HB 2139   STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Veterans and Emergency Management

Prepared By:	Cassie Passon, Counsel
Sub-Referral To:	Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Meeting Dates:	1/26, 2/23

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program within the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist with transport of rural veterans to receive health care. Allows grants for transportation regardless of whether care being received is covered by any federal benefit plan. Deems federally recognized Indian tribes eligible to receive grants.

Subsequent referral to the Committee on Joint Ways and Means
REVENUE: No revenue impact
FISCAL: Fiscal impact issued

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Fills gap for merely rural veterans; program compliments federal highly rural veterans transportation program
- Bill creates a programmatic transportation program instead of continuing as budgetary line item
- Bill going to Veterans work group

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The federal Veterans Administration (federal VA) operates the Highly Rural Transportation Grants Program that helps Veterans access transportation to and from heath care appointments in highly rural areas at no cost. Only seven counties in Oregon qualify as highly rural counties; Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Lake, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Wallowa, and Wheeler Counties.

House Bill 2139 establishes in statute the Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program, which was previously created in the 2019-2021 budget of the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs. The Rural Veterans Healthcare Transportation Grant Program is a state program that supplements the federal program by serving Veterans that live in rural areas that do not meet the federal definition of highly rural. The Oregon Dept. of Veterans Affairs partners with the Oregon Dept. of Transportation to administer the program and funding. Current program service area includes Klamath, Deschutes, Crook, and Jefferson counties and the Warm Springs Reservation.