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The Growing Danger from Sprawl's Fiscal Edge

1000 Friends of Oregon Report Analyzes Oregon's Growing Infrastructure Burden, Provides Solutions

PORTLAND, January 10--As the nation breathes a sigh of relief following a step back from the so-called fiscal cliff, another fiscal precipice remains largely hidden to many Americans: the overwhelming infrastructure burdens faced by many communities. Today, 1000 Friends of Oregon released a report revealing this increasingly fragile situation.

Oregon's publicly-funded physical infrastructure elements—its roads, sewers, and so on—are an investment in the future of its communities. Unfortunately, many Oregon communities are making the wrong bets. Entitled "More Extensive Is More Expensive," 1000 Friends' new report chronicles decades of sobering research into the full cost of sprawl and the sorry state in which it has left many communities' budgets.

The numbers are frightening: 24 percent of Oregon bridges are deficient, 69 percent of Oregon communities have property taxes falling short of essential services, and \$10 billion in unfunded infrastructure maintenance for the Portland area alone. Sprawling subdivisions and strip malls fail to pay their own way for maintenance and services, and such costs only grow over the full lifetime of public infrastructure like roads and sewers.

"Oregon's infrastructure is increasingly fragile, but so are the municipal budgets of most Oregon communities," said 1000 Friends Executive Director Jason Miner. "As is true in communities throughout the nation, many Oregon cities and towns are on a fundamentally unsustainable fiscal path."

Fortunately, there is another way. As the report also chronicles, numerous studies from around the nation have demonstrated that simple choices about long-term growth, transportation, and land use can mitigate or even reverse this dangerous fiscal edge. From large cities like Austin and Minneapolis, to small towns like Charlottesville, Va., and Bozeman, Mont., research has demonstrated that focusing resources on "quality growth"—mixed-use, walkable, efficient communities—is a far more cost-conservative option.

Oregon can experience these savings, too. 1000 Friends proposes that Oregon communities use a tool called Fiscal Impact Analysis to better inform long term growth choices. "By incorporating the full lifetime costs of different growth choices—for operations, maintenance, and services—our communities can make choices today that don't saddle future generations with unmanageable debt and decreased quality of life," Miner said.

From Bend's massive sewer project, to new highways and widened arterials serving fringe areas of the Medford, Eugene, and Portland regions, Oregon communities are finding that sprawl doesn't come cheap. Oregon taxpayers are demanding better accountability and transparency from their leaders' development choices. In its new report, 1000 Friends of Oregon provides clear guidance for how communities can do so.

The full report and a detailed summary are available online at friends.org/infrastructure.

About 1000 Friends of Oregon: 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit charitable organization with offices in Bend, Eugene, Grants Pass, and Portland. Founded in 1975, 1000 Friends works with Oregonians to enhance the state's quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural areas. For more information, please visit www.friends.org.