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QuickPoint! – “Beyond Traffic” Has a Different Meaning in Portland

By John A. Charles, Jr.

Portland is one of seven cities still in the running for [a \\$50 million grant](#) as part of the “Beyond Traffic” challenge sponsored by the federal Department of Transportation.

While the idea of solving traffic congestion sounds great, that is not an actual goal of Portland planners. In fact, local officials are trying to make traffic worse, by downsizing roads and lowering traffic speeds. As part of this campaign, a northbound travel lane on Naito Parkway was recently removed, and later this year two lanes on Foster Road will be eliminated.

Portland planners think we drive too much, so they want \$50 million in federal funds to develop new data collection systems to [encourage people to travel by bus, train, or bike](#). Since most people prefer a car, this will be a big waste of public money.

The transportation challenge for Portland is the need for an expanded highway system. Experimenting with technologies such as electronic tolling as a way of paying for that expansion might have been a useful grant application. But Portland planners don’t want to grow the system; they’d rather keep it small and congested, then use fancy technology to entice a few people onto a slow bus.

This is not a plan that will move us “beyond traffic.”

Updated as of 6/22: [According to The Oregonian](#), the U.S. Department of Transportation has selected Columbus, Ohio as the winner of the federal “Smart City-Beyond Traffic” competition.

With this distraction out of the way, perhaps city planners can turn their attention to something more useful, such as finding ways to actually reduce traffic congestion in Portland.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

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