

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

From: Mike Scott, SEIU Local 503

Date: March 16, 2023

RE: Support for HB 5040 ODOT Budget

Dear Co-Chair Gomberg, Co-Chair Woods, and members of the committee,

Hello, my name is Mike Scott. I worked as a highway maintenance specialist for ODOT for 26 years. All that in southern Oregon. I also have spent 15 years representing ODOT workers as President of our Union local 730, a sub local of SEIU. And I am currently retired as of last year. And I want to thank you for making time for me to speak to you today.

I want to talk about the importance of keeping our maintenance program funded and healthy.

We do a very specialized service for the people of Oregon and our community's. And that's keeping our highway system open and safe. We are first responders without the recognition of being first responders.

Whether it's dragging something off the road, helping a stranded motorist, filling potholes, assisting IR, closing lanes, or working with law enforcement. Not to mention winter ops and reacting to major emergencies such as wildfires, floods, slides, hazmat spills, and other extraordinary events. And we are experts at traffic control and working accidents.

Revenue from the gas tax has not been keeping up with the demand for services that our infrastructure needs. This has been slowly happening probably for the last 15 years or so. The expectation of service and the resources we need have been drastically depleted. And it continues to be a struggle to find sustainable revenue.

In 2009 the legislature passed a transportation bill that had a piece in it of contracting out our maintenance work. It was called the 219 project. It was roughly 30 miles of highway 219 that was given to a contractor to maintain. To make a long story short that project was stopped by the transportation committee after 2 years. What we learned from that experience was that we can't compete with contractors when it comes to large projects, but we also learned that they can't compete with us when it comes to the level of service the public needs.

Contractors won't do what we do. They won't sit on that hill waiting for the storm to come in. They won't pay for on call. They won't pay for someone to do road patrol on a graveyard shift. They're in the money-making business, we are in the public service business. All our maintenance shops are strategically placed anywhere from 20 to 40 miles apart. This enables us to respond to incidents in a timely manner. The only area we are lacking is in the far southeast corner of the state. Our economy navigates our road system as well. Tourism and freight are the biggest factors along with recreational activities which are year-round. Millions of dollars are lost during prolonged closures.

And something else. While everyone is tucked away in their beds at night, and that snow is coming down and that ice is forming, we are out there preparing those roads for the morning commute. Mother nature is tough and sometimes we lose the battle, but we are doing our best to make sure you can feel confident putting your children on a bus and that you can travel safely.

The highway workers in ODOT take their jobs seriously and with a lot of pride. We are not perfect, but we are really good at what we do. It's a dangerous job and we have a great track record of keeping ourselves safe along with the public. I believe it's so important to keep looking for innovative ways to fund our maintenance program and keep it alive and well. Because we invest in what we value.

Thank you

DON'T LOSE THE HILL!