



# JACKSON COUNTY

## Roads

### Roads and Parks Administration

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Joint Committee on Transportation  
Co-Chair Senator Chris Gorsek  
Co-Chair Representative Susan McLain

RE: Transportation Safety and Sustainability Outreach, Medford

Dear Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Members of the Committee:

I want to take the opportunity to welcome you to Jackson County in advance of your upcoming tour stop in Medford. We are excited to host your meetings in our county facilities and look forward to a robust, meaningful conversation on the challenges of our region's transportation infrastructure.

I know that, in your previous stops, you have heard plenty from local transportation leaders on the issues that need to be addressed on our state, county and city roadways. That will be no different here in Southern Oregon, as there are plenty. Inflationary impacts in both operations and maintenance, as well as capital construction, have led to serious challenges that prevent our local system from meeting the demands of the traveling public; not in the future, but in the present. This issue is prevalent across the state.

However, what may be unique to Southern Oregon is the collaboration that permeates through our transportation partners in our collective effort to address our local challenges to the best of our ability. I believe that we are more efficient when we work together. From ODOT, to Jackson County, to the many cities in our county, we value partnerships that benefit the entire transportation system. We also know an effective system makes individual partners stronger and ultimately provides for a better experience for the traveling public. This shared value leads us to trying to solve our issues at the local level during these challenging times to the best of our abilities.

Significant local partnerships:

- *Foothill Road Multi-Jurisdictional Improvements*- These improvements assist in meeting growth demands in the region, while also providing an important bypass route for Interstate 5 in the event of a Cascadia-level event. Completion of the project will ensure traffic will continue to flow to and from northern and eastern Oregon following a significant seismic event. The effort is a joint project between Jackson County, the City of Medford and ODOT. **The final shovel-ready phase of this project, with construction anticipated to cost nearly \$12 million is placed on hold until stable long-term funding is secured.**
- *Interstate 5 Winter Response*- When the Siskiyou Pass on Interstate 5 closes due to winter conditions, it significantly affects the regional (and west coast) transportation system, including

local roads, as travelers seek alternate routes. These closures can lead to serious safety concerns for the public. As such, Jackson County and ODOT District 8 have developed a unique collaborative plan to respond at a regional level with Jackson County, providing both transportation and law enforcement support to help ensure the safety of travelers during severe weather events, while allowing ODOT to focus important resources on maintaining the highway. Decreasing State Highway Fund revenues will make this continued partnership challenging moving into the future, resulting in a direct effect on the safety of the traveling public.

- *Emergency Response*- As the prevalence of severe wildfires in our region continues to grow, transportation officials are being forced to play a new role in response. During times when we historically were focused on pavement maintenance, we are now forced to focus our attention to providing traffic control for first responders to allow them to safely perform fire suppression and community evacuations. While this service is a necessary function, it is a challenging task for any jurisdiction to assume on their own, while trying to balance the need to maintain our roads during our limited summer maintenance season. Our advance planning, mutual aid during events, and the spirit of collaboration amongst ODOT, Jackson County and local cities makes our region better prepared for an event. This collaboration is growing more and more challenging as funds are reduced and resources dwindle.
- *Southern Oregon Cooperative Agreement*- This unique partnership between transportation managers in Josephine and Jackson County allows for efficiency in our maintenance services, while reducing redundancy and waste. The partnership allows for Jackson County to perform pavement maintenance services for small cities with the specialized equipment we have, resulting in significant cost savings for these jurisdictions. It allows each jurisdiction to leverage their strengths for the benefit of the traveling public throughout the regional transportation system.

The partnerships described above are only a sample of the regional collaboration transportation managers have developed and nurtured in an effort to ensure efficiencies in management of our local system. Due to systemic funding challenges, I fear these partnerships are growing harder to maintain. I look forward to the upcoming discussions on a broader level of what can be done to address this historic transportation financing crisis at the statewide level, while we continue to seek collective efficiencies and solve our issues at the local level.

I have attached information on our county transportation system for your reference and hope you have a chance to review it prior to your upcoming visit.

Sincerely,

Steve Lambert  
Director

cc: Jackson County Board of Commissioners  
Cindy Robert, Rainmakers Government Strategies