



To: Joint Committee on Transportation Reinvestment
From: Zachary Lauritzen, Executive Director, Oregon Walks
Date: June 12, 2025
Subject: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2025

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Zachary Lauritzen, and I'm with Oregon Walks—an organization dedicated to making walking safe, convenient, and attractive across Oregon.

As I said during my verbal testimony, **we have an *honesty problem* in Oregon when it comes to our transportation system.** Most Oregonians don't know the full truth: the transportation system we've chosen is extremely expensive—not just to build, but also to maintain. That cost includes significant environmental harms: air pollution, noise pollution, brake and tire particulate runoff, and greenhouse gas emissions. And that cost is also measured in human health and safety, with persistently high rates of serious injuries and deaths on our roadways.

This legislation moves us toward a more honest conversation with Oregonians about those realities—and a more honest investment in addressing them.

The vast majority of trips in Oregon are made by private automobile. That mode is, by far—and it's not even close—the most expensive. Constructing and maintaining freeways, highways, and the thousands of miles of urban and rural roads across our state—as well as the bridges required to connect them—is incredibly costly. If we continue down this road, we must be honest with Oregonians about the price. **People need to understand that fees and taxes must rise if we're doubling down on this system—and this package acknowledges that.**

At Oregon Walks, we believe there are better ways to get around. Representatives Nathanson and Mannix, and Senator Gorsek, are right: **deep investments in rail are critical.** Improving our passenger rail service provides people with alternatives to car travel between cities. Upgraded freight rail infrastructure can also reduce wear and tear on our highways by shifting some freight from trucks to trains.

Closely related—but outside this committee's direct purview—is the issue of how and where we build housing. As long as we solve our housing shortage by building farther and farther into the countryside, we'll force people into cars just to meet daily needs. I don't blame anyone for not walking, biking, or using transit when it's infeasible due to long distances or unsafe conditions. **However, it is the responsibility of this committee to avoid transportation policies that encourage sprawl, widen freeways, and further entrench car dependency.**

We also have an honesty problem when it comes to how ODOT manages money and projects. Many have testified this week that we cannot continue funneling public dollars to an agency whose megaprojects consistently come in over budget and behind schedule. We are highly sympathetic to that concern. **While we support immediately allocating funding to cities and counties, we urge you to establish strict cost controls and oversight before releasing additional dollars to ODOT for megaprojects.**

Accountability is also more complex and must extend beyond megaprojects. It should mean:

- Maintaining what we have before building more.
- Aligning our investments, policies, and incentives in ways that meet our VMT reduction and GHG reduction goals.
- Not “safety-washing” projects—i.e. touting the safety components—just to gain public support.
- Ensuring the Oregon Transportation Commission is truly representative by creating a membership that is represented by people whose primary mode of transportation is not driving.

Accountability is broad and your leadership can reflect that.

With regard to safety, your historic investments in the Safe Routes to School and Great Streets/Jurisdictional transfers are incredible. This is where this package can make a transformational difference in addressing our road safety crisis. **If Americans fully understood that traffic deaths each year are equivalent to 180 passenger airliners crashing with no survivors, we would not tolerate it.** We don’t accept that level of carnage in air or rail travel so why do we accept it on our roads? Your investments in SRTS and Great Streets are a powerful first step.

In addition to the points above, I respectfully urge you to consider the following:

Off-Street Trails Funding: Off-street trails are popular, cost-effective, and critical for completing the walking and rolling network. They offer safe, low-stress connections and deserve meaningful investment in this package. You have received several proposals to fund trails—please act on them.


Local Control Over Lane Widths: The current language mandating 12-foot lanes on freight routes is a top-down approach that undermines local control and design flexibility. It also conflicts with safety research showing that wider lanes increase vehicle speeds and endanger all road users, not just pedestrians. We understand the concerns of the freight community—but this is a sledgehammer where a scalpel is needed. Please remove this provision and allow local jurisdictions to decide what works best for their communities.

Stronger Climate Commitments: If we're honest about meeting our climate goals, we need policies and incentives that reduce vehicle miles traveled and support electrification. The proposed investments in transit and in walking/biking infrastructure are excellent, and yet not sufficient to meet our near-term GHG reduction targets. We must do more.

I recognize this is difficult, complex work. I know you're under intense pressure from many directions. As you finalize this package, I urge you to keep sight of our shared North Star: reducing serious injuries and deaths and meaningfully cutting greenhouse gas emissions. You can do this. Good luck in these final weeks!

Sincerely,

Zachary Lauritzen

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Z Lauritzen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Executive Director
Oregon Walks