

# Oregon's Transportation System Faces Structural Funding Challenges

## How Did Oregon Get Here?

Maintaining Oregon's transportation system is something most people can agree the government should do. People walking, driving, biking and rolling value smooth roads, safe ways to cross the street, snow clearing in winter, highways free of trash and graffiti, and excellent customer service. But ODOT and other transportation agencies across Oregon are cutting back on staffing levels and maintenance spending. Why is that?

Oregon's way of funding transportation has become antiquated. The state relies on gas tax receipts combined with fees on vehicles and freight haulers to form the State Highway Fund, which then distributes money to transportation agencies across the state.

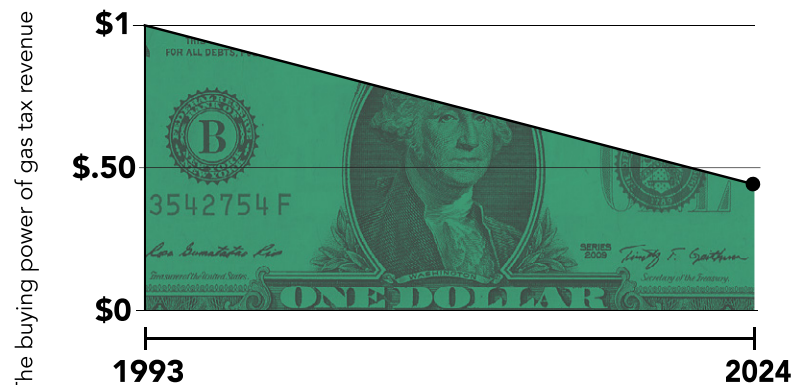
While this structure has supported the state's transportation system for a long time, the State Highway Fund as it is today won't be able to support the maintenance, operation, and safety of our system, and of ODOT, into the future. This is due to three main causes:

### 1 DECLINING GAS TAX REVENUE

Oregonians are driving increasingly fuel-efficient vehicles and switching to electric vehicles at a high rate – this is good as it will drive carbon emissions from transportation down 60% over the next 25 years. **But with increased fuel efficiency and more EVs, Oregon sees lower tax revenues and less money available to maintain the transportation system.**

### 2 HIGH INFLATION

Inflation has made maintaining the transportation system more expensive. The materials and staffing necessary to provide the services Oregonians rely on have gone up dramatically in cost. **Unlike many other states, Oregon's gas tax is static and isn't tied to inflation.** Our vehicle and freight hauler fees are also not tied to inflation. With every year that passes, the same dollar purchases fewer materials and less service.

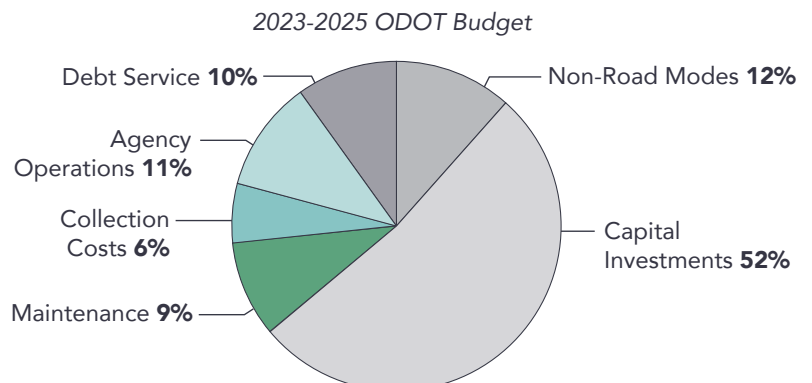


\* Since 1993, the last time the federal gas tax was raised, inflation has increased to where \$1 in '93 is worth \$0.46 in 2023

### 3 RESTRICTIONS ON AVAILABLE FUNDING

Only a small share of the funding that comes into ODOT can be used to maintain the state's transportation system and run the agency.

State law directs almost half of total state highway fund dollars to cities and counties and then dedicates over half of what's left to pay back bonds for past projects and invest in new projects, leaving only about 20 percent of every dollar available for state highway maintenance.



\*Not inclusive of one-time general funds granted during 2024 legislative session.

# Tough Road Ahead for Travelers

Oregonians can expect longer road closures, more trash and graffiti, worse winter driving conditions, more potholes, and slower DMV customer service because of this structural revenue issue. The decline in Oregon's transportation system won't be limited to state highways because counties and cities rely on the state highway fund for their maintenance services too. State, local, and neighborhood roads, sidewalks and bike lanes will all decline.

