



OFFICE OF MAYOR SAM ADAMS  
CITY OF PORTLAND

May 19, 2009

Matt Garrett  
Director  
Oregon Department of Transportation

Dear Director Garrett,

I am writing to begin a conversation regarding the process of setting speed limits on roads within the City of Portland's jurisdiction. I would like to work with you to explore ways to make the current system safer, more efficient, and more cost effective.

In this time of increased competition for limited transportation dollars it is important to ensure that the speed limit process is efficient, and not unnecessarily burdensome. The structure of the current system has been problematic for the City of Portland, and has led to inconsistent speed limits on streets across the City.

Currently, as laid out in statute and Oregon Administrative Rules, in order to alter the speed limits on streets within city limits, the City of Portland must go through a sometimes lengthy process to determine the appropriate speed limit for every individual street. While the end result could often be predetermined by previously approved speed limits of streets that share the same fundamental traits, the City is required to request a new study for each street segment and the State is then required to conduct duplicative studies for every request. We would like to streamline this process.

The current speed zone system has led to an ad-hoc procedure in which speed limits on city streets are determined incrementally, one street at a time, often in response to complaints from residents rather than in a systematic manner that considers speed zoning as an overall system for the City.

This has resulted in inconsistencies in the speed limits applied to Portland streets. Streets throughout the City that share the same essential characteristics in terms of size, function, and zoning often have speed limits that vary from 5 mph to 10 mph. This creates problems in terms of city planning as well as enforcement, and the inconsistencies create confusion among drivers, which can lead to a greater degree of speed violation.

I would like to discuss some potential options to make the current system more efficient, including the possibility of developing a pilot project that would provide the City of Portland a greater degree of flexibility in setting local speed limits. Such a program could solve some of the

problems facing the City while still maintaining the goals and principles that are the foundation of the current system. I believe that an examination of some relatively modest changes could result in a more efficiently run system, an increase in safety, and significant savings for both the City of Portland and ODOT.

I will look forward to discussing this issue with you further, and working toward a solution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S.A.M.', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sam Adams, Mayor  
City of Portland