



LANE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Heather Buch
Ryan Ceniga
Pat Farr
David Loveall
Laurie Trieger

July 17, 2024

The Honorable Chris Gorsek, Senator and Co-Chair
The Honorable Susan McLain, Representative and Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Dear Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain, Vice Chairs Boquist and Boshart-Davis,

On the occasion of the field hearing of the Joint Committee on Transportation, welcome to Lane County. First and foremost, I want to thank you all for taking the time to visit Lane County as part of your tour. Our county is unique in being the only Oregon county in which all 19 state land use goals apply. We're a microcosm of Oregon, more broadly, holding a rich diversity in landscapes, communities, and people.

Lane County was once the leading county-level producer of timber on a national scale and as such, our transportation system was exceedingly well funded. I'm told that my predecessors on the Board, once upon a time, regularly transferred road funds over to our cities as they had too much to spend. That's unfathomable today.

At present, Lane County is responsible for over 1,400 miles of roadways and 425 bridges. The vast majority of our road infrastructure was built over 100 years ago and, with escalating costs, we are falling further behind in our maintenance and preservation backlog. Beyond the preservation needs of our existing century-old infrastructure, we are also focused on key system pillars to carry us into the next century of service: safety, resilience, equity, and access.

I'm so pleased that you all took the time for a bus tour and were able to see tangible examples of each of these key pillars. Transportation is critical to the resilience of communities – both before and after disasters happen. You learned about the toll that firefighting and wildfire recovery take on roadways – like track sneakers after too many marathons – the heavy-duty vehicles fatigue roadways that are vital evacuation routes and equally vital routes to schools and to jobs for people simply looking to make a living and keep their families safe.

Fatal crashes occur at a higher rate in Lane County than our peers and we've joined the Toward Zero Deaths movement to focus energy on the work we know is needed to improve safety. We know the engineering solutions that would make a difference, but we don't have the \$2 billion in construction funds needed to bring our most traveled roads to basic engineering standards. We write as many federal transportation grants as possible but struggle to be competitive due to our low rural-road traffic volumes. .

Finally, we know that equity and access are critical hallmarks of a transportation system that works for all. Over half of our ADA ramps are failing and a third of them are missing. We know statewide that one in four Oregonians don't have a driver's license and we've learned here locally that over half

of our rural residents said they would walk and bike more if they felt safe enough to do so on rural roads.

I am encouraged by the thoughtfulness of your process and the care taken by legislative and agency staff to ensure you are getting a good look at multiple communities around Oregon. On any issue for which there is not enough of a shared funding source, the risk of resource conflict among parties is fairly predictable. Obviously, the State Highway Fund is essential to ODOT, to counties and to cities – and all our costs are increasing. Our roadways – like our lives, our communities, and our local-regional economies – are all interconnected. Underfunding one piece just moves the problems from one place to another and nothing is really solved for Oregonians.

Clearly, additional funding is needed – from new sources and perhaps from adding greater flexibility for new uses from existing revenue sources – and, where appropriate, creating flexibility not only for legislative appropriations, but also for county commissioners and city councils. As we think about new funding sources, we strongly recommend using an equity lens to evaluate options to mitigate differential impacts to lower income Oregonians.

In closing, Co-Chairs, I'm grateful for the opportunity to address the Joint Committee. Lane County is committed to being your thought partner, together with our cities and our respective associations. We are absolutely supportive of efforts to increase investments in maintenance and improved safety. And we firmly believe that a larger State Highway Fund, as a whole, should continue to be allocated as it is today with 30% and 20% flowing to counties and cities. We're excited to work with you on ideas for creating new flexibilities in possible revenue sources, as well.

Thank you, Co-Chairs.

Sincerely,



Laurie Trieger, Chair
Lane County Board of Commissioners

ELECTRONICALLY SUBMITTED BY STEVE ADAMS, LANE COUNTY POLICY
DIRECTOR