



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Transportation

Office of the Director

355 Capitol St NE

Salem, OR 97301

DATE: February 5, 2024

TO: Joint Committee on Transportation

FROM: Amy Ramsdell – Administrator
Delivery and Operations Division, Oregon Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: HB 2978 – Wildlife Crossings

INTRODUCTION

HB 2978 directs ODOT, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), to expand its existing Wildlife Passage Program to include small species and to develop a statewide plan and list of projects to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions in priority areas identified in ODFW's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan (WCAP); a training program; develop design guidance and standards; stand up an advisory group; seek federal and private grants; strategize and identify a dedicated funding source; and construct, maintain, and monitor wildlife passage infrastructure.

BACKGROUND

Oregon has a diverse wildlife population, whose habitats and migration patterns often intersect with the state's transportation system. Wildlife-vehicle collisions pose significant safety risks for system users and wildlife and have adverse cost impacts (vehicle costs, roadway repairs, medical costs, etc.). Oregon's transportation system sees about 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions (2017 – 2021), about 36 serious injuries (2017-2021), and about 4 fatalities (2017-2021) per year.

ODOT's priority focus is on creating wildlife connections through transportation infrastructure that reduce large wildlife-vehicle collisions and increase public safety on the state transportation system. Wildlife crossings help animals get where they need to go while reducing the chances of vehicle-wildlife collision, ultimately creating a safer transportation system for all.

The 2019 Legislature created ODOT's wildlife passage program with the passage of [HB 2824](#), which included a biannual reporting requirement for ODOT. The Department's existing wildlife passage program is focused on reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions with large species to improve safety for system users and wildlife and reduce property damage on state highways.

The program currently does not have a dedicated funding source. Furthermore, State Highway Funds (SHF) can only be used to design, construct, or maintain features to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions for large species (for which a public safety nexus exists) due to constitutional constraints on eligible uses of State Highway Funds.

[HB 5202](#) (2022 session) appropriated \$7 million of one-time General Funds to ODOT for the purpose of reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions and improving habitat connectivity for wildlife. To date,

ODOT has invested \$6.9M of the \$7M General Fund towards three projects across the state, including I-5 Mariposa Preserve Overcrossing (Design work: \$1.5M, and IJA Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program Grant Match: \$3.8M); US97 Gilchrist Fencing Project (\$600K); and US20 Harper-Juntura planning and design (\$1M). In December 2024, the Federal Highway Administration awarded ODOT \$33M of the IJA Wildlife Passage Pilot Program Grant for the I-5 Mariposa Reserve Overcrossing Project.

DISCUSSION

Wildlife crossings are a valuable safety feature for Oregon's state transportation system. ODOT appreciates the Legislature's ongoing commitment to grow ODOT's wildlife crossings program and to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and restore landscape connectivity for wildlife.

HB 2978 (2025) builds on the work set forth by HB 2834 (2019 Session) and HB 5202 (2022 Session) by expanding ODOT's wildlife passage program to incorporate projects for small wildlife species, reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions in priority areas in ODFW's Wildlife Corridor Action Plan (WCAP), establish an Advisory Committee, develop trainings for ODOT staff and stakeholders, seek dedicated funding, pursue grants and public-private funding opportunities, construct and maintain wildlife passage features on the state highway system, and uplifts the on-going partnership between ODOT and ODFW to carry out this work.

For the purpose of fulfilling the measure's intent to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions in priority areas and to ensure a full capture of priority areas for both safety hotspots for large wildlife-vehicle collisions and priority areas for small species, ODOT would like to also consider safety data developed with Oregon State University Cascades (OSU Cascades) in selection of investments under this program. Consideration of this data set in addition to the WCAP could inform joint development of the statewide wildlife passage priority list, allowing the program to maximize efforts and resources to identify areas with the greatest need for transportation safety, small species, and habitat connectivity.

ODOT's wildlife program is currently under-resourced and the need for wildlife crossing infrastructure outweighs available resources. Furthermore, Oregon's constitutional framework around eligibility and use of SHF dollars limit ODOT's work to state highways, creating additional barriers to addressing the needs for small species. Additionally, it's important to note ODOT cannot use SHF dollars to maintain small wildlife features. ODOT would need identified, dedicated resources to plan, design, construct, and maintain any new features, in addition to supporting the program and advisory committee work.

Furthermore, the measure directs ODOT to report on strategies to ensure the existence of funding sources to carry out the program. At this time, the Department anticipates significant barriers in identifying ongoing funding sources for the program outside of seeking federal and private funding opportunities.

CONCLUSION

HB 2978 directs ODOT to expand its wildlife passage program to include smaller wildlife species, establish an Advisory Committee, develop trainings for ODOT staff and stakeholders, strategize and seek dedicated funding, pursue grants and public-private funding opportunities, construct and maintain wildlife passage features on the state highway system, and uplifts the on-going partnership between ODOT and ODFW to carry out this work.

For the Legislatures consideration, ODOT offers the inclusion of ODOT-OSU Cascades safety data for the purpose of identifying priority areas in ODFW's WCAP, allowing the program to maximize efforts and resources to identify areas with the greatest need for transportation safety, small species, and habitat connectivity. Furthermore, ODOT anticipates challenges in identifying on-going funding sources to carry out the program due to the Department's funding shortfall.

ODOT appreciates the Legislature's continued commitment to the Wildlife Passage program in Oregon and looks forward to the ongoing partnership with ODFW.