

Sharon Meieran

Oregon State Legislature: House District 36



General Approach. The City of Portland has often been named the best bicycling city in the country. At the same time, car vehicle miles traveled are increasing while traffic congestion grows. Why do you think more Portlanders don't walk, bicycle, or take transit for transportation, and what will you do to help Portland (especially your legislative district) become an even better city to bike in, as well as a great city to walk and take transit?

As an emergency room doctor and a mother to two elementary-school children, safety is always first on my mind. I know that the City of Portland has made investments in bicycle safety, ranging from the green bike boxes downtown to the cycle tracks and neighborhood greenways around the city. I believe the State has an important role to play in expanding these kinds of long-term, high returns on investment. That's why I support programs like Safe Routes

to Schools, and I would be a vocal advocate for sustained and improved funding for that program.

As a resident of Southwest Portland, I know many of my neighbors and their children would feel more comfortable riding to school and to work were there adequate, safe corridors for them to do so. And as the co-president of the Rieke elementary school PTA, I believe that parents have the power and the responsibility to advocate on behalf of their children – for better resources in the classroom and to and from their schools.

I also believe that the active transportation community has a role to play, not just in advocating for more investments, but also in educating the broader public about the economic, health and lifestyle advantages of active transportation. Saving money, staying healthy and getting all the things done that need to get done – those are all powerful messages for convincing people to make small



changes on their way to a more active transportation life.

The health aspect is especially important to me. As the president of the Oregon College of Emergency Physicians, I oversee a network of ER doctors who are trained to deal with emergent medical needs. But as we all know, with cuts to the social safety net and a rise in uninsured Oregonians, the emergency room becomes a clinic of last resort for chronic health problems as well as emergencies. Encouraging Portlanders and Oregonians to live active and healthy lives – by incorporating movement and exercise into their existing schedules – will pay health dividends in preventive benefits.

Choices and Public Perception. Critics of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects often contend cyclists, pedestrians, and transit users don't pay their fair share in road taxes and other user fees. How would you make the case for allocating funds for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects?

People who make the argument that cyclists, pedestrians and transit users don't pay their fair share are using a tired and misleading argument. The reality is, investing in our public transit system is as much about equal access to opportunity as it is about taking single-occupant vehicles off the roads.

Fortunately, Portland and a number of cities and towns around Oregon have put strong active-transportation advocates in elected office – from City Councils to the State Legislature to our Congressional delegation. I will work side-by-side with these advocates to find innovative, consensus-driven approaches for funding bike, pedestrian and transit projects.

At a recent Portland mayoral race forum on active transportation, it was clear that all three leading candidates are strong supporters of bicycling, pedestrian needs and public transit. Regardless of the winner, I look forward to working with the next mayor of Portland and the Portland Legislative delegation to find funding and support for active transportation investments.

State Funding for Active Transportation. HB 1700 from 1971 (ORS 366.514) requires the state set aside at least 1% of the highway fund to build bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Meanwhile, one-quarter of Oregonians (roughly a million people) are too poor, young, old or infirm to drive. Do you feel that the 1% is an adequate allotment to fulfill the safety and transportation needs of the ever-increasing bicycling and pedestrian community? If not, what would you do to change it?

In these fiscally constrained times, I understand how challenging it is to maintain funding for vital programs, much less increase funding. But I also agree that we need to address the needs of all Oregonians, especially those who are disadvantaged.

I would invite the active transportation community to take the opportunity to brief me on their ideas and proposals for state funding for active transportation.

Traffic Safety. Traffic-related crashes are the top cause of death and injury for Oregonians aged 1 to 34. Pedestrian injuries and deaths are a serious problem in Oregon, with one serious injury a day and one death a week, encompassing 14% of traffic deaths in Oregon and 30% of deaths in Portland. Not surprisingly, most walkers and cyclists are injured or killed on busy streets. How will you improve traffic safety for walkers and bicyclists, especially for youth?

As I wrote above, it is the responsibility of the local community and our city and state public servants to make our streets safer for all users of the road. As an emergency room doctor and a mom, I understand deeply the devastating impact of traffic fatalities and injuries on individuals and communities.

I believe a combined effort of improved enforcement, better safety amenities (like lighted crosswalks, speed bumps, etc.) and community awareness will help. I will use my position as a state legislator to call on the Portland Police Bureau to put more resources toward crosswalk enforcement and toward community policing. I will also reach out to community leaders, religious leaders and business leaders to garner their support for modest investments that lead to safer streets.