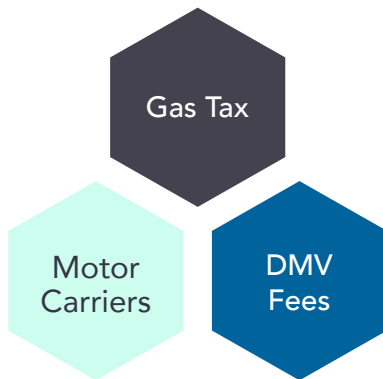


## Where Do We Go From Here?

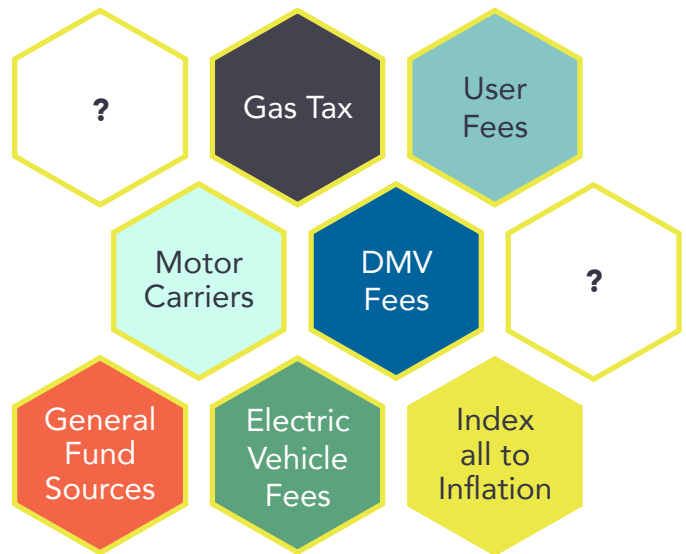
### A Road Map to Sustainably Fund Oregon's Transportation System

Sufficient, sustainable, and resilient funding is key to maintaining and modernizing our state's transportation system. Other states choose a variety of ways to sustainably fund a modern transportation system such as raising or indexing transportation fees to inflation, establishing new user fees like a road usage charge or tolls, or transfers from the general fund.

#### Oregon's Current State Highway Fund Revenue Sources:



#### Sustainable Funding Options for Oregon to Consider:



### URGENT ACTION IS NECESSARY FOR THE SERVICE OREGONIANS DESERVE

ODOT has enough funding to keep state highway maintenance levels roughly stable until the middle of 2025. After that, in the absence of additional revenue or revenue reform, **Oregonians will see a rapid decline in the safety, quality, and reliability of their transportation system.**

The legislature is working toward a comprehensive transportation modernization package in the 2025 legislative session. ODOT looks forward to working with our partners to help the Legislature identify sustainable solutions to Oregon's structural transportation budget issues.



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# Maintaining the System

## Oregon's Statewide Transportation System

ODOT's mission is to maintain a safe, accessible, and reliable transportation system for all Oregonians.

Statewide, ODOT is responsible for about 8,000 miles of roads, 2,770 bridges, 180,000 traffic signs, and countless critical safety features throughout the system. Our teams of dedicated professionals, locally based in 88 communities throughout Oregon, are on the front lines delivering essential day-to-day services that keep our roads open and safe every day.

As stewards of the state's multimodal transportation system, ODOT maintains and operates the system through two primary methods:

**ODOT's Maintenance and Operations Program** delivers day-to-day statewide services like emergency and incident response, snowplowing, pavement patching, roadway striping, guardrail repairs, litter and graffiti cleanup, and other essential maintenance services performed by ODOT crews.

**ODOT's Preservation Program** helps repair and replace bridge, pavement, culvert, and signal infrastructure to ensure long term performance. The investments in this program are prioritized to protect the state's existing infrastructure and safe operations while striving to strengthen seismic resiliency, connectivity, and reach Oregon's climate goals.

### By the numbers statewide (2021-2023 biennium):

- Maintenance equipment inventory: 6,183
  - This includes a range of equipment from a pick-up (light fleet) to a 10-yard truck (heavy fleet) to a grader (off-road construction equipment) to a slip-in sander unit.
- Total road miles: 7,972
- Total bridges: 2,773
- Miles of barrier and guardrail: 1,871
- Maintenance facilities: 1,100
- Total signs: 179,795
- Traffic signals: 1,218
- Minor and major sign installment and maintenance hours worked: 102,533
- Minor culverts and Inlets cleaned: 69,211
- Pick up shoulder litter hours worked: 130,775
- Mowable acres of grass: 19,209





## Region 2

ODOT maintains and operates the transportation system through the work of five distinct geographic regions. Each region includes unique communities, landscapes, and conditions that determine the priorities and approach to maintaining and operating the transportation system within the region.

