

## Public Testimony Opposing House Bill 3991

Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am in full opposition to House Bill 3991, which proposes increasing vehicle registration fees, fuel taxes, and other transportation-related fees to generate additional revenue for the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). While the bill frames these changes as necessary to fund transportation projects for the biennium ending June 30, 2027, it ignores a troubling pattern of mismanagement of taxpayer funds and potential abuses of power under Governor Tina Kotek's administration. Imposing these new taxes and fees on Oregonians—who are already facing rising costs and declining services—would unfairly burden us further while rewarding ODOT's inefficiency and enabling unchecked waste.

First and foremost, HB 3991 hikes fees and taxes to funnel more money to ODOT without addressing its chronic mismanagement issues. Recent reports from OPB highlight how ODOT has been plagued by high staff turnover, outdated financial software, cost overruns, and project delays that have eroded public trust. The agency's financial woes stem largely from megaprojects that have exploded in cost while revenues have evaporated, crashing ODOT into what City Observatory described as a "financial brick wall." Audits reveal that projects from the 2017 funding package are over budget and behind schedule, with less revenue than anticipated due to poor planning and inflation mismanagement. In one extraordinary hearing covered by Willamette Week, ODOT admitted to a more than \$1 billion budget error in its 2023-25 cycle, underscoring a failure in basic financial oversight. Critics have pointed out that ODOT constantly fails audits and mismanages funds, including diverting resources to non-essential initiatives while claiming inability to maintain basic services such as plowing mountain passes. Even editorial boards like The Oregonian have called out ODOT's mismanagement, noting multiple instances where the agency has squandered resources without accountability. It's profoundly unfair to demand new taxes and fees from hardworking Oregonians when ODOT has repeatedly demonstrated it cannot responsibly handle the funds it already receives—perpetuating a cycle of waste that leaves roads unrepaired and services neglected.

Compounding these issues is Governor Kotek's own record, which raises alarms about questionable oversight and misuse of public resources. Under her leadership, taxpayer funds have been allocated to provide regular state police security and new staff for First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson, despite her holding no official elected position—a move criticized as an abuse of power that diverts resources from critical needs. Kotek has also been accused of overreach in other areas, such as signing bills that invite legal process abuse to target political opponents and mishandling agency leadership amid investigations into ethical violations and abuse backlogs at entities like the Oregon Youth Authority and the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission. Public sentiment echoes this, with calls to impeach Kotek for such actions and widespread criticism of her administration's handling of power. Expanding funding through new taxes and fees under this governance risks enabling more unchecked spending and potential abuses, especially given the bill's emergency declaration that bypasses extended review.

**Oregonians deserve better stewardship of our taxes.** Instead of rushing through HB 3991 and imposing unfair new burdens, the Legislature should demand more audits, reforms, and accountability first. Public hearings have already seen strong opposition to this and related transportation bills pushed by Governor Kotek, with citizens submitting testimony against the measures due to these very concerns. **I urge you to reject this bill and protect Oregon taxpayers from further mismanagement and abuse.**

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