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Testimony of Chris Corich, former State Aviation Board Member in Support of HB2075.

Good afternoon, name is Chris Corich. I am an airport planning consultant of 7 years, a former employee for Portland International Airport where I completed a wonderful 19 year career as the General Manager of Long Range Planning and Noise, and until recently, I was a 9 year member of the State of Oregon Aviation Board. I am here today to testify in strong support of HB2075 and to urge you to support aviation in Oregon by recommending its passage.

One of the key aviation organizations in the State is the Oregon Department of Aviation – an agency that Sen. Johnson once led. As a member of the Oregon Aviation Board, I watched the slow decline of that agency as its funding – tied in large part to the State aviation fuels tax, has declined. The decline stems from two factors: the pilots who fly the small planes like I once did are in decline. Fewer hours flown = less fuel sales. In the case of jet fuel, the decline is driven by something that we should all be happy about. During my aviation career, I have seen commercial airliners become drastically more fuel efficient. More people and cargo are flying and less fuel is being burned. It is cheaper for the airlines – great for airline ticket prices, and better for the environment.

However, those falling fuel sales create a huge problem for the Oregon Department of Aviation, which like almost all other State Departments of Aviation, depend upon them to fund a significant portion of their operation. And the demands on the department are growing not declining. Most of the small airports around the state lack a full time professional airport manager. Small communities can't afford them. The Department of Aviation helps those communities navigate an increasingly complex regulatory environment of Federal, State, and Local regulations. An example of that effort is the State Wide Capital Improvement Program. This program coordinates Federal funding for all but the large commercial airports to ensure that Federal Aviation Administration funds – which provide 90% of eligible projects cost, are property sequenced and coordinated with small communities around the state. In addition to supporting the Department of Aviation, funds raised by the passage of this bill will help small communities pay for the 10% match for the 90% Federal dollars.

Not all airport projects are eligible for Federal Aviation Administration dollars. Some economic development projects or utility infrastructure projects are either not highly prioritized in the federal system or are outright not permitted. Funds from the passage of this bill will help fund those important projects.

When I was going through the confirmation process to join the State Aviation Board, I remember a question asked of me by Senator Ferriolli. He asked, what can be done for air service to rural communities? I didn't have an answer other than to say that there were limited funds to maintain airports but none that I knew of that would fund air service. Passage of this bill would provide funds for air service for rural Oregon.

The airports do a lot for us in this State. Most likely the pilot who will be flying the airliner on the next commercial airline flight you take will have trained at an airport like one of the ones we have all over the State. Business is happening at airports all over the state, whether it is Les Schwab visiting a local tire store, or Facebook staff visiting a data center. Cargo is moving. Need your car repaired in La Grande – there is a good chance that the unusual car part the dealer there needs to get you back on the road will take a flight in on a cargo plane from a warehouse in Portland. The result is you will get back on the road faster. Need an emergency medical procedure you can't get in Brookings? You can get a fast ride to a hospital that can perform that procedure – in an airplane. Is the forest on fire near your home? It is likely someone will be using an airport nearby to conduct or coordinate fire-fighting operations. And finally, for some, there is just the thrill of taking the controls of a plane and flying somewhere in our beautiful state.

This bill will help support airports throughout the State. I urge you to support its passage.

Thank you.

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