Region 2 builds, operates and maintains the state's multimodal transportation system in the Willamette Valley, north and central coast, Oregon Coast Range, Willamette Valley metropolitan area and central Cascade Range passes. This area covers nearly 25% of Oregon's state highway miles. With just under 600 employees, Region 2 serves the residents of Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Yamhill, Polk, Marion, Lincoln, Benton, Linn, Lane, western Washington and western Clackamas counties.

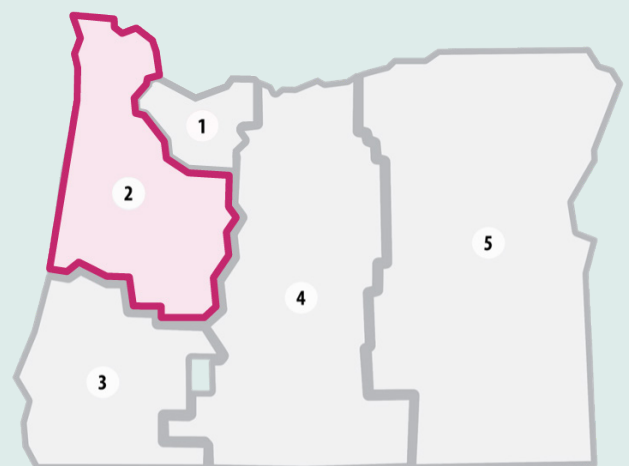
This region encompasses a wide range of Oregon landscapes—coastal beaches, mountains, rivers, lakes, large and small cities, farmland and vineyards, forests and even hot springs. The natural beauty and the state's two largest universities attract visitors throughout the year, contributing to a growing tourist industry and significant traffic on state-owned highways.

The diverse geography also presents Region 2 with its greatest challenges. In the heavily forested coastal side of the region, constantly shifting soil and heavy rains lead to rock and mud slides, highway sinkholes, flooding, and fallen trees along the highways. In the Willamette Valley, winter snow and ice events cause unsafe traveling conditions, congestion, crashes, and delays on I-5. In the central Cascades bordering central Oregon, heavy rain and snow challenge the snowplow crews on the Santiam and Willamette passes, causing landslides and hazardous tree and debris fall on the highways. There is also a high risk of wildfires along the region's highway corridors during the summer.

Along with insufficient funding and staffing levels to maintain deteriorating infrastructure, these conditions make Region 2 a dynamic environment to operate and maintain.

### By the numbers Region 2:

- Total road miles: 2,075
- Bike lanes and multi-use paths: 617 miles
- Number of bridges: 1,018
  - Average age: 55 years
  - 11.2 million square feet of deck area (about the same size as 194 football fields)
- Two major Cascade Range mountain passes
- Number of snowplows: 80
- More than 7,200 culverts
- Full-time employees: 575
  - Maintenance and operations: 337
  - Seasonal: 10
- Total maintenance facilities: 24
- Average maintenance facility age: 57 years



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NOTE: This document has been updated as of Oct. 10.

# Keeping Oregon's Transportation System Clean and Safe



ODOT's mission is to maintain a safe, accessible, and reliable transportation system for all Oregonians. A key component of ODOT's maintenance work is clearing and cleaning the state's rights of way, including preventive investments to keep Oregonians safe and preserve our transportation infrastructure. Cleanup efforts improve health and safety conditions for everyone.

## A Growing Issue

Increases in graffiti, litter, and camps on state-owned land are symptoms of larger societal challenges. Since the pandemic, we've increased our efforts to address this issue. For the 2021-2023 biennium, \$22 million (3%) of ODOT's overall maintenance budget was invested in cleaning and restoring state highway property. ODOT relies on the same funding and staff for graffiti removal and site restoration as we do for storm response, road repairs, and responding to incidents. With structural funding challenges and rising costs, it's becoming increasingly difficult to meet the needs of the system.

## Safety is our Priority

Cleaning graffiti, removing litter, and restoring campsites can increase safety risks for the traveling public, ODOT crews, and our contractors. Infrastructure damage and costs to clean and restore these areas has increased in recent years.

