

Opposing Proposed Cuts to ODOT Non-Highway Programs

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On Behalf Of: Myself, as an individual

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1601

I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity. The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of my employer, its board, funders, or partners.

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

I strongly oppose the proposed cuts to Connect Oregon, Community Paths, the Transportation Operating Fund, rail, reserves for non-highway programs, and Safe Routes to School, as set forth in the -3 amendment to SB1601.

I know this is a hard budget. I don't envy the position you're in. However, as gas prices are poised to spike and transit service is already shrinking, cutting the programs that give Oregonians real alternatives to driving is exactly the wrong direction at exactly the wrong time.

We are watching global instability escalate in real time. Military conflict affects oil markets, and when fuel prices rise, the burden lands hardest on the people who can least absorb it: low-income workers, rural residents, immigrants, seniors, and people with disabilities. These are often the same people who already have the fewest transportation options. Stripping away the programs that serve them is fiscal ignorance and abandonment.

At the same time, Oregon is already cutting public transit. Despite extensive advocacy last session, the Legislature failed to meaningfully fund operations in HB 2025, which is now headed to voters. If we reduce transit and gut the non-highway programs that complement it, people will be inconvenienced and, if this passes with the -3 amendment, they'll also be stranded: unable to get to work, to a doctor's appointment, or to the grocery store.

Connect Oregon

Connect Oregon was created by the Legislature in 2005 to invest specifically in non-highway transportation: aviation, rail, marine, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit through competitive grants

and federal matching funds. Weakening or eliminating it doesn't just cut projects. It signals to non-drivers that they are optional users of Oregon's transportation system. They are not. They are essential. It also undermines Oregon's ability to compete for federal dollars that other states will gladly capture instead.

Community Paths / Multimodal Active Transportation Fund

This cut is particularly hard to stomach because Community Paths is partially funded by the bicycle excise tax; a tax paid at the point of sale by people who buy bicycles, with the explicit understanding that those dollars would be reinvested in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

The Legislature formalized this in 2019 through HB 2592, establishing the Multimodal Active Transportation Fund to support walking and biking projects. People paid into this system in good faith. Diverting those revenues to fill unrelated budget gaps, while simultaneously cutting the very infrastructure those revenues were meant to build, breaks that trust in a fundamental way. You cannot ask people to pay into a system and then hollow out what that system was designed to do.

Community Paths projects create safe and climate resilient infrastructure. Trails like the Westside Trail, Fanno Creek Trail, and the Gateway Connector are how people get to school, to transit, to jobs, and to daily necessities without a car. Cutting them while holding onto the bicycle excise tax is indefensible.

Transportation Operating Fund

The Transportation Operating Fund houses several programs that deserve individual attention, because each one is doing real work for real people today.

Innovative Mobility Program

The proposed \$5 million cut would eliminate one of the state's most flexible tools for testing practical mobility solutions, particularly in communities underserved by traditional transit. This supports projects that help low-income workers, rural residents, people with disabilities, and communities with limited English proficiency get where they need to go. Cutting it now, when Oregon faces rising transportation costs and declining transit service, eliminates adaptive solutions at the exact moment we need them most.

Transportation Options Program

This program is the connective tissue of Oregon's non-driving transportation network. It manages travel demand, educates the public on affordable travel options, connects veterans and low-income communities to reliable transportation, and runs the Get There statewide ride-matching database: the infrastructure behind Oregon's carpool and vanpool programs. It also runs the Get There Challenge, which introduces thousands of Oregonians each year to

alternatives to driving alone. Cut this, and you don't just lose a program. You lose the system that helps everything else function.

Statewide Vanpool Program

Vanpools are one of the most cost-effective transportation investments available. They deliver immediate congestion relief and emissions reductions while directly connecting low-wage workers, shift workers, and people with limited English proficiency to their jobs. These are the workers least able to absorb a gas price spike. Vanpools are a lifeline, not a luxury.

Amtrak Cascades

Amtrak Cascades trains sell out days in advance. This service has demonstrated growing demand with riders actively choosing Cascades over driving. Along the I-5 corridor, Cascades offers travel times competitive with a car, without the congestion, parking costs, or the rising price of fuel.

Cutting ODOT's operating support doesn't just reduce service. It eliminates Oregon's local match for federal rail dollars, forfeiting up to four federal dollars for every state dollar we walk away from. We'll effectively forfeit those federal funds to other states.

And the timing couldn't be worse. After years of planning and capital investment, new Siemens Airo trainsets are about to enter service. These trains represent a major upgrade in comfort, accessibility, and reliability. Defunding operations now, right as the investment is about to pay off, would squander years of public dollars and undermine the full return on everything we've already spent.

Oregon should be expanding Amtrak Cascades. Cutting it at peak demand, on the eve of new equipment coming online, is fiscally incoherent.

Safe Routes to School

Traffic violence is increasing nationally, and Oregon is not an exception. Children are among the most vulnerable road users, and the communities closest to schools are disproportionately low-income.

Safe Routes to School funds crossings, sidewalks, bike lanes, flashing beacons, and safety education: shovel-ready projects that prevent injuries and fatalities. Make no mistake, cutting this program is a choice to accept more preventable deaths. That is a choice the Legislature should not be willing to make.

In Closing

I recognize this is a genuinely difficult budget, and I'm not asking for perfection. But if these cuts move forward, even in reduced form, the Legislature must commit to swift, meaningful restoration in close collaboration with advocates, practitioners, and coalitions like Move Oregon Forward.

Oregon cannot credibly claim to support working families, climate resilience, or transportation justice while dismantling the programs that make those goals possible.

Transportation is access. Access to work, to healthcare, to school, to food, to community. When we cut non-highway programs, we are not trimming fat. We are cutting people off.

Please reject these cuts and protect the programs that keep Oregon moving, especially for the one in three Oregonians who have no other way to get there.

Respectfully,

Jordan Del Valle Tonoian

*As an individual, Transportation Options Professional,
and Transportation Demand Management Practitioner.*