

Earmarks in the Transportation bill

Friends of French Prairie recognizes the long-standing need for improvement of the I-5 Donald/Aurora Exit 278 and appreciate improvement or replacement of this interchange listed among the projects earmarked for funding in ODOT Region Two. Local area residents and governments, including the City of Wilsonville, have expressed concerns over urban-level development in unincorporated county lands without municipal governance, realistic system development charges or adequate development standards pertaining to stormwater detention, bike/ped facilities, transit accommodation, etc. Given the dramatic increase in traffic congestion at this freeway exit over the past two decades, and the consequent capacity and traffic safety problems, our support is conditional and tied to specific sideboards, including:

1. Capacity. Any improvement or replacement of this interchange will further increase traffic counts that in turn increase traffic on Ehlen/Yergen/McKay Road. Improvement or replacement of this interchange must include specific traffic mitigation or improvements to Ehlen Road on the east and west sides of the interchange that extend beyond the immediate interchange area to safely accommodate vehicles and bike/pedestrian use. Related to this is the real problem, already being experienced on Ehlen/Yergen/McKay Road, of traffic diverting from the Newberg/Dundee Bypass across French Prairie to reach I-5. A new or improved Exit 278 interchange has the potential to exacerbate this problem if adequate traffic mitigation to minimize this redirection is not included in both projects.

2. Traffic Safety. The continued growth in traffic has resulted in significant traffic safety problems at the current interchange and east along Ehlen Road to Hwy. 551, and west along Ehlen/Yergen/McKay Roads all the way to Hwy. 219. Improvement or replacement of the Exit 278 interchange must carry with it traffic mitigation on the east and west sides of the interchange that extend beyond the immediate interchange area to improve rather than further abet the already severe traffic safety problems.

3. Local Control. Local control of Ehlen/Yergen/McKay Roads is an important consideration. Specifically, continued ownership by Marion County, which has a vested interest in French Prairie as the most productive component of Marion County's agricultural sector, is key to this road servicing the local French Prairie community and towns.

4. French Prairie Bypass. Improvement or replacement of the Exit 278 interchange can in no way lead to the later implementation of a "bypass across French Prairie" or a tollway from Hwy. 219 to I-5. Various proposals to this end have been floated over the past fifteen years, and Marion County is on record with at least three unanimous decisions by the Board of Commissioners opposing such an undertaking, including against the proposed Coastal Parkway and Westside Bypass Special Road District legislative proposal.

5. Fuel tax consequences. The proposed increase in fuel tax by nine cents in the Metro Congestion Relief District will have the consequence of having significantly lower-priced fuel available just south of the Metro boundary, and the next freeway interchange. This could drive additional development around the interchange, as well as significant consequential increases in traffic counts, especially by semi-trucks. This must be factored into planning, and Marion County should work with Salem-Keizer Transportation Study (MPO) to give serious consideration to increasing the fuel tax to equalize costs and raise additional revenue to address local-area traffic safety and implement appropriate traffic mitigation.