

Oregon's County Road System

Oregon's 36 counties maintain more roads and bridges than any other jurisdiction

Data

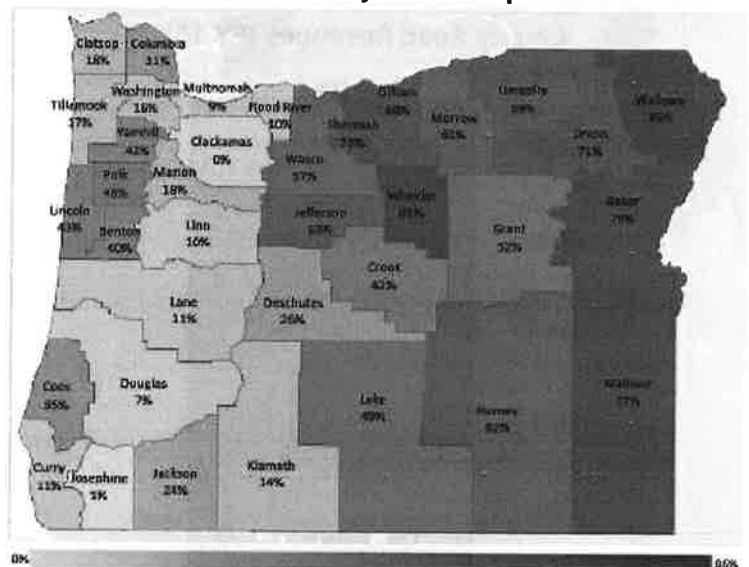
The county road network is a critical component of Oregon's integrated transportation system. Oregon's cities, counties and Department of Transportation maintain the statewide road system, which amounts to 52,759 centerline miles of roadway. Including local access roads within counties, counties are responsible for 63 percent (33,120 miles) of Oregon's non-federal road network. When looking at the roads counties directly maintain, 10,468 miles are unpaved, indicating a surface of gravel, cinder, dirt or other natural surfaces. Although these surfaces are cheaper to construct, they are often more expensive to maintain over time and can provide a less safe and comfortable ride.

Oregon's counties maintain 3,420 bridges over 20', amounting to 50 percent of Oregon's bridges. Of the county bridges, 249 are structurally deficient (SD), which generally means the bridge is in need of rehabilitation or replacement and vehicles could be restricted from using the bridge. It is imperative SD bridges be improved. Counties must bear a larger share of this burden than other jurisdictions because counties own 68 percent of all the SD bridges statewide. Beyond the big bridges, counties also maintain 1,290 bridges below 20' and 86,890 culverts, which have significant maintenance needs of their own. All of these facilities are crucial to the transportation of goods and people throughout our state.

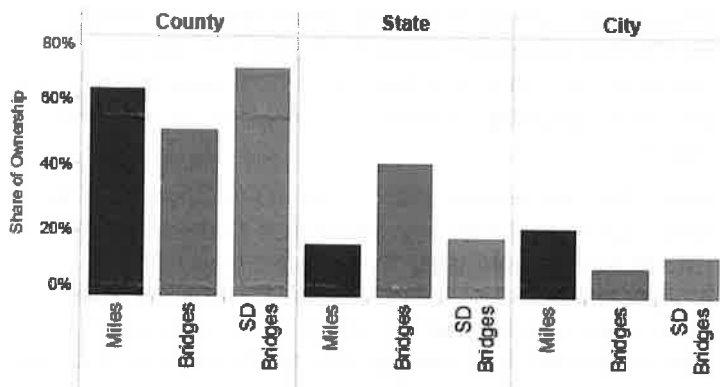
Description

Oregon's county road systems are as diverse as the state. In some parts of the state, booming populations have forced counties to confront shifts in land use and development patterns that require adaptation of a traditionally rural transportation system in to something nearly urban. Other counties in Oregon must work with their agricultural or forest industries to maintain export capacity and retain jobs in their area. Almost all county roads are routes for school buses, mail carriers and emergency vehicles.

Share of County Roads Unpaved



Comparison Between Jurisdictions



SD = Structurally Deficient

Oregon's counties also vary considerably by climate; county roads are damaged in both coastal floods and wildland fires. County roads provide essential links for commerce and economic activity including: local food to market delivery, access to Oregon's deep-water ports and the freight rail network, routes to recreational areas and tourist attractions, and connectivity between city streets and state highways. Regardless, all of Oregon's counties are working to make their transportation systems safer, less congested, and more efficient in moving people, goods and services.

