



**MULTNOMAH
COUNTY**

Good morning, Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee, I am Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 2179.

First, I would like to mention that we support the proposed amendment to this bill. We believe these minor technical changes recommended by the Revenue Committee Staff improve the bill.

Now, I'd like to speak to the primary purpose of this bill. As we discussed a few weeks ago in the Transportation Committee, this is a technical fix from House Bill 2001, the Oregon Jobs and Transportation Act that passed in 2009. As you may recall, HB 2001 gave permission to Multnomah County and Clackamas County to enact a local vehicle registration fee for the purpose of "design, replacement, engineering and construction" of the Sellwood Bridge.

The issue, and the reason we are here today with HB 2179, is that the original language did not specify that the revenue collected from a vehicle registration fee could be used to pay debt service and costs related to bonds. Although we felt the legislative intent was very clear about the purpose of the local vehicle registration fee, our bond counsel has advised us that "in order to give an unqualified opinion to investors that a pledge of these fees is a valid and binding obligation of the county, a statutory change is necessary.

HB 2179 simply clarifies this point by adding the language "may be used to pay debt service and costs related to bonds or other obligations issued for such purposes."

We are here with some urgency because we need to move forward with the financing on this project. As Representative Tomei has mentioned, we have reached consensus with our local partners and the state and we have a federal Record of Decision that allows us to move forward on construction next year. This is truly shovel ready.

I think it bears repeating that the Sellwood Bridge, after 85 years, is functionally and structurally obsolete and has a federal bridge sufficiency rating of 2 out of 100. At the same time, this bridge is the busiest 2-lane bridge in Oregon, carrying over 30,000 vehicles daily. Replacing this bridge will improve connections, operations and safety for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians. Finally, I think it is important to note that this bridge project will create thousands of jobs for Oregonians at a time when we need them most.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.