
February 3, 2022

Chair Susan McLain
Chair Lee Beyer
Joint Committee on Transportation

Chairs Beyer and McLain and Members of the Committee:

Multnomah County supports the adoption of the -2 amendments to HB 1558, the Transportation Omnibus Bill for the 2022 session. Our concerns with the bill as written range from preemption to our own ability to finance and maintain our infrastructure assets, but most importantly the language in Section 8 of this bill would have immediate impact on Multnomah County's financial commitments and partnerships around our region, many of which are decades old.

Section 8 would prevent us from collecting our longstanding motor-vehicle rental tax (MVRT) from certain operators. The MVRT currently generates revenue for bond repayment for sever of the facilities Oregonians know and love in the Portland Metro region. This bond repayment method is critical to partnerships we have with other local governments in the region. Given the drop in VFTA revenues since the beginning of the pandemic, any additional decrease in collections will have significant impacts on our bond repayment for these assets.

The preemption in section 8 also removes one of the few options counties have to generate revenue for bridges and other infrastructure. As you know, bridges are a huge financial burden for local governments. We struggle to maintain them and counties have the most bridges by far in poor condition due deferred re-investment in such critical infrastructure. Multnomah County is currently problem solving for how to replace the Burnside bridge, and this could be one dedicated funding stream for that project. We are committed to working with the legislature and our partners to modernize transportation funding in our state, but the timeline of that is still a ways in the future. Local governments already have fewer options for funding bridges than our state partners, and we must preserve all revenue options for local transportation assets.

Multnomah County has long been supportive of the need to reduce emissions and greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere. We look forward to partnering with members of this committee as well as other local government, rideshare and food delivery partners in the interim to find ways to do that while also supporting a healthy, safe and resilient transportation system and fulfilling our bond repayment agreements. We ask that you not move SB 1558 forward this session without the -2 amendments.

Sincerely,

Taylor Steenblock

State and Regional Affairs Coordinator, Multnomah County Government Relations