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Clackamas leaders: Appreciative of tolling pause, but vigilant

Tootie Smith, Paul Savas, Martha Schrader, Mark Shull, Ben West, Brian Hodson, Michael Milch, Joe Buck, Denyse McGriff, Frank Bubenik and Rory Bialostosky

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Clackamas County officials found plenty of shortcomings in the ODOT I-205 Tolling Project Environmental Assessment.

Toll collections are paused, but our work is not done.

We appreciate that Governor Kotek and the Oregon Legislature recognized that the Oregon Department of Transportation needed to slow down and to find a solution that works for everyone. Because of their actions, tolls will not be collected until 2026 and a new legislative subcommittee on Transportation Planning has been formed.

What does all of that mean?

The tolling pause is a result of many local voices speaking with a unified message — ODOT's tolling proposal would encourage motorists to divert off the interstate into local neighborhoods, decrease safety on our streets and worsen the local congestion that already exists today. Our residents are concerned that these cut through trips will lead to accidents, pollution and noise, and will make it tougher for local residents to get safely to work, school and daily activities. After many attempts by all of our communities to share concerns or propose alternatives to lessen the effects of tolling, it became clear ODOT officials felt they could not slow down nor deviate from the direction of the past Legislature, and thus were unable to respond to local concerns.

The recent direction from Governor Kotek to pause the collection of tolls is an important shift in this process. With a pause, now there is time to get this right. But ODOT must actually slow down and consider solutions that do not cause diversion.

Hope rests on the newly formed Subcommittee on Transportation Planning established by Senate President Rob Wagner and House Speaker Dan Rayfield. This subcommittee has been charged with reviewing the planning and implementation of ODOT's major transportation projects and to consider a range of funding options, which may include tolling. As this group is being formed, it is critical to weave local perspectives into the process.

We recognize ODOT has funding needs, and we know that revenue is decreasing while transportation project costs are increasing. As local agencies, we share and understand these same challenges. However, transportation funding should not be so burdensome that it encourages drivers to leave the interstate just to avoid tolls. Solutions need to encourage business and freight movement, while also benefiting the everyday driver. And most importantly, solutions need to improve safety on and off the interstate system. We must work together toward common goals and viable solutions.

We all have more work to do, and we must do that work together. The road ahead requires our full attention. We are committed to having a seat at the table, advocating on behalf of our communities, and pursuing a future in transportation funding supported by our residents.

Co-signers of this opinion article include Clackamas County Board of Commissioners members Tootie Smith, Paul Savas, Martha Schrader, Mark Shull and Ben West. Mayors Brian Hodson, Michael Milch, Joe Buck, Denyse McGriff, Frank Bubenik and Rory Bialostosky signed on behalf of the cities of Canby, Gladstone, Lake Oswego, Oregon City, Tualatin and West Linn.