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Funding Oregon's County Roads

Oregon's counties leverage a variety of funding sources to maintain and preserve infrastructure investments

Local

Oregon's counties have a handful of options on how to raise their own revenue for transportation funding. Transferring general fund property tax revenues to the road department is statutorily prohibited, except where those funds are explicitly dedicated to particular road projects when proposed to the voters. Instead, counties can institute local gas taxes, vehicle registration fees (VRF), system development charges and a variety of other mechanisms to fund their local road system (see "Other" in chart). Multnomah and Washington Counties have local gas taxes, and Multnomah County has a local VRF, which is dedicated to the Sellwood Bridge replacement project.

State

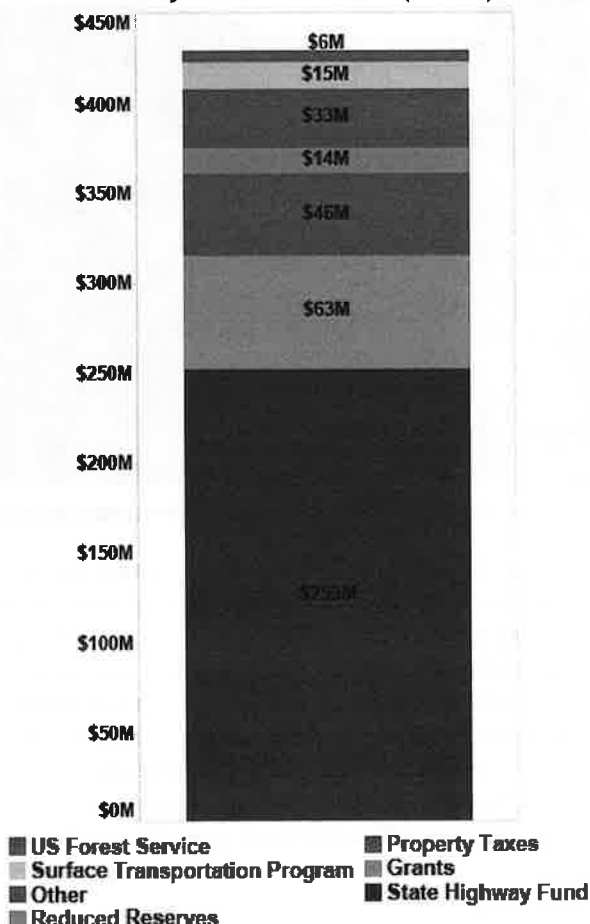
The primary state funding mechanism is the State Highway Fund (SHF), of which counties receive approximately 25 percent of the funds total revenue. This county share is allocated to each county based on their proportion of the statewide vehicle registrations. Revenue for the SHF is raised through the state gas tax, vehicle registration fee, weight-mile tax, motor vehicle license and road use assessment fees. The Oregon constitution restricts these funds to the construction, repair and operation of the statewide public road system, with at least 1 percent required to be expended on bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Counties also receive state funding through various grant programs.

Federal

Funding from the federal government comes in a variety of forms. The most flexible type of federal funding is from the Surface Transportation Program (STP), which can be used for almost any transportation service, except routine maintenance. Nearly all of the STP funds counties receive are exchanged with SHF dollars through an ODOT program called "Fund Exchange" where counties send \$1 dollar of federal STP funds in exchange for \$0.94 in SHF dollars. This allows counties to use the revenue on their highest priority work, maintenance and preservation, at a small cost. The remaining federal funds counties receive for transportation are allocated through various grant application processes, such as the Federal Land Access Program (FLAP). The FLAP program routinely funds the repair and preservation of county roads connecting population centers with recreational areas and economic generators on federal land. Unfortunately, the 10.27 percent match requirement placed on counties to receive much of the federal funding prevents many counties from accepting or applying for all of the funding they could otherwise receive.

Since 2000, Congress has assisted Oregon's rural counties that have large federal forests with payments in a program called "Secure Rural Schools" (SRS). These funds were directed to counties to make up for the lost revenue previously coming from timber harvest receipts, which had declined heavily over the past two decades. With the expiration of SRS, counties anticipate funding dropping from over \$100 million at the peak, down to only \$6 million when based solely on receipts.

County Road Revenues (FY 15)



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