

## **Testimony of Kurt Willcox**

My name is Kurt Willcox. I am a Eugene resident and a retired University of Oregon employee.

Three years ago, I sold my 19 year-old van and bought a new Volkswagen ID.4 electric vehicle. It is simply the best car I have ever owned – safe, low maintenance, cheap to operate, smooth driving, quiet, and, best of all, no carbon emissions. I was only able to afford that car, because I received a \$7,500 tax deduction from the federal government and a \$2,500 clean vehicle rebate from Oregon. I installed a charger in my garage with the help of a \$500 rebate from the Eugene Water and Electric Board and a tax credit from the federal government covering part of the cost of installing a 50-amp electrical line to the garage.

I primarily drive my EV around Lane County, so I only need to charge up about once every 7-10 days. I have taken trips to Bend each year in the winter, to Portland numerous times, and to both the North and South Coasts. I have also driven to Oakland, CA and to Vancouver, BC. Longer trips take a bit more planning, but I have never encountered serious problems charging the car when traveling on major highways. Charging infrastructure on the Oregon coast, however, is seriously lacking.

Last year, my spouse gave up her Toyota Prius, which she had happily driven for 13 years, and purchased a used Nissan Leaf electric vehicle. She was uncertain at first, but quickly became an EV convert and now tells everyone about the fantastic car she's got. It's easy to drive, there's very little to maintain, no more stops at the gas station, and she only has to charge up every few weeks. Driving electric works very well for both of us.

I also personally know of at least 8 people who have bought EVs in the past three years – all older folks like me. Four bought new and four bought used. For six of the eight, the state rebate and federal tax deduction were critical to their purchase decisions. Two even timed their purchases to the short window period when the Oregon Charge Ahead rebate was available this past April. They all use their vehicles in different ways, but all are very happily driving electric.

It's clear that the state doesn't have sufficient funds to maintain the roads we currently have, much less take care of future needs. Part of the reason for that is declining gas tax revenues, a problem that will only increase as more people adopt forms of electric transportation. I support raising additional revenue to secure the needed funds, and I am personally willing to bear an appropriate share of those increased costs.

My message to the Joint Committee on Transportation, though, is that you should not leap to partial quick fixes that punish those of us who have moved to electric transportation, such as raising registration fees for EV owners. Oregon should be advantaging the kinds of vehicles that help us meet our critical climate goals, and that includes hybrid electric vehicles that get at least 50 miles of electric range, since most people average less than 30 miles of daily driving. We should not take actions that disincentivize people from buying EVs or other forms of electric transportation.

In that regard, it is imperative for Oregon to shore up funding for the clean vehicle rebate program, so that it can once again provide rebates year-round. The rebate may need to be smaller, and it may need to be more focused on low-income purchasers, but it needs expanded funding. That could be achieved by dedicating all auto dealer privilege tax revenues to the rebate program or it could be done by raising the privilege tax rate or both. In all cases I am aware of, auto dealers simply pass that tax on to the purchaser, so it is rarely an added expense for them.

Oregon also needs to ensure that we have the kind of charging infrastructure that makes it convenient for people to drive EVs – both residents and visitors. As I mentioned, there are clearly charging deserts in Oregon, such as large sections of Highway 101 and Highway 97, including areas that see a lot of traffic. There are also many vehicle owners who don't live in single family homes with garages, as I do. They live in apartments, condos, rentals, or in rural areas and need a way to "charge at home", since that is the most convenient form of charging. Transportation and building code policies must work to facilitate easy access to charging infrastructure. When we visited London last year to meet our son's mother-in-law, for example, we saw several EVs being charged at neighborhood streetlamp posts.

There should also be effective incentives for public bodies and private employers to electrify their vehicle fleets. School districts, transit districts, utility districts, local and regional governments, and the state typically have most of their vehicles on the road during the day and park them in central locations at night where they can be recharged. Many private employers use their vehicle fleets in a similar manner. This is a perfect setup for electrification and Oregon should encourage fleet owners to move in this direction.

Finally, I think it is important that those who use our roads the most and who create the most wear and tear on them are responsible for a significant portion of the revenue that maintains the roads and funds ODOT. Whether that is in the form of a user fee or a weight-mile tax or something else is less important to me than ensuring that heavy users are heavy funders. That will include me to some extent, because of the weight of electric vehicles, but it is the sort of approach that will help Oregonians feel that transportation funding is being fairly apportioned.

Thank you.

Kurt Willcox