

**Testimony in Support of SB 679 Oregon Coast Trail
Connie Soper February 20, 2023**

My name is Connie Soper, and I am pleased to offer this testimony in support of SB 679. I am an enthusiastic advocate for the Oregon Coast Trail (OCT), having hiked it in its entirety twice, and written a book, *Exploring the Oregon Coast Trail*, which provides a guide for day hikers, and relates stories of the people and places that make hiking the OCT such a remarkable experience.

Unfortunately, while the OCT has been an officially designated trail for nearly fifty years, it is not complete. Portions of it are required to be walked along the shoulder of a busy highway, which is neither safe nor scenic.

For the past several years (interrupted due to pandemic restrictions, and other financial challenges faced by participating agencies), extensive planning has taken place to (1) identify and catalogue gaps in the Oregon Coast Trail which require hikers to walk along the shoulder of US Highway 101 or other roadways not intended for pedestrians; and (2) identify options for addressing these gaps. Perhaps most significantly, the planning effort brought together agencies such as Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Oregon Department of Transportation, US Forest Service, the Oregon Coast Visitors Association and others with a vested interest in completing this wonderful trail to make it a better hiking experience.

The Oregon Coast Action Plan is nearing completion. Now is the time to move forward with the momentum that has been initiated. Each “gap” project will need a champion or project sponsor to decide, in consultation with local stakeholders, the best alignment for that particular section of new trail. I was recently involved in helping design, fund and build a two-mile portion of the OCT that connects Neahkahnie Mountain to the City of Manzanita. The City served as project sponsor, and the project was completed with the cooperation of four separate landowners, the Trailkeepers of Oregon, the Northwest Youth Corps, and a cadre of local volunteers. This new segment of trail is very well used by both hikers of the OCT as well as local residents. Most importantly, it provides a safe alternative to walking along the highway.

This type of project can and should be replicated elsewhere. SB 679 would provide some of the necessary funding to close the remaining about 40 miles in various gaps on the Oregon Coast Trail. This funding can provide not only direct funding for projects but also leverage grant funding, too.

I urge you to support this legislation, and to promote local efforts that will result in future trail improvements. Thank you very much.