



National Headquarters

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September 27, 2024

Joint Committee On Transportation
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: State Transportation Conversations Across Rural and Urban Communities for 2025 Package

Dear Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain and Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

My name is Colin Reynolds, and I am the Senior Advisor to the Northwest Program at Defenders of Wildlife (“Defenders”). Defenders is a national conservation organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities, with over 48,000 members and supporters in Oregon. On behalf of Defenders, I urge the Joint Committee on Transportation to fund the Oregon Department of Transportation (“ODOT”) at the recommended level of \$5 million per year in the 2025 transportation package for wildlife crossing construction.ⁱ

Wildlife-vehicle collisions (“WVC”) are a significant safety problem on Oregon roadways. As explained in ODOT’s July 2024 “Transportation Funding Needs” document, each year “there are over 7,000 [WVCs] in Oregon” involving deer and elk,ⁱⁱ and “on average, four people die, and 521 people are seriously injured in those collisions.”ⁱⁱⁱ Outside of the direct danger to drivers and passengers, the cost of WVC is significant. Some of the newest research shows that WVC-related vehicle damage, medical expenses, and the lost hunting value of the deceased animal involved brings the average cost of a deer collision, in 2020 figures, to \$19,089, and the average cost of an elk collision is \$73,196.^{iv} Using ODOT’s 2022 WVC data, the total cost of elk and deer WVC in Oregon is above \$100 million.^v Unfortunately, the number of WVCs that actually occur in Oregon is likely much higher in reality, as multiple studies conclude that half or two-thirds of WVCs involving large mammals go unreported.^{vi}

Luckily, WVCs and their associated costs can be reduced through properly sited wildlife crossings, such as a bridge or tunnel that allows animals to safely cross, with associated fencing. For example, the Highway 97 undercrossings south of Bend reduced WVCs in the area by more than 90%.^{vii} Decreased collisions equate to decreased costs, and ODFW expects these crossings to pay for themselves in just 10 to 12 years.^{viii} With the lifespan of a crossing estimated at 50 to 75 years, the project should continue to pay dividends well into the future.^{ix} Due to all these factors, ODFW called the Highway 97 crossings “an obvious win for both wildlife and the traveling public.”^x

Providing state funds for this work is also incredibly timely, given the influx of federal dollars available for wildlife crossing and habitat connectivity projects that require non-federal matching dollars. For example, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act created over a dozen grant programs that can pay for wildlife crossing infrastructure projects.^{xi} In 2019, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2834 to reduce WVC. In this bill, ODOT was given the responsibility to reduce WVC through means such as wildlife crossings and associated fencing, yet, per the Transportation Report, ODOT has never received the funding to carry out this responsibility.^{xii} Additional funding would also allow ODOT to better assist the several citizen-led groups throughout Oregon who are attempting to raise sufficient funding to construct wildlife crossings.^{xiii}

Wildlife crossings also benefit wildlife, big and small. At one of the Highway 97 undercrossings south of Bend, ODFW observed 29 species use the crossing, including bobcats, badgers, squirrels, alongside deer and elk.^{xiv} At the proposed wildlife crossings in Oregon advocated by citizen-led groups, the crossings would benefit imperiled mule deer, and several species listed as Threatened and Endangered on the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Wildlife crossings are a non-controversial solution to a serious problem. Western states, regardless of Democratic or Republican leadership, have all embraced crossings. For example, Utah has over 50 crossings,^{xv} and Colorado has over 40.^{xvi} Among states bordering the Pacific, Washington has over 20 crossings^{xvii} and California has over 50,^{xviii} while Oregon, has just 5 completed undercrossings.^{xix} It should be no surprise that according to data released by State Farm on September 24, 2024, Oregon drivers have the greatest likelihood to collide with an animal as compared to drivers in California and Washington.^{xx} As estimated by ODOT in the “Transportation Funding Needs” document, “an investment of \$5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years.”^{xxi}

We respectfully request that the Joint Committee on Transportation fund ODOT at the recommended amount of \$5 million per year. Doing so would allow ODOT to accomplish the goal of reducing WVC, set forth by HB 2834, and address an issue of significant safety concern to all drivers that has a proven and cost-effective solution.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Colin Reynolds

Senior Advisor, Northwest Program
Defenders of Wildlife

ⁱ *Transportation Funding Needs*, OREGON DEP'T OF TRANSP. 13 (July 2024) <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf> (“Wildlife Crossings help to prevent animal-vehicle collisions. Each year, there are over 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon; on average, four people die and 521 people are seriously injured in those collisions. There is no dedicated federal or state funding source to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions, despite a recent state law meant to reduce these types of collisions (HB 2834 in 2019). An investment of \$5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years.”).

