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February 11, 2025

Senator Chris Gorsek Co-Chair  
Representative Susan McClain, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Transportation  
900 Court Street NE, Room 453  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB2154  
Testimony in Favor

Dear Senator Gorsek and Representative McClain:

I am writing to offer testimony in support of HB2154 relating to the establishment and operation of traffic safety corridors by Counties on county roads and highways with high accident rates.

While serving as the Mayor of St. Paul, Oregon in 2018-19, I worked with Representative Bill Post, the Marion County Commissioners, and ODOT on legislation to instruct ODOT to create a pilot project to study county traffic safety corridors. Thanks to the passage of HB3213 (2019), Marion County became the first Oregon county to designate a local safety corridor establishing the McKay/Yergen/Ehlen Safety Corridor. The corridor was formally established in February 2021.

Prior to the establishment of the safety corridor, that stretch of road was referred to locally as the “death road” due to the frequency of fatal accidents occurring there. No less than 12 people were killed in accidents the previous year.<sup>1</sup>

After the safety corridor’s implementation, the number of serious and fatal accidents dropped almost immediately; only 1 fatal accident has occurred since.

HB2154 would make the traffic safety corridor program permanent and allow them statewide, subject to the criteria set forth in the bill. I urge you to support the bill and recommend passage, but while taking the following into consideration:

Section 2(1)(b) of the bill provides that counties who establish safety corridors shall “... (b) *Establish requirements for regular community engagement, heightened enforcement, engineering improvements, infrastructure investments and public outreach. ...*”. While the requirements are reasonable, there is NO language in the bill that monitors the performance of Counties to ensure the requirements are consistently met. Statutory requirements are useless without compliance.

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1 <https://katu.com/news/local/a-dozen-fatalities-plague-marion-countys-mckay-rd-in-past-year>

I raise the above having observed Marion County's handling of the traffic safety corridor since it's inception. For the most part, Marion County has worked hard to make engineering and infrastructure improvements, and more are planned. When it comes to enforcement, however, the County's performance is lackadaisical at best and poor at worst. While the Marion County Sheriff usually conducts a "blitz" once a year, routine and consistent traffic enforcement isn't happening within the corridor or the surrounding area.

While HB2154 provides enhanced penalties for traffic enforcement in traffic safety corridors, the deterrent value of the penalties is worthless without enforcement.

HB2154 should be amended to include provisions:

- a) Requiring counties to submit proposed safety corridors to ODOT for evaluation, review, and approval, thus ensuring coordination of effort and resources;
- b) Requiring counties to collect and submit data related to the requirements outlined in Section 2(1)(b) to ODOT on at least an annual basis for statistical purposes, planning, and compliance; and
- c) Requiring ODOT to review a county's compliance with the requirements, and giving ODOT the authority to mandate corrective action(s), or safety corridor designation.

In closing, HB2154 is a step in the right direction to improve traffic safety throughout Oregon. If it becomes law, and properly administered, will prevent accidents and save lives. Thank you for considering it.

Regards,

/s/ Kimball Wallis

cc: Committee members via e-mail