

February 5 2026

Re: SB1543: Guardrails for good governance

Dear Sen. Gorsek, Sen. Weber, Sen. Frederick, Sen. Pham, Sen. Starr and the Committee on Transportation:

My name is Kathaleen B Parker, from Senate District 10 in South Salem, and I support SB1543 because we will never be able to have a modern alternative to I-5 congestion that connects residents and businesses as long as our high debt costs exceed our state revenue (and we really need to start collecting a sales tax in the state of Oregon).

What SB1543 does: It establishes the first-ever debt management policy for the Oregon Department of Transportation. It requires more information and transparency—especially to the public and the Oregon Transportation Commission when ODOT is deciding to take on new debt, including opportunity costs, alternatives, risks, and tradeoffs. This would also increase the membership of the OTC to be more geographically representative, including at least one member who primarily (or entirely) gets around without a car, and two non-voting members from the state legislature.

GUARDRAILS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Debt Management System: The OTC must create a formal debt financing policy in consultation with the State Treasurer and legislative committees.

Oversight & Transparency: ODOT must submit all proposed bond issuance requests to the OTC for review before proceeding, ensuring better public information on project risks, benefits, and timing.

Fiscal Responsibility: The bill aims to cap annual debt service for highway projects to protect funds for urgent, underfunded maintenance and safety needs.

Governance Changes: The legislation modifies the structure of the OTC, adding a two-term limit for members and increasing public access to meeting materials.

Why it matters: ODOT's debt is outpacing its revenue. The state brings in a lot of money for transportation, but it is mostly going towards repaying debt. Smaller bridge, maintenance, and preservation projects across the state are being defunded to cover the state's ballooning transportation debt. This is a commonsense policy that other states have to prevent these problems from happening. Oregon's legislature has never given ODOT direction on how to manage its debt, so this is long overdue.

Thank you for your time and support,

Kathaleen B Parker, Willamette Valley, Oregon