



September 12, 2024

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

For more than 25 years, the cities of Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson Counties (and Maupin in Wasco County) have worked together for a common purpose on issues that connect us.

We are literally connected through the state transportation system. State highways run right through the middle of all our cities, and as the region has grown dramatically, so too have the issues and challenges facing our region.

We urge you to focus on four key areas:

Safety: Major stretches of state highways, particularly the stretch of Highway 97 running from south of Madras through Redmond and Bend to the area south of La Pine is a facility that is near the top in the state for traffic fatalities and safety incidents. Safety improvements were promised decades ago and are desperately needed. These sections should all be four lanes and should include safety barriers. It is well past time to address these life-threatening conditions.

Operations and Maintenance: Maintenance = safety. Maintenance also = lower cost over the long term. Any fiscal plan for our roadways going forward must incorporate adequate funding to maintain the quality of the infrastructure.

Winter Maintenance: Threatening to cut off winter maintenance on the mountain passes should never be an option. The lives of Oregonians literally depend on winter maintenance. Investments which serve public safety must be the Department's #1 goal at all times.

Regional Equity: We acknowledge and support the need for robust systems on I-5, safe bridges across the Willamette River, and the importance of the Columbia Crossing. However, these three metro area projects appear to be headed towards a total price tag of more than \$11 billion. Yet, the state refuses to prioritize projects in our region that are - - in total - - far less than \$1 billion. That is completely inequitable, and it is not fair to the local taxpayers and road users who invest into the system. Ignoring serious transportation needs east of the Cascades is very problematic. We urge the Committee to require regional equity in any legislative transportation proposal.

We realize the gas tax (combined with tremendous construction inflation) cannot be the sole long-term funding source for transportation services. We urge the Committee to consider broadening the state's funding sources while also ensuring the funds are efficiently used and focused on the priorities we list above. For instance, spending tens of millions of dollars on consultant costs (i.e. for I-205 tolling), rather than specifically on our transportation system, is an example of misdirected priorities that lead to mistrust from the public. Better accountability and more transparency are a key to public support of any proposal from the Committee.

Thank you for visiting Central Oregon, and please use us as a resource as you continue your important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Fitch', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ed Fitch
Chair, COCO
Mayor of Redmond

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael T. Preedin', written in a cursive style.

Michael Preedin,
Chair
Mayor of Sisters