



## **Oregon Legislature Joint Transportation Committee-City of Eugene Testimony**

**July 17, 2024**

**Gleason Atrium, Lane Events Center, Eugene-OR**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Oregon Legislature's Interim Joint Transportation Committee (Joint Committee) related to Eugene's transportation needs. This testimony is complementary to the comments shared during the Round Table section of the Joint Committee's visit to the Eugene-Springfield Metro Area. My comments are on behalf of the City of Eugene and can be organized into the following categories: Funding Stability, Transportation Facility Challenges, Regional Airport, and Safety.

### **Funding Stability**

Transportation is a regional issue. People using our streets are not thinking about whether they belong to city, county or ODOT. Eugene needs sustainable funding to maintain our local transportation system and to make it safer. We struggle to maintain what we have with the funding that we currently receive from the State Highway Fund plus local funding sources.

We would like to see an increase in the key elements of the state highway fund including the gas tax in order to fund basic maintenance and operations of our system. Ultimately, we support a shift to a road usage charge. We also support indexing the state gas tax to inflation and allowing local governments to do so for local gas taxes.

Besides the State Highway Fund, the City of Eugene relies on other sources of revenue to both maintain and improve our transportation system including a 5-cent local gas tax, our 5-year street repair bond measure and system development charges. With a potential shift to a road usage charge, it's critical that we still be able to maintain our local gas tax in some way.

The primary revenue source for city's road fund is the State Highway Fund. The city's fund has a structural imbalance, with projected expenditures outpacing projected revenues. There are several unknowns with State Highway Fund revenue, including the impact of high fuel prices in both the short term and the long term. To maintain a balanced budget, the road fund will need to implement a future reduction strategy to reduce operating expenditures by about 10% beginning in FY28 if state legislation is not passed to address transportation funding inadequacies statewide.

### **Transportation Facility Challenges**

The closure of Eugene's only hospital and emergency room has raised awareness of the need to ensure that key bridges and overpasses in our community are resilient in the event of a subduction zone earthquake so that emergency services can access hospitals in Springfield. We have been working on seismically upgrading some of Eugene's 59 vehicular bridges. It has been especially challenging to fund projects where the only option is to completely replace a bridge such as the W. 11<sup>th</sup> Ave. bridge over Amazon Creek in west Eugene.

Managing the impacts of unsanctioned public-space camping is an ongoing challenge for a community with more than 3,500 unhoused people on average, and only about 1,100 total shelter spaces. The City has had to devote Public Works personnel, equipment, and funds to consistently respond to reports of camping impacts that affect roadway and pathway safety, sanitation, and access. For instance, in the first six months of 2024, the Public Works Maintenance Right-of-Way Team completed nearly 2,000 work orders for clean up in the public right-of-way.

City staff are also forced to spend time addressing unsanctioned camping on railroad properties throughout our community. This work takes resources away from maintenance activities to focus on getting the railroads to address issues on their property; sometimes it is public works staff performing clean up on railroad property, especially where the railroad intersects with our roadways.

We also experience vandalism on our transportation network, most notably in terms of copper wire theft. This has been a longstanding problem for lighting along our shared use path system and vandals even manage to move large concrete blocks that we install to prevent theft.

### **Eugene Airport**

The Eugene Airport has been growing briskly in passenger activity, with 41 percent more passengers since 2019. As a result, Concourse A is at capacity and is overcrowded at several peak periods during the day, with a lack of sufficient space for passengers waiting to board flights. The Concourse A expansion project will provide additional space for waiting passengers and feature significant accessibility upgrades, facilitating improved operational efficiency and passenger experience. With a larger terminal capacity, airlines will be incentivized to offer more flights, leading to increased competition and reduced airfares for travelers. The City of Eugene will apply to the FAA's Airport Terminal Program Grant funded within the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, with the recognition that federal funds will not account for the full project. Eugene expects to combined local funds and potential request state funding for this regionally significant investment.

### **Safety**

Like ODOT, we also struggle to prevent fatalities and serious injuries on our transportation system. We are seeing increases in fatalities and bad driving behavior that endangers other people using our streets whether walking, biking, driving or taking the bus. Even as we work to redesign our streets to make them safer, we can't control how people drive, especially if they are under the influence, driving distracted or inclined to drive aggressively. We need more help from the state and federal governments in solving this problem.

Other problem-solving ideas around safety: continue to fund projects to redesign both local and state-owned streets to make them safer. Add state funds to the All-Roads Transportation Safety grant program. We also would request a more robust approach from ODOT on the non-infrastructure side of transportation safety.

### **Eugene Transportation System Facts**

The City of Eugene manages 1,408 lane miles (563 centerline miles) of streets and 46 miles of shared-use paths. Approximately 22% of Eugene's streets are in fair, poor or very poor condition and in need of significant rehabilitation. Even streets in good condition are in need of regular and programmed maintenance such as crack and joint sealing, slurry seal, and overlays. Even with the city's 5-cent local gas tax and voter approved pavement bond measures, we still face a significant backlog for street repair that is currently estimated to be \$158 million.

Eugene manages 59 vehicular bridges and 52 pedestrian/off-system bridges. Seismic assessments have been completed on 57 total bridges, including 53 of the 59 vehicular bridges. 24 had identified seismic deficiencies. Construction costs are highly variable, and some bridges originally assessed as retrofits, upon further evaluation need to be reconstructed. One bridge we thought was a retrofit that turned out to be a replacement was the W. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue bridge over Amazon Creek; it is estimated to cost \$21 million to replace. The majority of the bridge retrofits would be between \$2 to 4M for construction. For some additional perspective, as of 2021, the retrofit of the Coburg Rd Ferry St. Bridge & the Ferry Street Viaduct were estimated to cost more than \$30M combined. Backlogged maintenance for all bridges is estimated to be approximately \$8 - 10M.

Only two of the three ODOT crossings of the Willamette River have been seismically upgraded via either a new bridge (I-5) or a retrofit (I-105) but there is still a need to address seismically vulnerabilities at Beltline either by replacing the existing bridges or building the new local arterial bridge. Also, the Hwy 99/Franklin Boulevard overpass over the UPRR tracks just west of I-5 also needs to be addressed seismically and was not transferred along with the rest of Franklin/Hwy 99 for this reason.

Recently released crash data from ODOT indicates that fatal crash numbers hit their highest level in over 10 years in the Eugene area beginning in 2022 and continuing in 2023. The current preliminary data for 2024 would suggest that Eugene is on pace to see similar fatal traffic crash numbers in 2024. Growing numbers of traffic fatalities at the local, state, and federal level demonstrates a need for more robust transportation safety investments.

### **Closing**

Thank you for your time and effort to engage communities across Oregon on this critical topic of transportation systems and investments. We appreciate your service and willingness to tackle tough problems.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lucy Vinis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lucy Vinis, Mayor