

June 13, 2025



Joint Committee on Transportation Reinvestment
Re: HB 2025 - Public Comment

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Vice Chairs Boshart-Davis and Starr, and members of the committee:

On behalf of Neighbors for Clean Air, a statewide organization dedicated to ensuring that every Oregonian has clean and healthy air to breathe, and as a member of the Move Oregon Forward campaign, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Transportation funding package - HB 2025.

SUPPORT FOR SAFETY AND TRANSIT FUNDING IN PACKAGE

Transportation's Effect on Public Health and Localized Air Quality

Transportation emissions are the leading contributor to air pollution in Oregon; more than half of Oregon's air pollutants come from the transportation sector.¹ Tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks release particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and other pollutants that are closely linked to asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic health conditions. These impacts are not theoretical, they are measured in emergency room visits, school absences, and rising healthcare costs borne by families and local systems.

The burden of transportation-related air pollution is not evenly distributed across the state. Emissions are concentrated in dense neighborhoods, near schools, and along busy highway corridors. The resulting health impacts, such as asthma, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses, disproportionately affect children, seniors, and underserved communities.

Expanded public transit reduces vehicle traffic and improves air quality at the neighborhood level. Similarly, expanding safe, accessible options for walking and bicycling offers immediate, measurable benefits to public health by improving local air quality. By providing viable alternatives to car travel, transit, and safe routes to walk or bike help lower exposure to harmful pollutants for thousands of Oregonians, especially our most vulnerable.

Environmental Justice and Transportation Equity

¹ Treiger, J. (2023, September 21). Oregon's report card: The urgent need for transportation investment. Oregon Environmental Council.
<https://oeconline.org/oregons-report-card-the-urgent-need-for-transportation-investment/>.

It is well-documented that communities of color, low-income neighborhoods, and Tribal communities face disproportionate exposure to transportation-related pollution and have historically received less investment in mobility infrastructure.

Historically, low-income communities and communities of color have been excluded from safe, accessible infrastructure for walking and bicycling. Many neighborhoods lack sidewalks, crosswalks, or protected bike lanes, conditions that make everyday trips more dangerous and limit access to basic needs.

Prioritizing investment in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and access to public transit is an investment in equity. These modes of travel are affordable, environmentally sustainable, and essential for residents who do not drive - whether by choice, age, income, or disability. Ensuring these communities are first in line for safety improvements is a tangible and overdue step toward correcting long-standing transportation inequities. Everyone deserves access to clean air and safe ways to move.

Rural Access and Connectivity

Robust mobility options are just as important in rural Oregon as they are in metropolitan areas. Many rural residents rely on public transit to access medical appointments, grocery stores, jobs, and essential services. For those without access to a personal vehicle, including older adults, people with disabilities, and lower-income residents, public transit is not a convenience; it is a necessity. Robust rural transit systems also enhance regional economic development by linking workers to employment centers and customers to local businesses.

While often overlooked in policy discussions, rural Oregon stands to benefit significantly from walking and biking infrastructure. In many small towns and unincorporated areas, distances are short enough that biking or walking is feasible, but only if safe facilities are available. Main streets without sidewalks, shoulders, or bike lanes discourage active travel and create barriers for residents, including children and older adults.

Safe and well-designed infrastructure enhances the vitality and safety of rural communities, promotes tourism, and supports local economies - all while also contributing to cleaner air.

We Appreciate the Investments in Safety and Transit

The ability for Oregonians to safely walk or bike where they want to go is not a luxury. It is a core government duty with far-reaching benefits: improved air quality, reduced chronic disease, safer streets, greater mobility for underserved populations, and stronger communities, urban and rural alike.

Likewise, transit is a foundational component of a healthy, just, and economically vibrant Oregon. Enhanced funding will yield improvements in local air quality, reduce health disparities, and improve mobility options for Oregonians in every corner of the state.

I thank this committee for this package that funds both safety and public transit as a matter of public health, environmental justice, and statewide accessibility.

