



UNION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Paul Anderes, Commissioner
R. Matthew Scarfo, Commissioner
Jake Seavert, Commissioner

Shelley Burgess, Administrative Officer

1106 K. Avenue | La Grande, Oregon 97850

Phone: (541) 963-1001 | Fax (541) 963-1079

August 25, 2025

Co-Chair Wagner, Co-Chair Fahey, and Committee Members,

For the record, my name is Jake Seavert, and I serve as a Union County Commissioner. I represent approximately 26,000 residents. Before preparing these remarks, I asked my constituents what message they wanted me to bring forward today. Like you, I was elected to be the voice of the people—not to speak for myself, but to represent them. I hope you will take the same approach.

Let me share a personal story. My youngest son earned his driver's license in January, started his first full-time job in June, and received his first paycheck in August. Within five days, he had spent 90% of it—most on fuel and vehicle maintenance, with a little left over for discretionary spending. Ten days before his next paycheck, he asked me for gas money. I said no. It was a teaching moment about budgeting and accountability. If I simply gave him money, he wouldn't learn how to live within his means. My role as a parent is to provide oversight, authority, and guidance to help him succeed financially. The same principle should apply to federal and state agencies, including the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

In rural Oregon, we face unique challenges: higher costs of living, long drives to schools, work, medical specialists, and grocery stores. Middle- and lower-class families are already stretched thin. My constituents have been clear—they do not support additional fuel taxes. Instead, they want accountability from ODOT. Essential, on-the-ground jobs should not be cut. The reductions should come from inefficiencies at higher administrative levels. Government must learn to do more with less.

Furthermore, urban transit systems such as bus and rail should not be funded on the backs of all Oregonians when only a small percentage will ever have access to them. ODOT's budget should focus on its core mission, not on programs like climatology and DEI that fall outside of that scope. Additional fee increases—such as higher vehicle registration costs—only add more strain on households and businesses that rely on multiple vehicles.

Union County residents are also asking for transparency. Where is ODOT's money actually going? They want to see a nonpartisan forensic audit, with a clear line-item report available to the public. If half of the 900-plus positions identified for layoff are already vacant, where is the money that was budgeted for them? Reforms are needed, such as simplifying the tax structure for semi-trucks—shifting away from the costly weight-mile tax system to a more straightforward fuel tax at the pump.

Doubling the payroll tax is unnecessary and counterproductive. Oregon is already struggling to retain and attract businesses. Higher energy costs and new tax burdens will only drive up the cost of goods and services while discouraging job creation and investment in our communities.

LC 2 is a temporary fix. Two years from now, we will be having the same conversation about how to fund ODOT. Granting the Department of Administrative Services authority to adjust tax rates in the event of legislative stalemate is not democracy—it is the opposite, concentrating power in a way that undermines representative government.

In conclusion, I urge this interim committee not to move LC 2 forward. Instead, restructure ODOT to protect essential “boots on the ground” maintenance workers and make cuts in areas of waste, unnecessary projects, and administrative overhead. In Union County, our road department workforce has already been cut in half since 1990. Despite losing nearly \$500,000 annually in SRS payments, we made difficult choices to maintain service levels without increasing the fuel tax. We ask the same of the State: demonstrate accountability before asking Oregonians for more.

For these reasons, both I and Union County oppose LC 2.

Respectfully,

Jake Seavert
Union County Commissioner