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## City Club: Put Metro in charge of transportation

by Andy Giegerich

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An influential policy watchdog believes Portland's transportation system oversight is too scattershot.

The City Club of Portland wants the Metro regional government to control the area's transportation decisions. In a report released Thursday, the City Club argues that the Oregon Department of Transportation should distribute transportation funds to Metro instead of cities and counties.

Metro would determine how to spend the money. Area agencies spent \$536.6 million on transportation projects in 2008.

The City Club — a nonprofit public affairs and research institution — suggests that Metro should be able to impose taxes or tolls and assume responsibility for any roads within its boundaries. The moves should take place in the long term, according to the report.

City Club researchers, including several local attorneys who drafted the transportation report, also called for a separate bridge authority to oversee most non-freeway bridges over the Willamette, Clackamas and Tualatin rivers.

However, the group also suggested that Metro and two other agencies give up their voting positions on the area's powerful Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation. The committee makes key funding and design decisions on the Columbia River Crossing, the region's \$3 billion-plus bridge project. It also allocates between \$23 million and \$37 million in regional transportation funds.

The idea doesn't sit well with one Metro official.

“That negates everything else,” said Rex Burkholder, the Metro councilor who oversees the group’s transportation policies. “It’s saying, let’s throw the money at Metro and let them do all the projects but leave the decision-making to others.”

The City Club’s opinions have frequently shaped Portland policies. A 2005 report on the Portland Development Commission, the city’s economic development arm, led to sweeping changes.

City Club researchers suggested that Portland borrow from other cities’ transportation oversight arrangements. In San Diego, a single agency oversees transportation, land use and energy issues. In Vancouver, B.C., one agency handles all transportation oversight.

“There’s no central nervous system in Portland, so to speak,” said Steve Griffith, a Stoel Rives LLP attorney who oversaw the report. “We have an incredible number of jurisdictions overseeing transportation and they all have a financial interest in it. It’s so complex that decisions are being made that aren’t necessarily efficient. They’re really far short of how good they could be.”

Burkholder said moving transportation oversight to Metro meshes with federal proposals to shift roads and highway spending decisions from state to local officials. Rep. Peter DeFazio, an Oregon Democrat on the Transportation Committee, champions those proposals.

The report criticizes how officials have handled three area bridge projects. Portland’s Sellwood Bridge is deteriorating because “ownership and responsibility” aren’t connected to the bridge’s actual users. Politicians have favored the Newberg/Dundee Bypass at the expense of other important projects. And the Columbia River Crossing is beset by different transportation objectives and politics.

City Club members suggest that Oregon and Washington officials create a joint land use and transportation planning entity to address Columbia River Crossing and other issues.

Business leaders say they’d support such a venture as long as it didn’t further delay work on the bridge project.

“We’d see no reason to start over again from the beginning,” said Brian Gard, co-chairman of the [Columbia River Crossing Coalition](#).

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