Making Transportation Work – A Tiered Road System

Hi, my name is Ryan A. Farmer, and I'm running for Portland City Commissioner. Alright, boys, let's hit the road!

Let's talk about transportation in our city. Portland is now one of the top 10 worst cities in America for traffic. Why is our traffic so bad, when we aren't one of the top 10 largest cities? It's because our roads do not have the capacity for all of us driving. Drive times in Portland have been steadily increasing since 2010, making us waste more and more of our time on the road. Not only is our transportation system increasingly inefficient, but it directly contributes to traffic accidents and deaths. Road fatalities have been trending upward since 2015, with 2019 being the deadliest year on Portland roads since 1997, with 49 people killed. Our roads are clogged, and it's literally killing people. So why don't our roads have the capacity that they need?

Because, Portlanders, we are many! We added over 240,000 residents between 2010 and 2018. Our population density increased from a little over 4000 people per square mile in 2009 to about 5000 people per square mile now. That's about a 25% increase, and this doesn't include the workers that travel daily into the city. Okay, they get the idea – go away!
And remember, it isn't just us on the road. It's our cars.
"Brother, may I have some road!"

A compact car takes up about 80 square feet on the road, while a personal vehicle, like a bicycle, only takes up about 10 square feet. This means that a *small* car need at least 8 times more space on the road than a personal vehicle does! With most of us driving alone most of the time, we each individually command an unnecessarily large amount of space on the road.
"Please brother, may I have some road!"

Regardless of how you feel about driving, the truth is that our roads do not have the physical space necessary for each of us to use cars as our primary mode of transportation within the city. If we insisted that we all get to drive efficiently and safely, we'd have to expand our roads beyond what is practicable, adding lanes upon lanes upon lanes. This is clearly not only a bad idea, but is ultimately physically impossible to achieve.
"Don't say that, brother! Give me some road!"
So what can we do to make our transportation system work?

Thankfully, the solution is straightforward. We can redefine our roads to be a tiered road system, separating different kinds of roads with different modes of transportation, based on what each is best at. Major roads or thoroughfares, roads that primarily connect farther distances within and outside the city like Burnside or Naito, can be dedicated to larger vehicles, like cars. Local roads, roads that primarily connect shorter distances within the city like Market or 18th, can be dedicated to small, personal vehicles, like bicycles. This not only makes transportation in Portland efficient and safe, but also cleaner and more affordable.

What we've done with transportation in Portland does not work and will not work. It's past time we make some fundamental changes. My name is Ryan A. Farmer, and I am running for Portland City Commissioner. Thank you, and vote 2020!

[Sources]

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