



Oregon

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Department of Transportation

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DATE: February 12, 2013
TO: Senate Committee on Business and Transportation
FROM: Amy Joyce, Legislative Liaison
SUBJECT: SB 235, honorary consul plates

INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 235 directs the Department of Transportation to extend the issuance of custom consular corps registration (license) plates to additional plate backgrounds: Share the Road and Pacific Wonderland.

BACKGROUND

Oregon allows for two different types of license plates, Specialty and Group, which raise funds for particular entities. Specialty plates have a unique background, each is created in statute, and the law limits how many types may be in existence at any one time. Currently they are Salmon, Crater Lake, Cultural Trust, Pacific Wonderland and Wine Country. Group plates are created administratively on application of a non-profit, college/university, or veterans' organization. Normally they are on the Tree background and have the name of the group or its logo occupying the left third of the plate. There is no limit to how many different groups may have such a plate, but each must meet minimum sales and renewals each year to continue being offered. Two Group plates – including Share the Road – have been granted statutory authority for unique backgrounds.

The Pacific Wonderland plate, which came into existence in 2009 to honor Oregon's Sesquicentennial, was designed to maintain a "retro" look harkening back to the original Pacific Wonderland plate. The retro design extends to the configuration of numbers and letters, which took up where the original plate series left off. Therefore, unlike other specialty plates, it is not issued in custom configuration.

No group plate is issued in custom configuration. With the logo or name of the organization taking up the left third of the plate, the configuration is always four letters. The logo on the Share the Road plate is a bicyclist on the left third of the plate.

The 2009 Legislature created the provision for honorary consuls to have a plate acknowledging their status. The plates are issued with a specific design and configuration, which technically is a custom configuration: "Official Consular Corps" appears on the left side of the plate, and a unique numeric configuration appears in the center. Currently, they may be issued on the Tree, Salmon, Cultural or Wine Country backgrounds. Approximately 50 consular corps registration plates are on the road today.

Because the specialty and group plate programs are fundraiser tools unrelated to the building or operation of highways, the Oregon Constitution's restrictions on the use of the Highway Fund prohibits using such money to pay for activity related to those plates.

DISCUSSION

The bill would allow consular corps registration plate configuration on the Pacific Wonderland plate and the Share the Road plate, in addition to the current provision for the Tree and other specialty plates. Because neither of those plates currently allows for custom configuration DMV would need to change its computer system to allow for that. Examples of changes are allowing the computer to accept custom configuration for these types of plates, and coding in the special fees that go along with custom plates.

One concern of the Department is how to mesh the current design of the Share the Road plate with the words Official Consular Corps. The underlying design and the configuration would overlap.

Due to the constitutional restriction on the use of the Highway Fund, and as with any work on Specialty or Group plates, the costs for implementation including systems changes would need to come from another source and be paid before DMV could begin the work.

SUMMARY

The bill requires the department to issue consular corps registration plates on the Pacific Wonderland and Share the Road backgrounds. Highway Funds cannot be used to implement these changes. It is unclear how both the honorary consul configuration and Share the Road design will fit onto the same registration plate.