Sensible Traffic Laws. For over 30 years, Idaho has had a law allowing cyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs, and come to a rolling stop instead of a complete stop (out of understanding of the laws of physics and the excessive use of stop signs on neighborhood streets). Over those last 30 years, Idaho police departments have seen no increase in safety problems, and have provided testimony in favor of the law. The Oregon legislature has considered passing a similar law in Oregon, but has failed to. What are your views on such a proposal?

I would support an Idaho-stop style law for cyclists in Oregon. As an individual biking in my community, I have often felt that this kind of approach simply makes sense. But I believe that it would only be successfully implemented if supported by a clear public education effort to inform drivers, as well as cyclists, of the new law. I would welcome the opportunity to be actively involved in moving this legislation forward.

CRC Highway Mega-project. There has been a lot of pressure to build the most expensive public works project in the region's history, the five-mile long highway project known as the Columbia River Crossing. Despite being a multi-billion dollar project, bicycle and pedestrian facilities involved are substandard, including an under-highway mile-long path, a five-block corkscrew detour into Vancouver, and a mostly minimum-width-allowed 16-foot path width, all for a facility designed to serve the next 100 years. The project is diverting billions of dollars from other regional priorities to build an expansion that won't solve congestion. What are your views on the mega-project and what would you do about its funding as a legislator?

The Columbia River Crossing project was designed to meet the needs of passengers and freight traveling the I-5 corridor from the Canadian border to the Mexican border. It has become a political football, pitting local interests with state interests, and business interests against environmental interests. I believe that, if we as a community are going to invest billions of dollars into a single transportation infrastructure project, it should reflect the values and priorities of the communities it serves.

I would strongly advocate for substantial active transportation elements in the project, including light rail, dedicated bus lanes, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities that recognize current trends and encourage increased active transportation.

Cleaner Transportation, Better Choices through Land

Use. Smart land use planning has a huge effect on how many people use transportation choices. In 2010, legislators passed Senate Bill 1059, which requires Metro to make its land use planning decisions lead to specific reductions in global warming pollution. It also requires Eugene-Springfield to plan on how it would accomplish such reductions. Would you support an effort to provide \$300,000 for a grant to do scenario planning for one of Oregon's other four Metro areas, which would be designed as a competitive pilot effort to model how Salem/Keizer, Corvallis, the Rogue Valley, or Bend could reduce their transportation pollution? If so, how would you go about finding that funding?

Yes, I would support such an effort. Recognizing the constraints on the state budget, I would support stakeholders' efforts to garner the funding from sources such as federal Sustainable Community grants and regional or national charitable foundations.

Transit funding. Transit systems throughout the state continue to struggle to make ends meet, especially in their quest for operating funds. In response, often service is cut while fares are increased. While the payroll tax cap was increased in 2009, it only increased for some cities. If you think public transit funding is inadequate, what sources of funds would you work increase or create as a legislator?

I would invite the input of the active transportation community as to how to address adequate and sustainable transit funding.





Transportation Equity. Recent census data show nearly 10,000 people of color, mostly African Americans, have moved from Portland's city core to the city's eastern edges over the past ten years. East Portland has much sparser sidewalks and bikeways, grocery stores and parks, and less access to transit. How would you ensure these increasingly diverse and historically under-invested neighborhoods are revitalized for their current residents? How would you improve transportation choices for low income communities and communities of color?

Abolishing the inequities that exist for low income communities and communities of color is a core mission for me. I see the tremendous inequities in our healthcare system, our education system, and as described above, our transportation system. I personally do not have an overarching solution to address these inequities that have been growing for generations. But as a start, I would support investment in outreach and education efforts for these communities in terms of transportation choices, and prioritize funding for programs that help improve these neighborhoods. I would make it a priority to engage leaders and community members who are affected in these communities, as well as members of the transportation community, to collaborate on finding solutions to this unacceptable problem.

Personal Example and Understanding. How do you currently travel around town, and how do you commute to work?

As I live in Southwest Portland and work in East Portland, I drive to work. I am fortunate to live in one of Portland's many walkable communities, and so my husband, children and I frequently walk to the grocery stores, coffee shops and local stores in the Hillsdale neighborhood. We frequently walk to our neighborhood school (Rieke Elementary). But I recognize that too many of Portland's residents don't have easy, non-car access to basic needs like I do. That's why I'm seeking your support, and why I would work to combine my background in public health with your expertise in transit and transportation advocacy.

Past Accomplishments. Do you have any specific accomplishments in improving the quality of life for bicycle, pedestrian and transit users in Oregon or other places?

No.

Anything to add?

I want to reiterate my support for active transportation as a matter of the economic and public health viability of our state moving forward, and as a fundamental component of the livability of our communities. I appreciate having the opportunity to share my views with you, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in more detail.

