

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 395



Chairs McClain & Beyer, vice chairs, and Members of the Joint Transportation Committee:

My name is Ashton Simpson, and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Walks. We are an organization dedicated to promoting walking and making the conditions for walking safe, convenient and attractive throughout the Portland metropolitan region and throughout Oregon.

I am here today to urge the passage of Senate Bill 395 to expand funding for walking and cycling in Oregon. Walking and biking offer clear benefits for people across Oregon. It is time for our policy makers to make the investments necessary to support these transportation choices in our communities.

Walking provides clear benefits for people from all walks of life. Whether it is for personal travel needs or recreation, walking is one of the most effective ways to address our crisis of physical inactivity. Lack of exercise and activity is a driver in the rising rates of chronic disease and obesity that translate into trillions of dollars in health care costs nationally. Many of these costs are picked up by the taxpayer through publicly funded health insurance coverage.

Walkable neighborhoods and communities also offer strong economic benefits. Many younger generations are choosing to forgo car-based transportation looking to move to areas that promote the use of walking and biking to get where they are going and enjoy recreation in the outdoors.

Investments in walking and bicycling also address congestion and accessibility, improving transportation experiences for all populations and boosting the impact of existing investments in our road networks.

Walking offers clear benefits to vulnerable and underserved populations. Safe routes to school support healthier children, while also keeping them protected from vehicles. Our growing population of older residents use walking to stay healthy and active, connecting them to necessities and amenities in the community when they can no longer drive.

Investing in walking and biking is also a critical way to advance equity goals as we know BIPOC and immigrant/refugee communities are less likely to be able to afford personal vehicles and are more dependent on walking to access public transit, shops, or schools. Last month, Oregon Walks launched *We Walk: Black Walking Initiative* to highlight the need for Black people to feel safe walking in the public right of way or on trails and recreational spaces in Oregon. Through

SB 395 and other steps, we can ensure equitable access to walking for all communities in Oregon.

It will be easy for naysayers to say we should put off this conversation. Save it for another session, a future transportation package. I am here today to urge you to act. We are decades away from achieving the walking and biking goals in the Oregon Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan because of inaction. This is a time to act. This is a time to enact Senate Bill 395. Thank you.