

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

HOUSE BILL 2275

Submitted by Cynthia Thompson, Chief Development Officer,
Ride Connection, Portland, Oregon
March 12, 2013

Chair Barnhart and Members of the Committee:

My name is Cynthia Thompson, Chief Development Officer for Ride Connection in Portland Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to House Bill 2275, a proposal to increase cigarette taxes dedicated to the Department of Transportation's Special Transportation Fund (STF). Ride Connection strongly supports increasing transportation funding for seniors and people with disabilities.

Ride Connection and its community partners link accessible, responsive transportation to older adults and people with disabilities throughout the Portland Metro region.

Ride Connection provided over 410,000 rides in the 11-12 fiscal year. These rides allowed older adults and people with disabilities to get to the grocery store for their weekly groceries, get to the doctor for dialysis and other critical appointments, get to the hair salon for a much needed haircut, as well as many other reasons. With the use of Ride Connection's services many people are able to stay in their homes longer, have access to a daily job, and provide options to older adults who had to give up their driving privileges.

For many this service is a lifeline.

- **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.



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To link accessible, responsive transportation with community needs.

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.

The increase to the cigarette tax 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.

- **I urge your support** of the continuous appropriation of cigarette tax dollars for funding for seniors and people with disabilities and moving into the future with an increase to this tax as proposed in House Bill 2275.
- **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 funding for transportation for seniors and people with disabilities be made a priority.

Ride Connection supports and urges your support of House Bill 2275.