AREAS TO GO FURTHER

As this committee continues refining this package, I'd like to highlight two areas where we can go further:

1. The Need to Invest in Medium and Heavy-Duty Truck Electrification to Reduce Toxic Diesel Emissions

Diesel emissions pose a significant threat to Oregonians' health and well-being. Diesel particulate matter, classified by the World Health Organization as a known carcinogen², is a leading contributor to heart disease and respiratory illnesses.³ Fine particulate matter, or PM2.5, is especially dangerous.⁴

Short-term spikes in PM2.5 are linked to increased mortality in infants, increased hospital admissions and emergency department visits for heart attacks, strokes, and pulmonary disease, and increased severity of asthma attacks and hospitalization for asthma among children.⁵ The long-term impacts are even more dire, raising the risk of premature death from heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, pneumonia, and influenza.⁶

These health impacts are especially serious in Oregon, where diesel emissions remain high. Just last year, the American Lung Association gave a failing grade for air quality to the majority of Oregon counties due to particle pollution.⁷ According to the Clean Air Task Force's projections, based on an EPA model and EPA data, 50 Oregonians are expected to die from diesel emissions in 2026 alone.⁸

² International Agency for Research on Cancer. (2012, June 12). *IARC: Diesel engine exhaust carcinogenic*. <https://www.iarc.who.int/news-events/iarc-diesel-engine-exhaust-carcinogenic/>.

³ Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. (n.d.). *Health effects of diesel exhaust*. Retrieved May 7, 2025. <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/aq/programs/Pages/Diesel-Health-Effects.aspx>

⁴ Saltzman, V., Walker, T., & Graham, J. (2025, April 23). *The Advanced Clean Trucks rule saves lives, so why is Congress trying to axe it?* Clean Air Task Force.

<https://www.catf.us/2025/04/advanced-clean-trucks-rule-saves-lives-why-congress-trying-axe-it/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ American Lung Association. (2025). *State of the Air: Oregon, Particle Pollution*. Retrieved May 7, 2025. <https://www.lung.org/research/sota/city-rankings/states/oregon>.

⁸ Clean Air Task Force. (n.d.). *Deaths by dirty diesel*. Retrieved May 7, 2025. <https://www.catf.us/deathsbymdiesel/>

But this is not an issue without a solution - this package provides an opportunity to develop significant and dedicated investment in both incentives and charging infrastructure for zero-emission medium and heavy-duty trucks through the forthcoming amendment that will create a new, progressive Luxury Vehicle Privilege Tax.

Electrifying diesel trucks is one of the most immediate and effective ways to cut toxic pollution and protect frontline communities. But Oregon is currently underperforming in deploying zero-emission medium and heavy-duty trucks. And without increased funding, we risk finding ourselves in the same position two years from now, hearing from truck dealers and manufacturers about how a lack of infrastructure is causing them to struggle to implement the Advanced Clean Trucks Rule.

And the interest in electric trucks is there. Many fleet owners and truck dealers have testified both before this legislature and before DEQ that they theoretically *want* to electrify, but have argued it's not currently feasible without more financial support and robust charging infrastructure. Our current approach isn't keeping up with the need to protect Oregonians from toxic diesel emissions or the opportunity to capitalize on this growing sector of technology, so I urge this committee to support the forthcoming amendment to develop dedicated funding for this issue.

2. Accountability includes Climate and Emission Accountability

Additionally, this package needs clear accountability measures for climate and health outcomes, not just fiscal ones. Strong financial oversight is critical, especially given ODOT's history with large, high-cost, high-emissions projects, but we also need transparency on how transportation dollars align with Oregon's climate, greenhouse gas, and airshed emission goals. Oregonians deserve to know how these investments shape the air we breathe, the climate we live in, and the future we're building together.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your dedicated work to craft a transportation package that works to serve all Oregonians. I especially appreciate the proposed investments in safety and transit, both vital for equity, access, and saving lives. I hope that moving forward, this committee will support the forthcoming amendment to address the significant issue of diesel truck pollution through electrification and ensure a robust accountability process for ODOT.

Sincerely,
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