



To: Joint Committee on Transportation

From: Mike Powers, President of SEIU 503

Date: 9/27/24

RE: SEIU ODOT Members and Transportation Roadshow

Dear Co-Chair McLain, Co-Chair Gorsek, Vice Co-Chair Boquist, Vice Co-Chair Boshart Davis and members of the committee,

My name is Mike Powers, and I am President of SEIU 503. We are a union that represents over 72,000 workers in Oregon. We understand the importance of maintaining our roads and responding to major incidents on our highways.

SEIU represents over 2,500 workers at ODOT. We maintain over 8,000 miles of state highways and roads. These highways range from major interstates to smaller state routes that connect towns and cities. We are responsible for roughly 2,700 bridges and major culverts. This includes routine inspections, maintenance, and occasional replacement projects. On average, we respond to more than 45,000 crashes annually. These incidents have a human life cost as well as a negative economic impact.

We are also representatives at your local DMV. We provide services to 13,000 customers every day through 60 local offices around the state. To ensure that customers are served, and records are up to date, we answer about 1.7 million customer phone calls per year, respond to more than 3 million record requests from businesses and fulfill more than 60 million record requests by law enforcement per year.

While ODOT operates statewide, budget cuts will have a disproportional impact in coastal and rural areas. For example, we maintain about 5,000 lane miles in Eastern Oregon or region 5, including critical routes for the public and commercial freight such as I-84 and I-82. With 25 maintenance facilities strategically placed in the region, we deploy roughly 200 crew members to operate 96 snowplows and work around the clock to keep people and business moving. Our resources are stretched even thinner with extended winter season and wildfire season.

It is no secret: ODOT's budget is heading towards a revenue cliff fall. The cost of maintaining and operating our state highway system is outpacing our ability to raise revenue to pay for it.

You, our elected officials, are in the unfortunate position of being in the driver's seat and tasked with crafting a bipartisan approach to the budget crisis in hopes of not driving off the cliff.

The budget crisis will undoubtedly have a domino effect on services. A reduction in services will adversely impact response times to incidents, the number of lanes a snow crew can plow, how quickly vehicles will be removed after a wreck, cross-agency collaboration in the case of extreme weather events. Also, without regular maintenance, our roads and highways will deteriorate rapidly. The bottom line is that Oregonians are going to need to wait longer for help if help is coming at all because we will not have the staff.

ODOT workers care deeply about the safety of Oregonians and our state highway system. As members of the communities that we serve, road safety is our imperative because our communities are relying on us to keep them safe regardless of what mother nature throws at us. Here we offer guidance as you navigate the budget discussions:

- Craft bipartisan solution to sustain and expand skilled ODOT workforce
 - Oregonians need you to come together to find a viable bipartisan solution to raise revenue to ensure that Oregonians can move around the state safely.
 - A bipartisan solution will ensure that ODOT has the funds to recruit and retain top talent. Funds will also allow ODOT to preserve and expand programs to attract new workers while addressing the program's shortfalls.
- Prioritize safety of workforce in budget decisions
 - At the end of the day, we want to get home to our families and loved ones. We don't want to be another headline in the paper: "ODOT crew struck by driver." All roadside workers are spouses, partners, parents, children, siblings or friends to someone – and we all deserve to get home safely at the end of our shift.
 - Here are the facts about work zone incidents from a [2022 report](#): 358 crashes in a work zone, 226 non-fatal injury crashes, 34 serious injury crashes, and 7 fatalities from crashes.
- Invest and protect what the state does best: operations and maintenance
 - With the current budget crisis, ODOT management and top leadership will likely look at options to privatize public work and cut the agency's workforce to save a few pennies at the expense of road safety. Keeping public work within the state's purview ensures better accountability and oversight over taxpayer funds. Outsourcing leads to lower standards of workmanship, safety, and service quality due to cost-cutting measures by private contractors.

In closing, I ask the Chairs, Vice-Chairs and members of the committee to craft a bipartisan approach to the budget. There are a lot of lives at stake when it comes to highway safety. Oregonians are looking at you to lead in this moment when action is desperately needed.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Mike Powers

President of SEIU 503