



**Testimony Submitted to the
Joint Legislative Committee on Transportation
Support for SB 395**

Senator Beyer, Rep. McLain and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

The Commute Options Board of Directors strongly supports SB 395 to boost State funding to ensure safer routes for bicycling and walking.

Since 2001, Commute Options, a 501c(3), has been a leader in Central Oregon promoting a range of commuting options for the region, including safer routes for biking and walking. Our service area is concentrated in Central Oregon, encompassing cities such as Bend and Redmond, but certain programs extend to Eastern Oregon as well; thus, we serve a multitude of small towns and the most rural areas of the State.

Often attention on bike and pedestrian safety focuses on urban areas, but we can assure you that rural Oregon has significant challenges as well. At Commute Options, we know first-hand the widespread need for bike and pedestrian route improvements in Central and Eastern Oregon in order to offer safer access that will lead to more active bikers and walkers, including school age students.

One of Commute Options' foundational programs, *Safe Routes to School*, is part of a national network of providers bringing walking and biking education and encouragement to school age children. We do this through regular walking and bike safety instruction in classrooms across Central Oregon, as well as encouragement events throughout the year.

We also run the *Walking School Bus* program (WSB), a unique program funded through *Oregon Safe Routes to School*, the Central Oregon Health Council, and the City of Bend. This program is the only one that offers reliable walking routes each week. It is so popular the program has grown by 75%.

Central Oregon is the second fastest growing region in the country. As such, we are experiencing increased demand for all forms of transportation. While we recognize the benefits of highway projects, spending on improvements for biking and walking routes can prove to have an even higher benefit with a lower investment of resources. Any means to provide safer routes for all and encourage fewer cars on the road is a plus.

The provisions of SB 395 would benefit communities in our service area, in many ways including:

- Improve safety for children and adults, including seniors, the mobility challenged and other vulnerable populations who choose to walk or roll
- Boost our local economy that is already a popular destination for recreational bikers and walkers
- Improve health benefits by providing a safer form of active transportation
- Reduce adverse environmental impacts from traffic congestion and carbon emissions
- Help Oregon meet the goals set in the 2050 Vision For Greenhouse Gas Reduction

SB 395 is a bill that directly embodies our core mission to promote walking, bicycling, carpooling, teleworking, and using public transportation to create livable communities and enhance the quality of life in Central and Eastern Oregon. Now is the time to pass the Safe Routes for All act (SB 395) and make good on our promises and achieve our vision for safer streets for all.

We urge your support for this measure in this legislative session. Thank you for your consideration.

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