ODOT invests in safety features such as fencing, rails, and barriers to help deter people from accessing dangerous locations. ODOT has processes to safely guide our staff and contractors as they perform this work, coordinate with partner agencies, notify campers, and handle personal items.

Unaddressed camping, graffiti and litter also impacts safety perceptions for neighbors, stops travelers from using bike paths and sidewalks, and are costly for ODOT and partners to address. Cleanup efforts provide a temporary fix to a much larger problem. Dedicated long-term solutions are critical to addressing this issue.

## Service Delivery

ODOT uses multiple approaches to tackle this complex and challenging work. ODOT has delivery programs and partnerships in place to deliver on all these services and the frequency is balanced with road maintenance needs and funding limitations.

### Litter

ODOT uses maintenance crews, youth litter patrols, Adults in Custody work crews, permitted volunteer groups, and an Adopt-A-Highway program to deliver litter clean up services. Due to safety risks, ODOT plans these services in advance, uses traffic control as needed, and has a formal process to safely guide staff as they perform this work and handle items collected.

### Graffiti

Graffiti removal is delivered through ODOT maintenance crews and contracted support. We've applied graffiti film, which can be peeled back to remove graffiti – saving crews from costly repairs and replacement – to new ODOT signs. Larger signs require highway closures, proactive alerts to industry partners of potential impacts, and can cost up to \$30,000 to replace.

## Camp Clean Up & Restoration

We work with community partners to schedule and execute campsite cleanups. Maintenance staff and law enforcement often talk with

campers and let them know camping is not allowed. Social service organizations offer available assistance and help connect people with resources. Crews then remove any remaining items, which we must store for 30 days. After the personal property and litter are removed from the site, ODOT works to fully restore the property.

### Access Prevention

Access prevention includes reinforced fencing, barriers, and vegetation and is delivered through ODOT crews and contracted support. ODOT crews maintain identified vegetation areas as natural barriers as part of our risk management work.

### Sponsor-a-Highway Pilot Program

In partnership with Governor Kotek, Central City Concern's Clean Start Program, and Tim Boyle of Columbia Sportswear, this collaborative pilot program aims to expand litter and graffiti cleanup

services in the I-405 corridor in the Portland Metro area. This program began in March 2024 and is funded through private donations. Litter removal is conducted through Central City Concern's Clean Starts Program and graffiti removal is completed by ODOT contractors.

### \$20M in new General Funding

In alignment with the Portland Central City Task Force and Governor Kotek's efforts to revitalize Portland, ODOT requested a one-time infusion of \$20 million in general fund dollars to increase the frequency of litter and graffiti removal, camp cleanup service and access prevention installment along major interstates and state highways in the Portland metro region. The legislature recognized the need and championed this effort with the passage of SB 5701 in the 2024 legislative session. Governor Kotek signed SB 5701 into law on April 17, 2024, and on April 18, ODOT began its work.

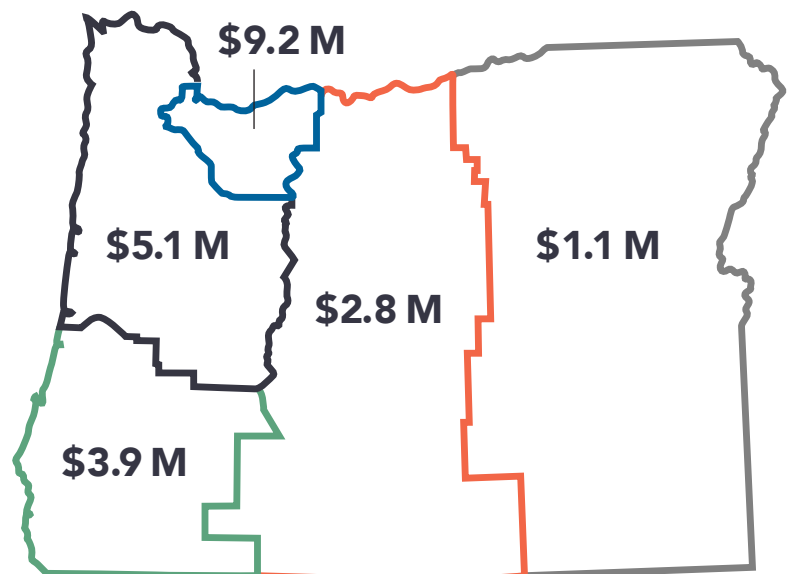
## By the numbers (2021-2023 biennium statewide):

For the 2021-2023 biennium, \$22M (3%) of ODOT's maintenance budget went to clean and restore state highway property.

