

Submitter: Janie Thomas
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Transportation
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1542

Dear Chair Gorsek, Vice Chair Weber, and members of the committee,

I support the passage of both SB 1542 Measure What You Drive and SB 1543 Guardrails for Good Governance.

Since 2007, the cost of paying back the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) loans has exploded by 400%, outpacing the money coming in. Outdated policies actually incentivize ODOT to take on more debt. We're now at a breaking point where interest payments are eating the budget meant for bridge and road maintenance, seismic retrofits, and safety investments that make Oregon a better place to live. Without action, Oregon's transportation infrastructure will continue to crumble as funds are diverted to pay off ballooning debt. Guardrails for Good Governance creates Oregon's first binding Transportation Debt Management Policy. ODOT will no longer be able to borrow money without a joint sign-off from the State Treasury and the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC). Before a single shovel hits the ground, ODOT must show the public the total price tag, including interest and opportunity costs (i.e. which other projects will be cancelled to pay for this one). These reforms ensure we balance today's needs with the future, so our children aren't paying for our road projects 30 years from now. This bill clarifies that the OTC has the independent power to approve or deny taking on debt through bond sales. They'll serve as a genuine check and balance on ODOT leadership. Prior to starting new projects, ODOT must publicly disclose a full analysis of costs, trade-offs, and debt implications – eliminating hidden costs that appear halfway through construction.

To set a higher standard for transparency, this bill requires OTC materials to be posted at least 24 hours before the public comment period closes, giving the public a real chance to be heard. This bill focuses on management and doesn't require additional funding. By making sure every dollar is used efficiently and oversight is tightened, we can fix our Transportation infrastructure.

Sincerely
Janie Thomas