



September 12, 2024

Joint Committee on Transportation (via JCT.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)
Oregon State Legislature | 900 Court St. NE, Salem, Oregon 97301

***RE: Transportation Package Tour to Focus on Maintaining a Safe, Functional, Efficient System:
September 12 Public Hearing in Bend***

Dear Chair Gorsek, Chair McLain, Vice Chair Boquist, Vice Chair Boshart Davis, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on key considerations and priorities for delivering a safe, functional, and efficient transportation system to Oregonians.

For over 35 years, Central Oregon LandWatch has been working to ensure Central Oregon's livable future. To grow well and with intention, LandWatch's Cities & Towns program works to deliver Complete Communities to our region—mixed-use places with housing options for all, nature nearby, and access to safe, convenient, affordable transportation options.

SUMMARY

We urge the JCT to make the most of this pivotal 2025 legislative session and forthcoming transportation package by:

- 1) Moving fair, sustainable and long-term revenue solutions forward;
- 2) Increasing funding for oversubscribed multimodal transportation programs;
- 3) Ensuring geographic equity in funding and investments; and
- 4) Using an integrated transportation, housing and climate lens to guide policy and funding decisions in order to maximize benefits for Oregonians and our communities.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

To thrive, Oregon communities need balanced, sustainable, multimodal transportation systems. To equitably and efficiently deliver this system to Oregonians, we urge you to prioritize:

1) **Diversifying and Increasing Equitable and Sustainable Revenue Sources**

Fair and sustainable funding **incentivizes** cleaner, safer transportation choices; is **progressive** and assigns burdens/benefits equitably; and **reinvests** in the comprehensive, complete transportation system we need. **That means considering revenue tools that:**

- Charge more for heavy, oversized, or highly emitting vehicles
- Charge based on the amount someone drives



- Reduce relative costs for low-income people and account for geographic differences, including rural and tribal communities
- Raise funds that aren't required to be used on roads
- Raise or dedicate funds for a specific purpose, program, or project

Specifically, LandWatch would like to see consideration of a road use charge (e.g. looking at evolving the voluntary OreGO program) included in forthcoming discussions. A weight tax/fee and increasing STIF funding is also of interest. However, because efforts focused on increasing revenue are tough and complex, initially we'd like to see as many options on the table as possible that line up with the criteria outlined here.

2) **Increasing Funding for Safety, Mobility and Multimodal Funds, Programs & Projects**

How we increase revenue is critical - and so is *what* we spend that revenue on. We need to take care of the existing system we have. And here in the fastest growing region in Oregon, we also need to plan and build a more balanced transportation system that meets our community's current and future needs.

The safety and mobility programs established in 2017 moved Oregon's communities towards a more multimodal, equitable, safe, and sustainable transportation future. However, these essential programs are oversubscribed and underfunded, while the need in Oregon's communities for safer streets and more diverse modal choice is significant and urgent. From 2013-2022, 8,554 people were hit by motor vehicles in Oregon— leading to 8,444 people injured and 746 people killed by motor vehicles.¹ Increased, long-term, and sustainable funding sources must be identified for safety and mobility programs and projects to protect lives and livelihoods.

It's time to prioritize investments in and significantly increase funding for essential, oversubscribed multimodal safety and mobility funds and programs including: the Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF), Safe Routes to School, Great Streets, and Oregon Community Paths.

Robust, sustained funding for these programs at the State level can make a world of difference for projects at the local level. Here in Bend, our transit system is in dire need of additional funding via STIF to sufficiently serve our community. There are also key, transformative transportation projects in the works that will help us meet our transportation, housing *and* climate goals, such as the Drake to Juniper Bike & Pedestrian Corridor and 3rd Street Safety and

¹ ODOT Crash Analysis and Reporting: [Crash Summaries By Year By Collision Type](#) 2013-2022



Connectivity Improvements. These local ‘game-changer’ projects – and others like them – would benefit from increased state level funding for the programs listed here.

In addition, we also support safety improvements highlighted by the City of Bend and other local organizations that will save lives along the Highway 97 corridor.

3) **Ensuring Geographic Equity in Funding & Investments**

Investments and projects need to deliver real value to Oregon’s communities by supporting the streets and services we use every day. **So it is critical to strike a balance between big investments/projects west of the Cascades and meeting the needs of fast-growing communities like those in Central Oregon.**

Indeed, Central Oregon is the fastest growing region in the state. The cities in Deschutes County alone have been growing at an average annual rate of 3.3%, and are forecasted to continue steady growth into the future.²

While populations and existing infrastructure are more significant in the Metro area and Willamette valley, population growth and urbanization is most acute in Central Oregon. This population growth directly translates into more roadway users— in cars, on buses, on bikes, and on foot. **In Central Oregon’s cities, there is a need to not only maintain existing infrastructure, but to build new infrastructure in expansion lands, and significantly upgrade existing infrastructure in infill areas to meet the growing needs of ongoing urbanization.**

Many of these infrastructure demands put significant pressure on City budgets, as they absorb the vast majority of regional population and job growth within their boundaries. We can deliver better geographic equity in our investments by ensuring communities throughout Oregon have more resources to address their local transportation plans, projects, and needs directly. **This means considering changes to the current Tax and Fee Distribution and Projects allocation, which currently sits at 50% ODOT, 30% Counties, 20% Cities.**

4) **Making The Most Of Every Dollar: Maximizing Benefits for Oregonians**

The 2025 Legislative Session and forthcoming transportation package present **a unique and critical opportunity to more fully integrate and simultaneously tackle Oregon’s transportation, housing, and climate needs moving forward.**

By honing in on the policies, programs and investments that sit at this nexus of issues, we can

² [Coordinated Population Forecast: Deschutes County 2022-2072](#), Portland State University Population Research Center (PRC) p. 13





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make progress on some of the most pressing issues of our time, deliver more equitable economic, social, and environmental benefits to Oregonians, and make the most of scarce resources.

An essential part of this recommendation is identifying— and prioritizing investments in— the places and infill projects within communities where transportation infrastructure investments help catalyze and support more housing close to amenities and services with safe, convenient transportation options. If we can align our priorities, funding streams and investments to put these projects at the front of the line, we will maximize our transportation dollars *and* community benefits. In the face of budget shortfalls, rapid growth, an affordable housing shortage, and climate change, it is vital to maximize our investments in ways that help our communities thrive.

We look forward to working with the Joint Committee on Transportation, our legislators, Governor Kotek, and myriad people, communities, and stakeholders on the path ahead to help deliver a more equitable and sustainable transportation future for all.

Thank you for your service and your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Corie Harlan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Corie Harlan
Cities & Towns Program Director

CC:

Ben Gordon, Executive Director, Central Oregon LandWatch

Kristin Reidelberger, Cities & Towns Associate Program Manager, Central Oregon LandWatch



We defend and plan for Central Oregon's livable future