- Litter – \$10.8M
- Campsite & Abandoned Property – \$10.3M
- Graffiti Removal – \$852,000

Expense by Region:

- R1 – \$9.2M (42%)
- R2 – \$5.1M (23%)
- R3 – \$3.9M (18%)
- R4 – \$2.8M (13%)
- R5 – \$1.1M (5%)



During the 2021-23 budget cycle, ODOT spent \$22 million statewide to clean and restore state highway property.



# About DMV

## Serving Oregonians

Almost every Oregonian is a customer of ODOT's Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division, better known as Oregon DMV. We are the face of government for most Oregonians. DMV is a customer service organization, a protector of roadway safety, and a source of revenue for Oregon's transportation services.

### Here is a look at who we are and what we do:

- In 2023, our 59 field offices served about 10,000 customers statewide each day.
- Every month, we see more than 1 million visitors to DMV2U, where customers can conduct more than 20 online transactions and find information.
- Our three call centers answer about 1.1 million customer inquiries per year.
- DMV maintains about 3.7 million driver licenses and ID cards and 4.4 million vehicle registrations.
- Annually, DMV processes more than 900,000 license, permit, and ID card issuances, renewals, and replacements and about 2.2 million vehicle registration renewals.

We know how important DMV services are to Oregonians and businesses across the state, and we strive to provide excellent, accessible, and reliable customer service. Yet DMV faces increased workloads while staffing hasn't kept pace with population growth. Aging facilities and safety issues contribute to the challenge of providing great service.



## Field Services Challenges

Oregon's population has increased more than 20 percent over the last two decades, growing by about 750,000 people from 2001 to 2024. That means an increased demand for DMV services, but staffing has not kept pace with that growth. In the same period, from 2001 to 2024, DMV's budgeted field staff has increased by just six individuals (404 then, 410 now). For all of DMV, we have seven more budgeted staff than in 2001 (846 then, 853 now). Staffing challenges combined with inadequate facilities and increasing incidents of customer threats—and even violence—impact DMV's ability to provide the level of customer service that Oregonians deserve.

## Staffing

Staffing is a daily challenge. In 2023, our field offices had an average vacancy and absence rate of about 30%. Even if all positions were filled, there are not enough employees to cover what is needed. Managers work daily to shift staff among offices to maintain the minimum number of employees necessary to keep offices open. Often managers are forced to neglect other critical responsibilities, spending much of their day at the counter to compensate for lack of staff. At times, it is not possible to open a given office at all. During 2023, one or more DMV field offices were closed for a total of 118 separate days due to staffing. Such closures create even bigger impacts in areas of our state with fewer and more dispersed DMV offices, leaving customers without the ability to access key DMV services unless they travel significant distances.

## Customer Behavior and Safety

In June 2022, DMV established a Threat Assessment Team that has met 41 times to address specific threats of violence made against customer service staff. This resulted in 32 customers receiving notice to contact DMV through specific channels, and that coming to a field office would be considered trespass.

Our dedicated frontline staff interact with customers every day and strive to provide the highest level of customer service despite increased demand and insufficient staffing levels. However, unsafe customer behavior is contributing to additional employee absences and exacerbates DMV's systemic staffing challenges.

## Inadequate facilities

DMV has 59 field offices throughout the state. Many of those offices are too small or otherwise inadequate to provide the level of service that Oregonians expect and deserve. Moving or even updating an existing field office is expensive. When budgets are tight, facilities work is prioritized well below the need for staff to serve Oregonians. Each biennium, it becomes increasingly difficult for DMV to appropriately relocate, update, and maintain these facilities.

### About DMV2U

Before the pandemic, there were three transactions that could be completed online. In 2020, DMV fully launched DMV2U. Through DMV2U, residents can now complete more than 20 online transactions, including renewing vehicle registration, renewing or replacing a driver license or ID card, paying certain fees, reporting an address change, and much more. These online services save hundreds of thousands of customers a trip to a DMV office. Even those who don't go online benefit; every person who goes online frees up a spot in line at a field office.

### Real ID in Oregon

The federal Real ID Act passed in 2005 and set national standards for state driver licenses and ID cards. Enforcement at airport security checkpoints will begin May 7, 2025.