ⁱⁱ *Watch out for wildlife: Vehicle-wildlife collisions peak this time of year*, OREGON DEP'T OF FISH AND WILDLIFE (Oct. 12, 2022), https://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2022/10_Oct/101222.asp.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*

^{iv} Marcel Huijser, et al. *Cost-Benefit Analyses of Mitigation Measures Along Highways for Large Animal Species: An Update and an Expansion of the 2009 Model* (Sept. 30, 2022), https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Report_TPF-5-358-cost-benefit-analysis-update_2022.pdf (Table 5).

^v In 2022, ODOT recorded 4,587 deer vehicle collisions and 246 elk collisions. Multiplied against the estimated cost of a deer and elk collision, the total cost of deer collisions is \$87,153,000 and elk collisions is \$17,956,000 resulting in a total cost of \$105,111,000.

^{vi} For literature on unreported data see Tracy S. Lee, Kimberly Rondeau, Rob Schaufele, Anthony P. Cleavenger & Danah Duke, *Developing a correction factor to apply to animal-vehicle collision data for improved road mitigation measures*, 48 WILDLIFE RESH., <https://www.publish.csiro.au/wr/pdf/WR20090> at 506 (“Our study demonstrated that AVCs involving large mammals are underestimated; more animal carcasses were reported during walking surveys off the road than were reported during road surveys. These animal carcasses represent error sources in traditional AVC datasets generated by road surveys, because of injury bias. In our region of the Rocky Mountains, we suggest that a correction factor of 2.8 can be applied to road survey datasets to account for undetected road-kills.”); Marcel P. Huijser, & James S. Begley. *Large mammal-vehicle collision hot spot analyses, California, USA*. WESTERN TRANSP. INSTITUTE (2019), https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/09/4W6693_Huijser-and-Begley-FINAL-Report-Caltrans-Statewide-20190913-reduced-image-size.pdf at 14. (“Furthermore, crash data typically represent only a fraction (14-50%) of the carcass data, even if both data sets relate to large mammals only...Finally, the carcass data are far from complete as well; animals that are not very visible from the road in the right-of-way may not be removed and do not get recorded. Wounded animals that make it beyond the right-of-way fence before they die are also usually not recorded at all.”).

^{vii} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*, OREGON DEP'T OF FISH AND WILDLIFE, <https://oregonconservationstrategy.org/success-story/us-97-wildlife-crossing/>.

^{viii} *Id.*

^{ix} *Id.*

^x *Id.*

^{xi} Renee Callahan, *Wildlife Infrastructure Funding Opportunities within the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act*. (2024) ARC SOLUTIONS, NPCA, WILDLANDS NETWORK., https://arc-solutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/IJA-Wildlife-Infrastructure-Funding-Guide_FINAL.pdf.

^{xii} *Transportation Funding Needs* at 13.

^{xiii} See e.g., *Oregon Wildlife Federation promotes three wildlife crossing projects, one on Hwy. 20 in Central Oregon*, KTVZ (Sept 18, 2024), <https://ktvz.com/news/wildlife/2024/09/18/oregon-wildlife-federation-promotes-three-wildlife-crossing-projects-one-on-hwy-20-in-central-oregon/>; Roman Battaglia, *Proposed wildlife crossing in Southern Oregon seeks federal funding*, OPB (Oct. 2, 2023), <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/10/02/southern-oregon-wildlife-crossing-federal-funding/>.

^{xiv} *Strategy Spotlight: U.S. 97 Wildlife Crossing*.

^{xv} *Wildlife Crossing Structure*, UTAH WILDLIFE MIGRATION INITIATIVE, <https://wildlifemigration.utah.gov/land-animals/crossing/>.

^{xvi} Stephanie Butzer, *Colorado is becoming a leader in constructing wildlife crossings — and there's much more to come*, DENVER 7 (Sept. 4, 2004), <https://www.denver7.com/news/local-news/colorado-is-becoming-a-leader-in-constructing-wildlife-crossings-and-theres-much-more-to-come>.

^{xvii} Sara Zaske, *Wildlife crossings potentially save millions of dollars annually in Washington state*, PHYS.ORG (Aug. 30, 2022), <https://phys.org/news/2022-08-wildlife-potentially-millions-dollars-annually.html>.

^{xviii} See *Connecting California: An Interactive Map of Wildlife Crossings Across the State*, WILDLANDS NETWORK (Aug. 16, 2023), <https://www.wildlandsnetwork.org/newsroom/interactive-ca-wildlife-crossings-map>.

^{xix} Oregon also has retrofitted 5 culverts to enable wildlife movement.

^{xx} *New State Farm data reveals the likelihood of hitting an animal while driving in every state*, STATE FARM (Sept. 24, 2024) <https://newsroom.statefarm.com/animal-collisions-24/>.

^{xxi} *Transportation Funding Needs* at 13.