



Testimony to Portland City Council
May 22, 2019

My name is Mary Peveto. I want to thank you for the opportunity to add my small contribution to your very difficult task of balancing so many interests within the city's budget.

That said I would like to make a case for your consideration for prioritizing investments in solving our air pollution problem in the city. It is real and it threatens not just our quality of life, but the long term growth and potential of our children especially the most vulnerable populations. In January 2019 a study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research demonstrates the cost Portland has been paying each year it failed to act on reducing air pollution from our roads: students attending schools located near busy highways had lower rates of academic performance, higher absenteeism and higher rates of disciplinary problems than those attending less polluted schools. The more traffic on nearby roads, the larger the decline in scores on state standardized tests.¹

Recently there has been much hype around the problems of industrial pollution, and the toxic hot spots of heavy metals. The reality is our most dangerous and highest volume pollution still comes from the heavy transportation infrastructure that snakes through and around our beautiful city. And it is getting worse.

It seemed that Portland had somehow decoupled growth in the region from air pollution, specifically carbon, but all data points to a reverse in that trend. Oregon Department of Environmental Quality data released at the end of 2018, shows that our ground level Ozone has been rapidly growing since 2015, and exceeded the national ambient air quality standards since 2017.

I believe with the looming climate crisis, it is a good investment for our city to look urgently and creatively at alternative transportation options. We can't keep investing in freeway expansion, and then be surprised that more and more cars are populating our roads. Study after study confirms that is what happens – you invest in car-centric infrastructure and they will come in greater numbers.

That is why I would encourage the city to look at utilizing the river: it runs nearly parallel to the I-5 corridor, which serves huge commuting populations in our region from Vancouver to Milwaukee. Public ferry service is ubiquitous in cities our size across the nation and the world. For every one vessel, one trip, you potentially remove hundreds of cars from a crowded commuting roadway. And technology is rapidly improving to ensure that the carbon and pollution footprint is minimized. I believe that building a ferry service is a creative alternative to keep Portland on the cutting edge of sustainable urban planning and culture. Thank you for your consideration of the investment in studying this option.

¹ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25489>