Oregon began issuing Real ID credentials when our new driver system went live in July 2020. As of mid-2024, about 28% of Oregonians with a driver license or ID card have a Real ID.

This summer, DMV is launching a campaign to urge people to beat the coming rush for a Real ID. During the 2024 legislative session, the legislature approved ODOT's request for 26 temporary field office staff to focus on Real ID issuance. The positions and campaign costs are covered by the extra fee charged to Real ID customers, which is restricted solely for Real ID purposes.

### Safety

DMV promotes roadway safety by issuing driver licenses, as well as suspending or revoking them for unsafe driving behavior or when someone is no longer fit to drive due to medical reasons. DMV also houses Oregon's State Highway Safety Office, focused on curbing risky driving behaviors through education, as well as issuing federal grant money to local and Tribal governments, law enforcement, schools, and community organizations.



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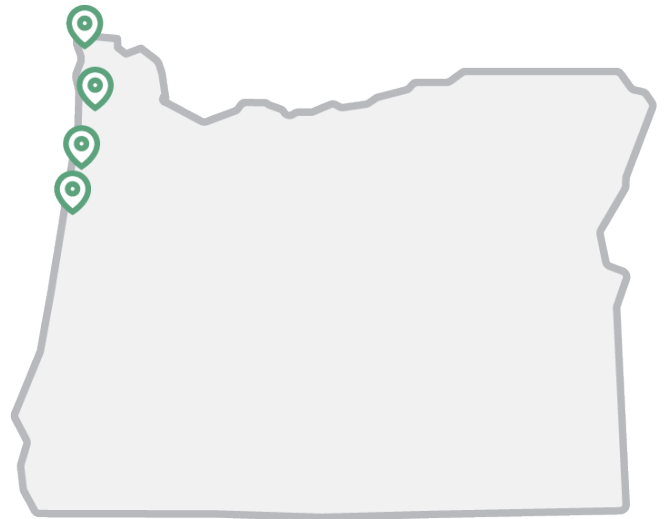


# Tillamook Office and North / Central Coast DMV

## The north and central coast DMV offices serve customers through:

- Four locations: Newport, Lincoln City, Tillamook, and Astoria.
- 11 total staff:
  - Tillamook: (1) Office Leader and (1) front-line staff
  - Astoria: (1) Office Leader and (3) front-line staff
  - Lincoln City: (1) Office Leader and (1) front-line staff
  - Newport: (1) Office Leader and (2) front-line staff

Coast offices are managed in clusters with other inland offices. Managers must split time between coastal and inland offices, limiting their on-site presence.



## Additional metrics

- In 2023, these four offices served 91,000 customers, with an average wait time of 17 minutes. Astoria had the longest average wait time of 38 minutes.
- Customers in this area mostly speak English and Spanish. Staff report the need for Spanish translation daily. While none of the staff who work in the north and central coast offices are bilingual, they frequently use handheld Pocket Talk translation devices to serve Spanish speaking customers.

All DMV offices strive to provide each customer with excellent, accessible and reliable customer service. Geography in this area plays a key role in the ability to provide high-quality, consistent service.



As staff availability in the north and central coast area is minimal, any combination of planned or unplanned employee absences requires relief staffing to be sent to these offices from inland DMV locations (Willamette Valley, Portland metro areas). Staffing limitations throughout the broader region often make sending relief impossible, resulting in office closures on the coast. In 2023, there were 49 days of partial or full-day closures in this area due to insufficient staffing. When it is possible to send relief, travel time limits the hours the office is sufficiently staffed.

In June 2022, to help mitigate unplanned closures on the coast, DMV reduced the Lincoln City office's services to three days per week. Lincoln City remains closed Mondays and Fridays—DMV's busiest days—so staff can travel to bolster staffing at other offices on the north and central coast.

At times, Tillamook and Lincoln City must operate with only one employee. Running an office with only one employee adds operational complexity and can only be done by a seasoned employee. In recent years, there has been a growing safety concern with single-employee offices due to the rise in unsafe customer behavior and threats against DMV staff.

The four offices in this area are in small, aging buildings on properties that do not allow for expansion, making it difficult to adapt to changing needs.

- Total number of DMV budgeted employees, including Field and Headquarters: 853.
- Total number of DMV Field Services budgeted employees: 410.
- Total number of DMV Field Services budgeted positions in the North Central Coast area: 11.



The Tillamook Office lead Brian Bertrand, who has been with DMV for 21 years, won the Tillamook Citizen of the Year award in February 2023 for his customer service at DMV.