

Hello Joint Interim Committee on Transportation Funding,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the interim transportation bill- LC 2. On the good side, LC 2 provides absolutely essential funding to keep public transit running and existing roads maintained. However, many elements of the bill are wasteful, inequitable, and bad for Oregon.

Here's my comment on what to keep, what needs changing, and why:

1. Support the gas tax increase:

- The 6 cent increase barely keeps up with inflation, and I want the people working to paint stripes, put up traffic and warning signs on the roads, and filling potholes, to get paid a living wage and have the supplies they need to do their job.
- If you want to help your constituents with affordability, go after the oil refiners' record profits: after the increase, Oregon's gas tax would be 46 cents per gallon. Consumer Watchdog recently reported that oil refiners are taking profits of more than double that: \$1.01/gallon¹: That's not "a fair return on investment." That's price-gouging.

2. Support increased public transit funding:

- I used to live in Tillamook County, and Tillamook County and other rural transit agencies desperately need this funding to meet resident needs!
- I ride the Max and the Bus here in Portland to get to scheduled appointments; frequency is important.
- About 30% of Oregonians can't or don't drive², but they still need to get to school, work, the doctors office, the grocery store, etc. For anywhere beyond what people can access through active transportation (walking, biking, wheelchairs, mobility devices), public transit allows them to meet their life needs AND boosts the economy.

3. Public transit considerations for future sessions:

- Additional public transit funding should be derived from a progressive tax source like the state income tax rather than a payroll tax.
- Consider streamlining regulations around sizes of buses/transportation options: many routes in Oregon are essential but less densely populated and could be served more cost and time-effectively with, for instance, mini-van sized vehicles.

Benefits:

- 1) transit agencies would save significantly on fuel/energy costs;
- 2) space would be freed up in bus garages;
- 3) transit vehicles would be easier to electrify, leading to further cost saving;
- 4) smaller vehicles generally pollute less and contribute less to climate change, especially if electric.
- 5) electric vehicles are promising for vehicle to grid resilience, which could help reduce utility costs overall.

4. In the next session, please secure funding for active transportation routes and trails.

5. Oppose a surcharge or higher fees on high mpg and electric vehicles:
- Higher fees on efficient vehicles not only penalizes people who are decreasing pollution and health harms, but is likely to increase road maintenance costs!
 - Heavier vehicles like SUVs get lower miles per gallon than small cars while causing much more wear and tear on the road.
6. Change the road user charge so that electric vehicles are incentivized not penalized:
- It's plain wrong to charge electric car drivers as though they were driving gas guzzlers that got only 20 miles per gallon.
 - "About 40 to 50 percent of toxic air pollutants in Oregon come from vehicle exhaust"³ today, but tailpipe exhaust would be eliminated if 100% of vehicles were electric. More efficient vehicles which use less gas also tend to produce less exhaust.
 - Additionally, more efficient and electric vehicles contribute less to costly climate change.
 - I ask you to consider: How much pain, how many premature deaths, and how much money in healthcare costs from pollution-driven asthma, cancers, dementia, and more could Oregonians save if we eliminated tailpipe exhaust by incentivizing, rather than penalizing, the shift to more efficient, electric vehicles?
 - One fair way to do this would be to make the road-user charge "inversely proportional to the miles per gallon (or equivalent)":
 - Miles per gallon listing is easily accessible on the sticker info of all gas cars
 - Miles per gallon equivalent is listed on the sticker information of electric cars
 - Converting miles to fee has to go through a computer program specific to the individual car anyway.
 - Write the law so that the program charging the driver charges less for less polluting, i.e. more efficient cars.
7. I am skeptical that reducing the number of weight-mile rates will be fair, or even alleviate administrative burdens on trucking companies and the state. Here's why:
- Differences in vehicle weight significantly impacts wear and tear on roads.
 - Large vehicles are already weighed– it's not a guessing game to figure out which rate they should pay, no matter how many weight-mile rates there are.
 - The ease of putting the numbers in the calculator is not changed by the number of rates.

In conclusion, we need to fund existing roads. The legislature should not burden Oregonians with extra fees - whether for efficient vehicles or expanding freeways - that increase pollution, harm health, and make our lives worse. Instead, we need policy that facilitates: vibrant walking, bicycling, and rolling routes and the transition to electric vehicles and efficient bus and rail.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,
Helena Birecki

References:

1. [https://consumerwatchdog.org/energy/oil-refiners-take-home-1-01-per-gallon-in-gross-pr
ofits-in-may-1-05-on-retail-sales/](https://consumerwatchdog.org/energy/oil-refiners-take-home-1-01-per-gallon-in-gross-pr
ofits-in-may-1-05-on-retail-sales/)
2. <https://www.opb.org/article/2025/05/08/transportation-funding-oregon/>
3. <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/aq/pages/for-cleaner-air.aspx>