

# Shift the Balance!

## We can't build our way out of our transportation problems...

In the past, we've tried to accommodate the increasing numbers of cars and trucks on the roads by building new roads. Between 1957 and 1994, the nation spent over 3.5 trillion dollars on roads (adjusted for inflation), with proportionately very little on transit and other modes that would reduce demand on the system. It seemed as if we had an unlimited budget for highway spending. As a result, we have dramatically increased the demand on the road network. National studies on the impact of adding new roads or more lanes on congestion have shown that we can't build our way out of the problem. In fact, places like Atlanta that made huge investments in new roads in the 90's experienced some of the biggest increases in traffic congestion in the country.



*A transportation system should give people choices.*

## Transportation investment resources are shrinking...

During the post-1950 freeway expansion era, the federal government bore most of the cost of building roads. In Oregon, for every dollar spent on roads, the state only spent 8 cents. That situation no longer exists. Some experts predict that the Federal Highway Trust Fund will be broke by 2010, leaving us with even less money for roads. In addition, state and federal gas taxes haven't changed since 1993, while the cost of living has increased by 35%. But transportation funding isn't just about building roads for cars. Other modes went through decades underfunded. Even today, walking and cycling only receive 2% of state transportation dollars. We are entering a new era for how we pay for new transportation investments, thus we need to begin thinking differently about how we get the most out of the dollars we realistically have to spend.

**Transportation!** Mention the word and most people think of driving a car, which is how most of us get around. Thanks to the car we have been able to travel to places we were never able to reach before, and live in ways that were unimaginable before its invention. However, during the past 50 years, we became so enamored with the car that we built a transportation system devoted almost exclusively to it. As a result, we now have a system that is out of balance, and we've seriously limited the choices we have for traveling. Our ever-expanding waistlines are just one side effect of this lack of choice. Other signs of this imbalance include congestion, air pollution, deteriorating roads and bridges, rising gas prices, and parking headaches... And, we've accepted the extraordinarily high death and injury rates associated with cars as normal. For all of these reasons and more, it's time to change the way we approach transportation issues and create a new regional transportation strategy that will serve our communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our regional government, Metro, is in the first stage of a process known as the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update that will determine how we spend at least \$4.2 billion on transportation in the metro area over the next 20 years. This is a key opportunity to make a new transportation plan – the 21<sup>st</sup> century plan we need. To get there, the new plan must **Put People First, Do More with Less, and Empower the Economy.**

These strategies will help us balance three important elements underlying our transportation decisions -- Community, Convenience, and Cost. By taking a balanced approach, we'll shift the balance toward a more sustainable transportation system and a healthier, more prosperous region.





Efficient land use supports more walking.

## Community

Community can mean different things to different people, but at its roots it is a connection among a group of people and a feeling of belonging. It can be a safe place where people of all ages can assemble, providing opportunities to take part in a variety of activities from work to recreation. It's what makes your neighborhood unique from another one. To build community, there should be places for people to come together, on purpose and by accident. There should be a diversity of people and households with various incomes and interests. There should be a building of trust over time from the interactions that occur. And, residents should be able to actively participate in the decisions that affect their community. The way these things happen depends, in part, on the way we design our urban landscape.

Land use affects transportation design and transportation design affects land use. In the first case, if, for example, a strip-mall is built, it will attract many trips by individual drivers, as well as trucks delivering goods to businesses. On the other hand, if an area is built with many types of uses, for example retail shopping at street level and business offices and homes above, there will be fewer individual auto trips and more transit and walking, and more opportunities for interaction. Thus, it fosters community. In the second case, when we build new roads, interchanges or light rail lines, development can occur where it previously could not. Depending on the type of land use it encourages – for example, mixed use development versus places only accessible by car – these investments may or may not contribute to a sense of community.

## Convenience

For most of us, transportation is not an end in itself, so it's frustrating when it doesn't operate smoothly. We want access—to work, school, shopping, arts & culture, to visit friends, go to the doctor, visit parks, etc.—in the most convenient way possible. We want to quickly get the raw materials we need for the work we do, distribute goods to our stores, and move the goods we create within the community and beyond. This generates and supports economic activity, jobs and prosperity.


## Costs

Transportation is expensive! This is the part of the balancing act that we least like to accommodate...and acknowledge! Transportation is expensive not just for everyday things that we normally think of – the price of a bus ticket or filling up the gas tank – but also the other very real costs that we don't always consider: social, environmental, and health costs.

