



April 6th, 2023

Joint Committee on Transportation  
Oregon State Legislature  
Salem, Oregon 97301

To members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

My name is Zachary Lauritzen and I am the interim director at Oregon Walks. We are an advocacy organization based on the fundamental principle that all people should be able to safely move around their community outside of a vehicle. This is especially poignant when talking about kids getting to school or the park, our elders being able to age in place and complete their daily needs when they can no longer drive, and securing safe transportation access for the hundreds of thousands of adults in Oregon who do not drive.

Communities across our state are crisscrossed with high speed roads that are undeniably dangerous. The data backs this up. Vehicular injuries and deaths continue to rise in Oregon and we hold the undesirable distinction of being near the top of that category in the entire United States. We know that significant numbers of injuries and deaths occur on orphan highways where the original intent and design of the road (often rural) no longer match the land use and community needs through which they pass (now much more urban due to growth).

There are a number of solutions to interrupt this problem, but all require resources to invest in improved safety infrastructure. To interrupt the slew of injuries and deaths on our roads, we need infrastructure such as better lighting, enhanced crossings, wider sidewalks, protected bikeways, narrowed lanes, increased tree canopy, raised crosswalks, and slower speeds. Simply put: we have to create spaces that are more oriented toward people rather than high speed vehicular travel.

It is important to note: this problem is not going away. Every year we fail to address this problem results in more injuries and deaths, further deterioration of our infrastructure, and continued misaligned investment of public and private resources along these corridors. Immediate action is required and fully funding this bill is a meaningful start to interrupting and beginning to ameliorate this issue. To be clear, this is just the start! The actual needs across the state are counted in the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. But what else are we to do? Continue to accept the disruption, damage, and death caused by high speed roads cutting through our communities? Absolutely not.

Two final thoughts:

1. I encourage the committee to adjust the funding mechanism. These are highways under ODOT's control. Resources should be directed from the highway trust fund and packaged with various grant opportunities at the federal level. That is the purpose of these dollars!
2. \$100 million is the tip of the iceberg. Whether through jurisdictional transfer or an expansion of the Great Streets program, we encourage the legislature to pursue a systemic statewide approach to addressing orphan highways that continue to damage our communities. We are more than happy to offer our time, energy, and expertise with you and other partners to design that systemic approach!

I implore you to pass this bill out of committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Z Lauritzen', written in a cursive style.

Zachary Lauritzen  
Interim Director  
Oregon Walks