



# Clatsop County Commissioner Lianne Thompson Testimony on Clatsop County Transportation Needs

June 17, 2024

## Co-Chair Gorsek and McLain and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation

I am bringing to your attention 4 issues that need addressing.

**1** **First**, I strongly urge your committee to prioritize investments in safety and in the maintenance, rehabilitation, and operations of existing transportation facilities across the shared transportation system.

- We have three lifeline routes in Clatsop County in dire need of repair. Combined, these heavily used roads transport approximately 35,000 vehicles a day.
- They are **Hwy 101, Hwy 30 and Hwy 26**. When closed or not fully operational due to collisions, flooding, or landslides they cut off or limit first responder's ability to reach people in need. They also strand or significantly delay residents and visitors coming to or leaving our county on business or for pleasure.

**Hwy 101** - when flooding or collisions force the closure of this Highway rerouting of drivers may take up to two hours to reach destinations north of the closure. Not only does the backed-up traffic cause extreme congestion along Hwy 101, it also can result in vehicles backing up on **Hwy 26**, adding to the potential of collisions on that route.

**Hwy 30** - recent landslides and accidents have prevented traffic moving from 6 hours up to 2 days and this is important as this Highway is the preferred route for semi traffic in the area.

- When the new section of Hwy 30 was built back in the 60's, ODOT turned jurisdiction of the old highway to the County. These parts of the old highway offer an alternative way to bypass traffic accidents and slides in those areas. Unfortunately, most of the accidents and several slide areas fall between Mileposts 87.8 and 95.5, (Old 30 Burnside to Tongue Pt.), where there is no alternate route.
- This issue is heightened even more when traffic from additional vehicles navigate our highways in Spring through Fall. It is important to remember that more than 53% of visitors to Clatsop County are Oregonians and of that number nearly 37% come from Portland. Reinforcing my comment of the heavy use of Highways 30 and 26.<sup>(i)</sup>

During the summer months and particularly around the 4th of July, Clatsop County population swells to well over 100,000 people straining not only the roads, but infrastructure and public safety as well.

With the potential Cascadia Event, under the current conditions of these Highways, Clatsop County's 40,000 residents and up to 250,000 guests will be cut off from emergency or vital supplies assistance.

Note that those numbers bring us to nearly 300,000 people ranking us above Salem, the 2nd largest city in our state. When you combine the 3rd largest city—Eugene — with its neighbor city of Springfield our population is still larger.<sup>(ii)</sup>

(i) Travel Oregon

(ii) Oregon Blue Book | <https://sos.oregon.gov/blue-book/Pages/local/city-population.aspx#InplviewHashc076b417-114c-41b6-bb51-0466878aec21=SortField%3DRank-SortDir%3DAsc>



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**2 Second**, I want to address the critical need to increase State Highway Funding.

To continue maintaining our existing road system, it is very important to maintain the State Highway Fund 50-30-20 split for safety improvements and to maintain critical infrastructure on which all travelers of our roads require and expect.

It is also critical to make sure that the Small County Allotment continues and grows.

- Over the last four years we've seen our construction costs increase almost 25%.
- With Clatsop County projected to lose at least \$500,000 every year due to the implementation of the Habitat Conservation Plan, an increase to the small county allotment will be one of many avenues Clatsop County and our residents will need to maintain the health and well-being of our residents and preserve these vital lifeline transportation infrastructures.

**3 Third**, in a sustainable and incremental manner, we urge you to address the highway cost allocation imbalance responsibly so users pay in proportion to the road costs for which they are responsible and without lowering overall State Highway Fund revenue available to local governments.

- The operation and maintenance budget for ODOT is only **2% of whole budget**. We urge you to re-fund this portion of the budget at a significantly higher percentage to maintain what we have instead of building new.
- We understand that there is a shortfall but it is more prudent to prioritize maintaining our existing transportation infrastructure. Yes, there are times to build new but you cannot do it at the expense of the roads we now have and rely on. That is what preservation and maintenance is all about.

**4 Fourth**, increase funding of the State Transportation Improvement to support rural transit statewide.

- In 2020, ODOT and the AOC collaborated with county jurisdictions providing support in evaluating seismic lifelines.
  - When you compare evaluating rebuilding those bridges within ODOT's system between Knappa and Astoria after a catastrophic event, with seismically retrofitting the County's bridges using the alternative routes, a 10:1 cost/benefit ratio was found over rebuilding ODOT's bridges in the short term, and allowing the continued movement of people and goods to the area.
  - The County participated in this exercise but it appears to have gone nowhere.

Thank you for hearing the concerns of Clatsop County. I urge you to recommend additional funding to meet our most critical transportation and life safety needs.

Clatsop County Commissioner - District 5  
Lianne Thompson