

**Testimony of Metro Councilor Ashton Simpson  
In Support of House Bill 3014  
House Committee on Education  
February 20, 2023**



Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, housing and homeless services, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

Metro supports HB 3014, and I am here to express my support from two vantage points: one as an elected official, and another as a former non-profit executive leading one of the state's largest pedestrian safety advocacy organizations.

Traffic crashes are the second leading cause of death in Oregon for children ages 5-17. As we strive as a region and state to reach zero traffic deaths, we know this will require transforming our streets with improved infrastructure. But we cannot wait to make those needed investments to support kids safely crossing the street on a day-to-day basis; and this bill could save lives.

When school districts can partner directly with existing efforts to improve transportation infrastructure and deliver Safe Routes to School programs, our shared investments will be more effective in meeting student needs and improving safety. These programs are highly sought after and critical to the work, particularly to low income and communities of color where infrastructure is poor or lacking and kids do not have a safe way to get to and from school.

This was made clear to me through the Parkrose School District's partnership with Oregon Walks and Metro, to provide walking school buses and corner greeters to two elementary schools. We had limited funds to offer for volunteer workers and as a result, had low turnout for help with these programs. Metro supports flexibility in the system to provide for local solutions to transportation problems, such as equipment, signage, personal protective equipment, and more.

In addition, reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the transportation sector is a top priority for Metro and the State of Oregon. Across the region we have seen the share of school trips by vehicle increase when there aren't alternative and reliable options for families. We need all the tools possible to ensure we are moving in the right direction to meet our state and regional climate goals. HB 3014 will begin to address some of the issues we face with pickup and drop-off at our local schools.

Lastly, we know that climate change disproportionately affects communities of color, nationwide. These communities often have poor air quality from traffic that cuts through their neighborhoods. I've witnessed firsthand how poor roads and heavy traffic contribute to chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is one of the leading causes of low high school graduation rates, which disproportionately affects students of color in our region. Transportation is a key barrier to student attendance and one that we have the tools to address together. Metro is committed to supporting school districts in implementing transportation services that advance student success through our Safe Routes to School program and funding.

I urge you to pass HB 3014 so that we can support our kids getting to and from school safely.