

May 9, 2017

The Honorable Dan Saltzman
City of Portland
1221 SW Fourth Avenue, Suite 230
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear Commissioner Saltzman:

The Alliance represents more than 1,850 small, medium and large employers in the Portland metro region. An efficient multimodal transportation system to move goods and people is essential to our economy and quality of life. In recognition of this, the Alliance has a long history of supporting multimodal investments in our transportation system to promote mobility, efficiency and safety. Unfortunately, it increasingly appears that the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) does not similarly support each of these goals. Instead, decisions are being made that significantly impact the mobility of the many to the benefit of the few.

In a scientific public opinion survey of Portland voters conducted for the Alliance, 74 percent of voters supported maintaining existing capacity for cars rather than remove car lanes to make way for bikes (52 percent strongly supported this position). In addition, in a separate scientific survey for the Alliance, only about 20 percent of respondents said they would ride a bike more often if there were a more developed bike network. Importantly, those respondents were more likely to be 18 – 34 year old MAX riding men. While we understand that it will be increasingly important to shift modes of travel in order to mitigate increasing congestion from additional residents and jobs, forecasts from the 2035 Comprehensive Plan show that 65 percent of trips will be auto and 24 percent transit; in the central city, those figures are 57 percent and 21 percent respectively. Bicycle mode share, meanwhile, hovers around 6 percent. Many of the projects we have seen of late compound congestion issues faced by the majority of system users.

The latest example of this is the so-called “Better Naito” project. We do not support its implementation generally and this summer in particular. The rationale presented for the project is conflicts between festival goers, bicyclists and pedestrians, yet there are others ways this could be addressed. The lane could be closed only during actual festivals, or the fencing erected for the festivals could be pushed back from the curb into the park in order to provide room for those awaiting entry.

The experience during the last Better Naito pilot shows that there are substantial traffic impacts due to closing one northbound lane. Employers and employees report significant queuing south of the lane closure and impacts to the downtown street grid. Already this year, employers are reporting hearing complaints from their employees about Better Naito. Though PBOT has indicated additional travel time of less than two minutes, it is inconsistent with what we hear from road users. In addition, the travel impact analysis, to our knowledge, did not study the extensive queuing that occurs as a result of the lane closure or impacts on adjacent streets.

The impacts discussed above occurred during last year’s pilot. Given the tremendous amount of construction activity that will occur in the central city this summer – 70 projects are planned – further constraining this critical transportation corridor simply does not make sense. The closure of the Morrison

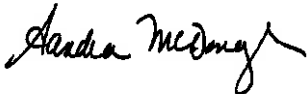
Bridge alone, one of the busiest local bridges over the Willamette, is in the heart of the Better Naito and contributes to the impacts felt along the entire project.

In addition, there are multiple other necessary transit system maintenance projects that are impacting travel alternatives; our members are hearing from employees that TriMet has told them they cannot reasonably guarantee travel times. In the face of this, to encourage the use of alternatives by commuters and visitors the city is highlighting BikeTown discounts for first time users. While this may be of use for people lucky enough and with the means to live in downtown or within the inner eastside of the city, it does nothing for the thousands of people for whom that is not an option because of proximity, health, parenting obligations or a host of other individual circumstances.

Naito is one glaring example of projects that seem designed to inhibit mobility for the vast majority of system users. It is also an example of using a "pilot" to institute transportation changes that become permanent without adequate public input from all users. Another example is the pilot project at the off-ramp from I-405 onto NW 14th Avenue, which has resulted in increased congestion and diminishes critical portal capacity into downtown. We hear examples of using pilots, or inadequately engaging multiple stakeholders, in order to drive preferred solutions from throughout the city.

We urge you to reconsider "Better Naito," as well as provide more balance in the approach to the Portland transportation system and improved processes to engage impacted system users. It is imperative to consider the needs of all system users, as well as goals the city has related to age-friendliness, equity, and economic opportunity and competitiveness.

Sincerely,



Sandra McDonough
President & CEO

cc: Portland City Council