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On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Interim Committee On Transportation
Funding
Measure, Appointment or Topic: LC 2

Stop the Gas Tax Scam: ODOT's Oversight Failures Are Not Our Problem

Dear Committee Members,

Oregon's transportation funding crisis is a direct result of legal fund restrictions, ODOT mismanagement, and insufficient oversight. The Governor and Legislature have failed to implement smarter fund allocation strategies or temporary measures, such as a sunset clause, to alleviate the burden on taxpayers. Instead, they propose raising gas taxes and implementing new fees without addressing the root causes of the issue.

ODOT's billion-dollar project overruns are a glaring example of fiscal mismanagement. These overruns should have been anticipated with proactive oversight and legislative action, including potential fund reallocations before costs spiraled out of control.

Additionally, excessive upper management compensation contributes to the fiscal strain. Based on 2023 data:

Agency Head (Director): \$288,516 annually

Chief Information Administrator: \$200,000–\$250,000

Deputy/Chief roles: \$200,000–\$230,000

Transportation Infrastructure & Project Delivery Administrators: \$200,000–\$230,000

Engineering Administrators: \$200,000–\$220,000

These positions, while critical to operations, highlight a stark disparity compared with the average ODOT employee salary of roughly \$87,883. Redirecting excessive management compensation could alleviate some financial strain while maintaining essential services.

Moreover, the current gas tax system places disproportionate pressure on gas and diesel vehicle owners, while EV owners contribute minimally to road maintenance. The proposed increase in EV fees is a step in the right direction but remains

insufficient; EV owners should pay at least a comparable amount to gas and diesel consumers to ensure fairness.

A truly responsible leader doesn't cling to power when the state's finances are in crisis; they open the books. If fiscal mismanagement has grown so severe that trust is eroding, the only honorable path forward is transparency and accountability, including independent oversight or receivership if necessary.

A governor who truly cares about the state would not see oversight as a threat but as a safeguard to protect citizens and restore confidence that public money is managed wisely. Refusing independent review signals fear, not strength. Leadership is not about protecting one's ego or political future; it's about protecting the people. Citizens deserve oversight, accountability, and a leader willing to put the state above self.

I urge the Committee to reject the proposed fuel tax increase until ODOT demonstrates improved fiscal management, transparency, and accountability, including audits of project spending and upper management compensation, and until EV fees are adjusted fairly relative to gas and diesel contributions.

Thank you for considering my testimony.