

Written Testimony for the  
Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

**ODOT's Budget, HB 5040**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

OEC supports the vital work that ODOT does to keep Oregon's people and goods moving.

ODOT's budget request includes several expenditures that OEC is particularly supportive of:

**ConnectOregon VI**

Oregon faces major challenges to providing adequate and stable funding for non-roadway transportation modes, including transit, freight and passenger rail, ports, aviation, bicycle paths and facilities, and pedestrian ways. Funding these non-roadway transportation modes has been perennially difficult in Oregon given constitutional restrictions that limit motor vehicle fees and taxes exclusively to roadways and due to the absence of a state sales tax, a primary source for non-roadway transportation funding in many other states. OEC strongly supports "re-upping" *ConnectOregon* and keeping bicycle and pedestrian projects eligible within the fund, while continuing discussions about a truly long-term, stable source of funding for transportation solutions that reduce household transportation costs, improve public health, and protect the environment. The Oregon Transportation Forum suggests restoring *ConnectOregon* funding to the \$100 million per biennium level.

**Senior & Disabled Transit Services**

With regard to funding transit operations, Oregon ranks in the bottom third compared to other states. Oregon should fund transit operations at a far greater level, particularly to support vulnerable populations: seniors, disabled persons, youth, and lower-income Oregonians. Senior population growth is significant in Oregon: it is expected to increase 43% between 2010 and 2020. Elderly Oregonians are interested in "aging in place"—which saves them, their families, and the broader community money—but they need non-auto transportation options in order to do so.

The Oregon Transportation Forum proposed increasing the state funding contribution to transit services for the elderly and disabled to \$75 million per year. ODOT's request is just \$9.3 million. We hope you will help this important vulnerable population with its transportation needs.

## **Passenger Rail**

The Amtrak Cascades service between Eugene and Portland will shut down this year without a state contribution of \$10.4 million. If trains are eliminated, it will be very difficult and expensive to reinstate service in the future. The Amtrak Cascades corridor from Eugene to Vancouver, BC accommodates some 800,000 passengers each year, with the Portland to Eugene portion accounting for about 15% of the total. Amtrak Cascades also provides tangible economic benefits. It spurs spending on travel (more than \$35 million in 2009, according to government transportation reports). It generates \$1 million in local tax revenues and \$2 million in state tax revenues. It creates an estimated 600 jobs. It curtails roadway costs by reducing wear-and-tear. And it curbs the state's carbon emissions.

What Cascades Amtrak really represents is a critical aspect of the future of transportation. It isn't the only solution to rush-hour gridlock on I-5, but does provide an important tool for addressing Oregon's daunting transportation challenges and helping the system become more efficient, resilient, and environmentally sound.

We hope you will support ODOT's request of \$10,408,710, the bare minimum needed to keep our trains running.