

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF
SENATE BILL 260 AND SENATE BILL 247

Submitted by Cynthia Thompson, Chief Development Officer,
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February 19, 2013

Chair Beyer and Members of the Committee:

My name is Cynthia Thompson, Chief Development Officer for Ride Connection in Portland Oregon. On behalf of Ride Connection, an organization that utilizes over 400 volunteer drivers and links accessible, responsive transportation with community needs, I am testifying today in strong support of SB 260 and SB 247.

Having spent nearly 25 years working in the transit industry managing transit systems in both rural and urban areas one thing I have learned is the **VALUE of mobility and transportation.**

- **I urge your support** of the continuous appropriation of lottery dollars for the Connect Oregon program and moving into the future with the new legislation SB 247 with its proposed amendments. Senate Bill 260 and 247 if adopted will ensure the Connect Oregon investments already made will be sustained long term.

Transportation is the currency of modern life...

Investing in transportation is absolutely critical if we are to build a better future.

As the first manager of the City of Portland's Options Division now known as Active Transportation. It became readily apparent to me the overwhelming need for infrastructure improvements for all modes. Yet, I believe **the most critical need and the low hanging fruit is to provide capital and operating funding for transit and to improve access to transit.** So many communities do not have adequate facilities for people to walk to the bus. Door to Door service is 20 times more expensive than accessing fixed route serve.

Connect Oregon has been a remarkable investment program for transportation infrastructure in Oregon. Connect Oregon's investment in transit to date has created hundreds of construction related jobs. It assisted many transit agencies and organizations around the state with funds to build adequate facilities for



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To link accessible, responsive transportation with community needs.

administration, fleet, and the riding customers. Throughout my career, I learned how difficult it can be in rural and suburban systems with limited funding sources to solve long term capital needs. It is a struggle every day just to keep limited service on the road. The thought of having long term capital needs met is just a dream for many.

Ride Connection's dream finally came true thanks to Connect Oregon IV when it was awarded \$2.75 million to contribute to the construction of Glisan Commons, a new mixed-use, transit oriented facility located in Portland's Gateway Urban Renewal District.

- **You not only created over 80 construction jobs but also the capacity for 60 full-time living wage jobs in a Transit oriented development by the investment made in Ride Connections new facility.**

The five-story facility which will house Ride Connection's administrative headquarters is currently under construction and slated for completion February, 2014. In addition the new facility will bring four stories of workforce housing above and when phase two is finished there will be 60 residential units of affordable senior housing. The new location serves as a storefront where community members can access information about all their transportation options in the region.

- **There is a critical need to address transit operations funding, particularly with the loss of BETC, Oregon Business Energy Tax Credit program.**

With funding pots being eliminated, or reduced, including the Business Energy Tax Credits and ODOT's flexible funds program. Ride Connection anticipates a loss of nearly \$500,000 operating dollars a year from the changes made to the BETC program, as do many transit agencies across the state. It is therefore even more important that a dedicated funding source is available to provide opportunities for operating assistance.

Connect Oregon PLUS is for people. People power the economy.

- **Growing population of older Oregonians need transportation options to access life's essentials: nutrition, healthcare, social interaction and to age in place.**

The fact is people are getting older and **America is aging** with 76.4 million baby boomers. **A baby boomer turns 60 every eight seconds.** In 2000, 35 million Americans were 65+, by 2030; 70 million Americans will be 65+ and will comprise 20-25% of the US population. The average baby boomer will live to be 83. Transit services are critical for this population as they age.

It is easy to take transportation completely for granted until you don't have it.

Ride Connection works with individuals every day who need transportation services. People who lost their eye sight, were in an accident, or lost their license and now desperately need transportation to function and continue to live independently.

The Ride Connection network of drivers is made up of over 600 drivers and 429 are volunteers providing these critical rides for Oregonians to go to the doctor, to go grocery shopping, or for social interaction. Ride Connection strives every day to make sure every person has access to reliable and accessible transportation.

Connect Oregon Plus could be the difference for Ride Connection's network of providers being able to meet the growing demand or facing a 15% - 20% turn down rate in specific geographic areas of the region where fixed route and dial-a-ride services are crucially needed. This lack of capacity results in turning down trips, saying NO to Mary who needs to get to work, or Joe who has a medical appointment and in the worst case scenario NO can mean someone can't get reliable transportation and may have to move to a care facility at a higher cost to society, not to mention the high cost to the person who loses their independence.

Mobility is good for the economy. Independence is good for your health.

The bill dedicates 50% of the annual allocation toward air, marine and rail projects and 50% toward bicycle and pedestrian projects, passenger rail and public transit projects, including operating assistance for passenger rail and public transit. As the legislation evolves I would suggest a top priority be placed on projects that address the transportation needs of the transit dependent and older adults and people with disabilities.

Ride Connection supports and urges your support of SB 260, and the enhancement of Connect Oregon through Senate Bill 247.