

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Member Day Testimony

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Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for the opportunity to inform the Committee's work on critical infrastructure issues and to share the major needs from Oregon's Sixth District.

As I know Ranking Member Larsen is aware, the I-5 corridor is the most important transportation artery across the Pacific Northwest. Access to I-5 is essential for economic development, allowing businesses to get their goods to market.

In my district, one of the most important projects undertaken in recent years is the Newberg-Dundee Bypass. This highway improvement is a critical link to bring existing and anticipated economic development to the region by creating a safer, more efficient connection between these rural communities and I-5. My local stakeholders estimate that finishing this project could create over 6,000 new manufacturing jobs alone, by improving the movement of goods on the west side of the Willamette Valley in the heart of my district, to Interstate-Five.

It will also provide significant safety improvements by moving freight traffic off local roads. The corridor is part of Oregon's Critical Rural Freight Network used by more than 3,000 trucks a day. From 2018 to 2022, this corridor experienced 141 crashes, including 11 fatal or serious-injury crashes, highlighting the urgent need for safety improvements.

While increasing the capacity to transport goods to Interstate Five was critical, it is not the sole goal. The highway itself also needs upgrades to improve capacity and seismic resiliency. The I-5 Boone Bridge crosses the Willamette River in Wilsonville, just south of Portland, and is a critical link for freight moving up and down the west coast. The bridge is part of Oregon's designated Seismic Lifeline Route and is at serious risk of failure in a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

More than 126,000 vehicles, including an average of 17,000 trucks, cross the bridge each day. We must replace the bridge to adapt to economic growth in the region and ensure the safety of our communities from natural disasters.

We also desperately need to improve the junction of Hwy 51 and OR-22 which is the primary route for tourism and freight to the Oregon Coast. According to Oregon Department of Transportation Statistics, this junction saw 154 crashes between 2016 and 2022, with 10 resulting in fatalities.

Not only is the junction itself dangerous, it provides critical access to Salem's regional trauma center for residents of Polk and Yamhill counties who deserve safe and accessible roadways when every second counts

All of these projects have strong financial support from local and state governments, but they can't get over the finish line without federal support.

As your committee prepares to advance a multi-year surface transportation reauthorization, I urge you to consider the impact on projects like these and offer your strong support for the federal partnerships that make them possible.

Federal competitive grant programs are essential tools for projects like these, but they are often oversubscribed and under-funded. Programs like BUILD and MEGA can help make these projects pencil out. I encourage you to consider providing as much flexibility as possible for these funding opportunities to allow DOT to tailor its support to the specific needs of the project.

RURAL grants are especially important. This program is designed to help projects in rural areas that are often overlooked. Importantly, RURAL grants can cover up to a hundred percent of the project cost. This flexibility allows large projects to move forward in under-resourced communities.

Unfortunately, the RURAL program has seen significantly more demand than it can support. I urge you to consider drastically expanding this program to maximize investments in the communities that need them the most.

I look forward to offering my help as the Committee moves forward with surface transportation reauthorization, and I appreciate the opportunity to share these critical priorities from my District.

Thank you.