In addition to the millions of public dollars we spend in the region on new transportation investments and maintenance each year, personal spending on transportation is growing. In 2004, the average household in the Portland metro area spent \$7,276 on transportation, second only to housing. In our region, the average household spends \$22,931 a year on housing and transportation together, which is roughly half of all spending.<sup>1</sup> So, moving to a distant location with cheaper housing may appear less expensive at first, but the savings may not be so great after factoring in that second car you'll need because of poor transit and lack of shopping and other services in your neighborhood. Furthermore, with the price of oil projected to fluctuate wildly and rise substantially in the future, the portion of our income being spent on transportation will likely continue to rise. With incomes falling behind housing and transportation cost increases, more and more of us, not just low-income residents, could have to make difficult choices between paying rent, getting to work or buying food and medicine.

*There are lots of hidden costs in a car-dominated transportation system*

It's difficult to quantify the costs drivers impose on society, but estimates range from \$126 billion to over \$1 trillion per year.<sup>2</sup> This includes the costs due to air pollution, climate change, imported oil security, road congestion, car crashes, noise, reduced land values, etc. For the three-county region in 2005, car crashes cost \$577 million.<sup>3</sup> Car crashes are also the leading cause of death under age 45 in the Northwest.<sup>4</sup> As you can see, the way we've built our transportation system has burdened us with enormous costs.



<p><b>Social Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced time with family &amp; friends</li> <li>• Isolation, resulting in increased crime, loss of networking</li> <li>• Disruption &amp; destruction of neighborhoods (noise, pollution, physical barriers)</li> <li>• Loss of independence for young, old, and economically disadvantaged</li> <li>• Emotional loss from car crashes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Financial Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to own car(s) due to lack of viable options</li> <li>• Garages &amp; parking add to cost of housing</li> <li>• Full cost of car crashes often not reimbursed by insurance</li> <li>• Protecting fossil fuel resources in volatile regions of the world</li> </ul>
<p><b>Health Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deaths and injuries from car crashes</li> <li>• Lack of physical activity, leading to obesity</li> <li>• Asthma</li> <li>• Lung cancer</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental Costs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air and water pollution</li> <li>• Global warming</li> <li>• Loss of habitat to roads &amp; parking</li> <li>• Consumption of non-renewable energy</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2003-2004*. ([www.bls.gov/cex/](http://www.bls.gov/cex/)).

<sup>2</sup>Victoria Transportation Policy Institute. *Transportation costs and benefits*. ([www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm82.htm](http://www.vtpi.org/tdm/tdm82.htm)), 2005.

<sup>3</sup>National Safety Council. *Estimating the costs of unintentional injuries*. ([www.nsc.org/lrs/statinfo/estcost.htm](http://www.nsc.org/lrs/statinfo/estcost.htm)), 2005.

<sup>4</sup>Sightline Institute. *Cascadia Scorecard 2006*. ([www.sightline.org/research/cascadia\\_scorecard](http://www.sightline.org/research/cascadia_scorecard)).

# Shift the Balance!

## How do we shift the balance?

### Put People First!

What does this mean? It means that people, rather than cars, trains, buses or trucks, would be the primary focus for the decisions we make about our transportation investments. It means we would develop our communities in ways that would give residents real choices in how they travel. Health and safety would become a top priority so that walking and biking could become an easy choice for short trips to school, nearby parks and neighborhood shopping. Our transportation investment strategy would help reduce the high number of traffic fatalities and car crashes in our communities. Transportation and housing expenses would remain affordable for residents, especially those of modest means, and transportation costs for business would be manageable. Peoples' travel environment would be healthy, safe and accessible including street trees, public art, well-lit, comfortable bus shelters, wide sidewalks, bikeways and trails with connections to local business districts and public spaces. These kinds of amenities also attract and support talent fostering a robust, socially and environmentally sustainable economy.

### Do More with Less

In other words, be fiscally responsible. To do this, we must optimize the current system to make it more efficient and sustainable. This strategy acknowledges that our current system is operating far from what it could be. It also acknowledges that it is much more cost-effective in the long run to manage transportation demand, rather than increase capacity. Doing more with less keeps freight moving by designating freight priority facilities, which could be shared with transit. It would focus on making riding the bus as pleasant and

convenient as possible for all users, especially those most dependent upon it. Increasing connectedness of streets and sidewalks and investing in maintenance would be prioritized over building new road facilities. If we did more with less, drivers would pay directly for the full costs imposed on our community from vehicle use. This could include road pricing such as tolls and congestion pricing of freeways during peak periods, changing parking pricing, and changing fees such as insurance and registration so that they reward people for driving less. Surface parking would be minimized and even prohibited in certain pedestrian zones to free up land for other uses. And we would prioritize making transportation work better inside the urban growth boundary instead of expanding the boundary without adequate resources to pay for the infrastructure needed to serve new areas.

