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Dear Chair Girod, Chair Nosse, and members of the committee,

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper, I urge you not to redirect funding from the Oregon Community Paths and Safe Routes to School programs to highway maintenance and operations as proposed in the -3 amendment to SB 1601.

We recognize the importance of maintaining Oregon's transportation system. However, shifting dollars dedicated to multimodal infrastructure — including funds generated by the bicycle excise tax — to highway infrastructure undermines both the intent of those revenues and the values Oregonians consistently express: safety, climate responsibility, and equitable access to transportation.

Greenway pathways and off-street community paths are not recreational luxuries. Along the Willamette and throughout our basin, these corridors serve as essential commuter routes for people traveling to work, school, and services — while also providing safe access to the river and public lands. They reduce traffic congestion, lower emissions, and provide the safest possible routes for children, families, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Redirecting multimodal funds to highways disproportionately harms those who do not drive or cannot afford to own a vehicle. In many of the communities we serve — including rural and working-class areas — safe walking and biking infrastructure is not optional; it is foundational. Cutting funding for these programs widens inequities and leaves behind those already facing transportation barriers.

From a climate standpoint, this shift also moves Oregon in the wrong direction and goes directly against Governor Kotek's Executive Order 25-26, prioritizing and increasing the pace and scale of adoption of climate resilient strategies into existing state programs to deliver benefits for communities and ecosystems. Transportation remains the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Investing in active transportation and passenger rail reduces carbon output, improves air quality, and supports Oregon's statutory climate goals. Diverting bike tax revenues — originally intended to support safe cycling infrastructure — to highway operations erodes public trust and conflicts with the purpose of that revenue stream.

The Oregon Community Paths and Safe Routes to School programs are already underfunded relative to demand. Meanwhile, traffic fatalities involving pedestrians and cyclists remain unacceptably high. Off-street pathways are the safest infrastructure we can build.

We respectfully ask you to preserve the following funds from redirection or reduction:

- Multimodal Active Transportation Fund, including bicycle excise tax revenues dedicated to the Oregon Community Paths program
- Transportation Operating Funds that support passenger rail, pathways, and paratransit
- Safe Routes to School funding

If additional resources are needed for highway maintenance and operations, we encourage the Legislature to examine major expansion projects and other capital allocations rather than reducing investments that protect vulnerable users and reduce long-term climate and public health costs.

Oregon can maintain its roads without abandoning its commitment to safe, equitable, and climate-responsible transportation. We urge you to protect the programs that keep communities connected to school, to work, and to the river.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michelle Emmons

Upper Willamette Riverkeeper & Co-Executive Director