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March 2, 2023

Oregon Joint Committee on Transportation  
Co-Chair Senator Chris Gorsek  
Co-Chair Representative Susan McLain  
Co-Vice Chair Senator Brian Boquist  
Co-Vice Chair Representative Shelly Boshart Davis

**Subject: Oregon Counties Support Rural Traffic Safety and Increased Funding, Ask for Definition Clarification for Rural Communities in Senate Bill 445**

Co-Chair Senator Gorsek and Co-Chair Representative McLain and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) and Oregon Association of County Engineers and Surveyors (OACES), we would like to thank the Joint Committee on Transportation for your attention to rural traffic safety. We want to also thank Senator Hayden for introducing Senate Bill 445 and highlighting the critically important funding needed for rural traffic safety.

The Oregon Association of County Engineers and Surveyors (OACES), an affiliate of the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC), represents Oregon's 36 county public works agencies and road departments across the state and provides a forum to share best practices and overcome challenges. County roads are a critical component of Oregon's integrated road system and are responsible for over 60% of Oregon's non-federal road network, over 32,000 total miles, and over 3,400 bridges.

AOC and OACES have no position on Senate Bill 445 (2023) and will continue to work with the state and other local governments in partnership to find collaborative solutions and sustainable funding for rural traffic safety.

Rural county and local government roadways face significant challenges from limited cell phone reception, longer emergency response times, simpler roadway infrastructure, and risky driver behaviors. While small scale crashes are concentrated in urban areas, rural roads see 55.5% of Oregon's fatalities, and when vehicle crashes occur there, the risk of fatalities is 75% higher than on urban roadways. County roads suffered 442 fatal and serious injury crashes from 2016 to 2020.

AOC and OACES respectfully request a careful review of the definition of "rural city," currently defined as "a city, town or other community located in this state that has a population of 15,000 or less." We are concerned that this definition does not address the needs of rural unincorporated communities and county roads, many of which have similar safety needs as a

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“rural city.” Considering the limited resources available to reduce fatal and serious injury crashes in the state of Oregon, counties also request that any new traffic safety program focuses on safety projects that achieve the greatest benefits in crash reduction and saving lives regardless of jurisdictional boundaries, ensure flexible local project decision making, and leverage opportunity in existing safety programs like the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program, the All Roads Transportation Safety (ARTS) formula program, and the federal discretionary grant Safe Streets and Roads for All Program (SS4A).

County road departments play a key role in managing Oregon’s rural traffic safety, and are grateful to be included in the discussion, as the subsequent policy changes will have a severe impact on counties and county safety. We hope to have the opportunity for more in-depth conversations going forward regarding rural traffic safety with the Joint Committee on Transportation, Senator Hayden, and other stakeholders.

Sincerely,



**Brian Worley**

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