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TRANSPORTATION PACKAGE FAILS TO LOWER TRANSPORTATION COSTS, WILL INCREASE SPRAWL

Several of the state's leading environmental, conservation and land use organizations criticized the current legislative transportation bill for failing to do enough to create jobs, lower transportation costs and build stronger, healthier communities in Oregon.

"What started as a balanced transportation package has become an \$840 million highway funding bill that takes the state backward," said Bob Stacey, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Oregon. "We can't support the package in its current form."

House Bill 2001, includes a list of nearly 50 new road or road widening projects around the state.

"We need a transportation package that creates jobs working on the smartest, highest-priority transit and road projects, lowers transportation costs by giving Oregonians better transportation choices, and builds stronger, healthier communities by reducing vehicle-related pollution," said Chris Hagerbaumer, Deputy Director of the Oregon Environmental Council.

The groups had praised the original transportation package that was crafted by a diverse workgroup assembled by Governor Ted Kulongoski last year. That package struck a balance between investments in road and bridge maintenance, projects to relieve congestion, and expanded transportation options that help Oregonians pay less for transportation.

"Investments in transit and road maintenance, dollar for dollar, provide more jobs than building new roads," said Brock Howell, Transportation Advocate for Environment Oregon. "Oregonians don't have to choose between a healthy economy and a healthy environment. We can, and should, have both."

In a letter delivered to the Governor and legislative leaders, the groups proposed several changes they see as crucial to restore balance to the package, including:

- Require plans for cutting global warming pollution from cars and trucks in fast growing parts of the state (the bill only requires this in the Portland area);
- Raise the minimum bike-pedestrian project spending level to 1.5 percent of road funding, or otherwise ensure increased funding through a non-motorized vehicle transportation fund; and
- Tell the Oregon Transportation Commission to review the \$840 million list of legislator-earmarked projects, using criteria in the bill, and direct the Commission to recommend to the February 2010 supplemental session the best package of projects that \$840 million can buy for Oregon, rather than individual legislators' favorites.

“We have worked hard with diverse stakeholders for more than a year to craft a package that will create a balanced transportation system for Oregon,” said Scott Bricker, Executive Director of the Bicycle Transportation Alliance. “We will continue to work hard to make the transportation bill a package that all Oregonians can support.”

The letter was signed by 1000 Friends of Oregon, Oregon Environmental Council, Environment Oregon, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, and the Oregon League of Conservation Voters.

A newly created Joint Special Committee on Transportation has scheduled a hearing on the bill for today (Thursday) at 5 PM in Hearing Room F in the capitol.