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Taking on Transportation for Youth Climate Justice: Adah Crandall

17-year-old, early high school graduate Adah is a climate justice organizer from Portland, OR who focuses on the intersection of climate and transportation.

In 7th grade, I learned of the expansion of a toxic freeway into the backyard of my middle school. Terrified, I started organizing my peers for clean air legislation, which soon grew into something much bigger: a citywide effort to stop freeway expansions and decarbonize Oregon's transportation system completely. Thus, the Youth Vs ODOT campaign was born.

Over the course of 2 years, we used a combination of mass protest and political advocacy to shift the political common sense around freeways and climate. By holding biweekly rallies, over 30 in total, we built a base of students that grew from 10, to 50, to hundreds. Our creative tactics, such as "trick-or-treating" at the ODOT building on Halloween, chalking messages on the sidewalk, and even holding a protest outside our governor's mansion, made the issues unavoidable to elected officials who otherwise would not have paid attention. At the same time, I and other Youth Vs ODOT organizers showed up to dozens of regional and statewide legislative hearings, delivering unprecedented volumes of public comment that brought youth voices into spaces previously dominated by status-quo-following adults.

Though there is a long way to go to win the future we deserve — where the bus comes every 5 minutes and no student has to worry about toxic air — Youth Vs ODOT shook up Oregon politics in a way that makes this vision more possible.

In 2020, nobody was raising questions about expanding freeways in the middle of a climate crisis. Now, because of Youth VS ODOT's work, the two are inextricably linked, and several expansions in Portland are indefinitely postponed. Student organizing works, and I cannot wait to see what comes next from the seeds we have planted.

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