



OREGON
ASSOCIATION OF
NURSERIES

**Testimony before the House Committee on
Transportation and Economic Development
HB 4113 – relating to the Columbia River Crossing
By Jeff Stone, Executive Director
February 12, 2014**

Chair Read, members of the committee, I am Jeff Stone and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. I welcome the opportunity to provide our support for the authorization of state resources to fund the I-5 Replacement Bridge over the Columbia River.

Traded sectors need to get product to market

As the state's largest agricultural sector, the nursery and greenhouse industry needs a transportation system that promotes getting product to market. Nearly 75% of nursery stock grown in our state leaves our borders – with over half reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. As a trade association, we support efforts that encompass a long-term vision and investment on transportation because it serves as a cornerstone of sustained economic growth. We have seen first-hand how choke points within the Portland Metropolitan have detrimental impacts on the economy and ecology. It is important to understand that freight does not care who owns the roads, it only cares about getting through. The economics of freight is one that the nursery industry faces every day. There are consequences of doing nothing – the region may face limitations for workforce access, congestion creeping into non-peak travel times, and the cost of fuel and availability of trucks to shipping dependent Willamette Valley industries.

Freight is a two way street

Securing buyers and exporting our products is only half the battle as trucks first need to deliver goods to Oregon. In our mind, freight is a two way street. As congestion continues to mount we become less attractive to freight haulers. The result is increased shipping costs and less reliability. Agricultural loading docks are not clustered like industrial parks'; rather they are located on the nurseries and farms. So it is essential that state policy makers look at transportation systems that support job creating industries that bring back dollars to our state.

Transportation infrastructure is critical to Oregon's economic health

The nursery and greenhouse industry acknowledges the challenges and opportunities that HB 4113 presents this committee. We share the tremendous disappointment in the State of Washington for backing away from a bi-state partnership to invest in a critical transportation corridor. The lack of investment by our neighbors from the north changes the math and circumstances for the consideration for this state to move forward on the Columbia River Crossing.

However, product needs to get to market. Significant transportation investments need to be made, including this critical bridge. Ignoring the problem only places greater cost burdens – not only quantified by replacing an unsafe bridge in the future but economic costs to industry that rely on a transportation system to conduct their commerce.

Last month the Oregon Department of Transportation released its Investment Grade Analysis which said that toll revenue is sufficient to finance construction of the bridge. We urge you to consider this factor as you make your decision on whether or not to support this project.

Are the circumstances the same as 2013 when the state passed forward thinking transportation investments, they are not. Is it time to shake off a little political turbulence and build this bridge now, we believe it is. The OAN respectfully requests that the Oregon Legislature make the wise investment into our transportation future and allow its businesses and people to move throughout the region. Please support House Bill 4113, as amended.

Thank you for your time and attention.