### Empower the Economy

A strong economy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not require expensive highway projects that will simply create more demand on the highway system. This was the supply side thinking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today's financial and business climate depends upon a strategy that focuses on decreasing demand and integrating transportation and land use more fully. These have the value-added benefit of enhancing our region's livability, which is a key economic asset that attracts business and talent to our region. The way we do transportation will either enhance livability or detract from it. So, we must focus our transportation investments on those strategies that create desirable places for individuals and families to live, work, and play – places that are vibrant and have a broad array of local retailers, great schools, attractive, green and affordable housing and where there are great recreational and cultural opportunities nearby.

## Strategies to Shift the Balance

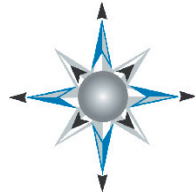
- Use rail & streetcar transit to create great communities and spur economic development, building upon previous successes that have added \$6 billion in development along rail & streetcar lines.
- Pursue changes in taxes, incentives, and zoning in a manner that benefits communities equitably, closes the distance between affordable housing and good-paying jobs, and puts resources into existing neighborhoods and areas already designated for new development.
- Dramatically increase convenience of public transit for all users, especially those most dependent on it, by making it quicker and more frequent.
- Make bicycling and walking safer, easier, and more pleasant by:
  - Creating bike boulevards and more bike lanes & facilities;
  - Building sidewalks and pedestrian crossings and connections that increase safety and accessibility;
  - Enforcing traffic laws to make our communities safer; and
  - Greening our streetscapes.
- Reduce total amount of land dedicated to parking.
- Keep freight moving by reallocating lanes for shared bus/freight-only use where appropriate and by investing in rail to increase shipping by train.
- Use communications-based information and electronics technologies to make the system more efficient and safe wherever possible.
- Charge users directly for costs imposed on society by their vehicle use, including measures to reduce demand on the road system.
- Prioritize transportation investments based on thorough assessment of costs imposed and the distribution of benefits for the community.
- Fund programs that help businesses support their employees to reduce demand on the transportation system—through carpools, vanpools, transit, flexible work etc.
- Use transportation investments to stimulate the economy by evaluating their impacts on businesses and jobs and by contracting with local businesses to design and construct the improvements, including linking job training and microcredit lending opportunities wherever possible.
- "Green" our streets: - use green building techniques in transportation projects to reduce stormwater runoff and beautify neighborhoods.

# How you can get involved!

✓ Fill out the Shift the Balance! Questionnaire. We will share your input with Metro to shape the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan.

✓ Sign up below to receive updates on Shift the Balance! and how to be involved in shaping the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan.

✓ For additional information please contact Jill Fuglister – 503-294-2889 or [jill@clfuture.org](mailto:jill@clfuture.org) or check our website at [www.clfuture.org](http://www.clfuture.org)



## COALITION FOR A LIVABLE FUTURE

*Working for a just and sustainable region*



Plan your community around cars...  
get more places for cars.



Plan your community around people...  
get more places for people.

*Idea courtesy of Project for Public Spaces.*

## The Regional Transportation Plan Update – An Opportunity to Rebalance the System

Metro's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is the 20-year blueprint that guides investment in the region's transportation system. Over the next 18 months Metro will be updating the plan, providing us a key opportunity to shape the future of our region and rebalance the transportation system. We have until February 2006 to shape the policy direction of the new RTP by letting Metro know our priorities and desired outcomes. Based on these, Metro staff will develop a draft RTP for release next fall and a final decision in December 2007.

While we've made some smart transportation investments in recent years, there is still a long way to go to rebalance the system. With a million new residents expected to live in the region in 25 years, and shrinking transportation resources, the stakes are very high to make wise decisions.

The RTP Update provides a unique opportunity to redirect our transportation investments so that we create real choices for people and move toward balance in our transportation system.

- I'd like to receive updates on Shift the Balance! and learn how to be involved in shaping the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan.
- I'd like to receive clinfo, CLF's weekly email digest of regional livability events and activities.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes, I want to join the Coalition for a Livable Future!

Membership levels include:

- Basic, \$40  
 Family, \$60  
 Advocate, \$150  
 Hero, \$250-499  
 Sustainers Circle, \$500 or more

Enclose check or join online at [www.clfuture.org](http://www.clfuture.org)

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The Coalition for a Livable Future unites over 80 diverse organizations and hundreds of individuals to promote healthy and sustainable communities. By connecting issues, people and organizations, CLF empowers communities to take action together to shape the big decisions affecting the Portland region's future.