

Testimony In Support of SB 679 (Oregon Coast Trail)
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As an Oregonian who recently hiked the entire Oregon Coast Trail (OCT) in June-July 2021, I strongly support additional funding to continue developing this trail.

I am a backpacking enthusiast who has thru-hiked numerous other long distance trails over the past five years, including the 2,200-mile Appalachian Trail and the 800-mile Arizona Trail. There is no doubt in my mind that the OCT's unique scenery puts it on equal footing with these other iconic National Scenic Trails.

Nonetheless, there are still several sections of the OCT that significantly detract from this amazing outdoor adventure. This especially true of the Cape Creek tunnel (near Heceta Head), where there is no sidewalk for pedestrians, as well as anywhere hikers are forced to detour onto Highway 101 to piece together missing trail segments.

When considering this bill today, I respectfully ask the committee members to put themselves in the shoes of the average hiker attempting to walk the length of the OCT.

Would any of you delight in hiking on a narrow paved highway shoulder while logging trucks, large campers and RVs, or cars filled with distracted beach goers whiz by you at 55 miles per hour? Would you feel safe doing this for miles at a time? And would you encourage your child, sibling, or parent to backpack on a long distance trail where those hazards were routinely present?

Probably not.

Yet, these are the current conditions you *will* experience if you attempt to thru-hike the OCT today. The gaps in the trail not only continue to put hikers' safety at risk, but they create a hazard for drivers who must contend with unexpected pedestrians.

As I'm sure this committee recognizes, long-distance hiking is growing in popularity around the U.S. and abroad. Hikers and backpackers are clamoring for new and unique adventures, and the OCT provides something no other major long distance trail can compete with - a panoramic coastal backdrop for nearly 400 miles!

Additionally, the OCT is almost certain to see an increase in its future use due to climate change. Dangerous wildfires close portions of the nearby 2,655-mile Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) every year. These closures leave PCT thru-hikers searching for other trails to fill the remainder of their hiking season, and the OCT is rapidly gaining in popularity within the hiking community as a viable West Coast alternative.

Fully funding the completion of the OCT will help remove this influx of new backpackers from our busy roadways, lowering the risks to both the hikers and the vehicles who are currently vying for the same shared space on the Oregon Coast.