestrian / bicycling transportation easier and increasing tourist traffic: 1) There will be fewer cars lining the streets if 5 – 6 story (minimum) parking garages are implemented (opening up / easing access for pedestrians / bicyclists); 2) The down-town area is in need of a parking garage (or two) and like Portland, can be a commercial garage with day-passes, hourly passes, and seasonal / annual

passes, all of which are very inexpensive and yet, make a lot of money (especially for private developers).

- I am disappointed to see expansion area projects: the main body of the City needs work. Once you improve the City, then expand.
- Mapping: It's neat to build all these "alternate" routes. Will people use them? Maybe, but only if they know they exist. The City needs to issue a "free" brochure to the folks living here showing all the new road changes so people can pre-plan alternative routes. Otherwise – it will be more bottle-necks. The same should hold true for the detours during this period of time (or something available online).

Every decade (and even more frequently), the people reach out to the City Councilors, planners, and other staff to remind them that the "City" is growing. It is not possible to be the Central hub of traffic in Oregon and not eventually attract attention. And, for almost 30 years, I have watched the Council deny the idea of "growth", while expanding urban growth boundaries, and somehow believing that Bend will be a retirement community for the ultra-wealthy (while failing to construct anything that would attract or keep those folks). The City of Bend has had countless opportunities to bolster business growth (both small and large scale – although the people have just done it for themselves without the City's help), increase tourism, and even help mitigate the cost of living. And, time and again, the City Councilors, planners, and other staff seem to be on a massive scale of disconnection between real life and their roles as City staff (this is not for everyone – and those folks know who they are).

What is the City of Bend? It is a town divided in half, and then again in half, with each quarter group that represents some level of It is what I would refer to as a: "Hodge Podge". With all of the unique opportunities that Central Oregon has had to become a burgeoning community with a vast diversity of peoples and a great City: that dream has not happened in my near 30 years, here. I can only imagine how upsetting that is for folks who have lived here their whole lives. I have witnessed the local news, and City representatives, laughing at citizens who say that Bend "sucks" or make negative comments, ignoring the very real, very hurtful, and very terrible reasons that many people living here are unhappy and only endure it because it is their "home". Every town has its fair share of problems, but many of Bend's problems can be fixed. That's what makes this so frustrating. When I read that there are millions of dollars in pedestrian bridges to be built, but the City won't fix its roads or put more snow-plows out during winter, there is a problem.

The "neighborhood" planning in January of 2019 for the transportation folks: 200 people and 86 written feedbacks. These represented the highest priorities. 100,000 people live in Bend. A quarter of a million live throughout Central Oregon and use these roads, daily. I estimate that over half a million pass through the City annually. But, "200" people decided the priority? That means that the City is going to tax 100,000+ people and countless businesses, hundreds of millions of dollars for the "City's" transportation priority basis of just 0.2% of the population (that's just "in City"). This is the type of disconnect and misrepresentation that I previously referred to and it is supported by the numbers. What's worse is that there were over 1,000 participants in June and July of 2018. No wonder people stop trying to give feedback to the City. Most of the people's complaints and comments were ignored or rejected while the City took the time to record all of the ways it reached out to people (which was wholly insufficient), take tons of promotional pictures at the open house, and then use that small sampling as another promotional tool to demonstrate the ethnic, disability, and age politically correct sensitivity of the City (read the Outreach Milestones from the TSP website).

The people have stopped responding because the Transportation goals are not in line with the needs of the citizens, but you're going to charge us for special interest projects. It's almost enough to make one wonder whether or not there should be additional concerns about inappropriate conflicts of interest (especially with the constant over-runs and delays in project performance throughout the City, in the past 2 decades). Even recently, I've been through the City's planning department on a project and discovered the major problems with efficiency, the enforcement of codes that are counter-productive to business type and neighborhood design, and the major costs involved. Sadly, Bend is not healthy.

In conclusion:

- I reject the entire transportation system plan. There is no need to "rush" into spending the taxpayers' money immediately. We can get independent studies that cost far less than what we're being charged and better system analysis if needed, or the planning committees can reconsider some of their proposals.
- Before moving forward, there needs to be a council / planning committee discussion on the priorities of Bend. It cannot be based on a 0.2% sampling of the entire population if the entire population is going to spend tens to hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Once priorities are determined (and that should always be traffic flow), rather than disturb the few, major arteries that the citizens have, we should be looking at new solutions, first. Once those are completed and traffic is eased up (and alternative routes are available), we can then go back and look at improving the existing East-West / North-Side corridors.
- Some improvements are needed, such as the incoming highway at the North end of town, completing roads that are unfinished, and fixing roads throughout town. Sure, we need more sidewalks – but we can get there, eventually, after we have roads that can be driven upon without damaging vehicles.
- The railroad needs re-routed, one way or another.
- A 5 – 6+ story parking garage is needed downtown, not more hotels.
- The City needs to first identify alternative funding sources, especially where taxpayers have already been massively burdened, before proceeding. It's unfortunate, but with the right people, it can be done.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. I know it was long, but unfortunately, the same issues keep popping up over and over without resolve, which requires recapping everything that has occurred and re-re-addressing the same issues. I pray that you will do the right thing for the people who live here, pay rent and taxes (etc) and help pay for Bend, Oregon to keep operating, and not some special interest agenda.

Regards,

Dan Kennedy, csa
President