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Joint Committee On Transportation

Co-Chair Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair Representative Susan McLain and Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

I am writing to express my support for SB 395 on behalf of myself and my fellow members of Sunrise Movement PDX. Sunrise Movement PDX is a youth led organization fighting to combat climate change. We believe in the necessity of a critical shift to an ecologically sustainable, equitable and just world.

I spent the first 25 years of my life believing that getting around in a car was the only realistic way to get anywhere. In my hometown, walking and biking are treated as recreational activities or ways to exercise rather than modes of transportation. People drive to a greenway in order to walk or bike safely.

Throughout many places in Oregon, many people continue to believe what I did just a few years ago- that walking and biking are not viable ways to get to work, to school or to access services. This is largely due to a lack of investment in these communities, which often have high populations of low income persons, BIPOC populations and senior citizens. Many of these communities lack pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that enables people to walk and bike safely to their destinations. Currently, an abysmal one percent of state highway funds are allocated to this critical infrastructure. Most people do not see walking or biking as an option when the infrastructure is so poor (or non-existent). Many people sit in their cars every day, contributing to rising carbon emissions and sitting miserably on a congested road.

We have a choice to make now about the world we are building for the next generation. Do we continue promoting the false narrative in so many towns that cars are the only way to get around through refusal to adequately fund other forms of transportation? Do we carry on ignoring that 40% of carbon emissions come from transportation here in Oregon as we are facing a monumental climate catastrophe? The alternative is to increase funding for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to provide equitable access to safe ways to walk and bike, including for students, elderly persons and BIPOC communities. We must do this across the board, from suburban areas to exurb areas to rural areas. The ability to walk or bike to a destination should not be a privilege reserved only for Oregonians wealthy enough to live in the few Oregon neighborhoods that are currently walkable..

SB 395 will reduce carbon emissions, with the added bonus of reducing congestion. It will enable access to safe, alternative modes of transportation. SB 395 will boost our local and state economy. Our organization is focused on passing a Green New Deal that fundamentally transforms our community and society to respond to the climate crisis - and a Green New Deal for transportation inherently means a substantial increase in investments in crosswalks, sidewalks and bike paths that are accessible to all.

We all want to breathe healthy air, to have healthy bodies and to cultivate a healthy planet. Please support SB 395 so that we can be one step closer to these goals.

Thank you for your time and service,  
Kristen Sartor