



# Smarter Investing in Transportation for a Stronger Oregon Economy

## Executive Summary

Transportation policy is not separate from economic policy, it is economic policy. For Oregon, the strongest business case is not “a status quo investment approach,” but a recommitment to a transportation and energy vision that lowers household costs, expands access to workers and customers, improves freight reliability, reduces crashes, and strengthens local energy resilience. The evidence from Oregon, national, and international research points in the same direction, that investments in transit, walking biking, trails, targeted safety upgrades, transportation electrification, charging infrastructure, and grid resilience can:

- **Create more jobs and economic activity per dollar of public investment;**
- **Save Oregonians money** by giving households and businesses lower-cost, less volatile transportation options, including electric vehicles, transit, walking, and biking;
- **Deliver benefits faster** by prioritizing projects that reach main streets, pocketbooks, and local economies sooner, and deliver more projects on time and on budget;
- **Build compounding local benefits** by keeping more transportation spending in Oregon through local utilities, electrical workers, maintenance jobs, safer streets, and existing infrastructure;
- **Reduce strain on Oregon’s environment and infrastructure** by making better use of roads, transit lines, and walkable centers, which can support more housing at lower public cost.

# INVEST SMARTER. PROSPER TOGETHER.

Multimodal, safe, and clean investments build a stronger economy, healthier communities, and a better future—for everyone.

## COMPOUNDING BENEFITS OVER TIME

The choice we make today shapes Oregon’s future for generations.



## THE MULTIPLIED IMPACTS FOR OREGON

<b>GOOD JOBS</b> More jobs per dollar invested—especially locally.	<b>ECONOMIC RETURN</b> Transit generates about \$4 in economic returns for every \$1 invested.*	<b>FASTER DELIVERY</b> Many multimodal projects can be built in months—not decades.	<b>EFFICIENT USE OF DOLLARS</b> Lower cost to build and maintain over the long term.	<b>LEVERAGES MORE FUNDING</b> Attracts federal, private, and local investment.	<b>BUILDS RESILIENCE</b> Multiple ways to move people and goods—stronger in a crisis.	<b>A COMPETITIVE OREGON</b> Attracts talent, businesses, and opportunity.
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\*American Public Transportation Association (APTA)  
Sources: APTA (2023); Smart Growth America (2022); NACTO (2021); TRB (2019); Oregon Dept. of Energy (2025) and others.



## Overview

Oregon’s transportation and energy investments should be judged by a straightforward business standard: **which investments create the most durable economic value for each public dollar spent?** By that measure, multimodal transportation, targeted safety improvements, electrification, and electrical grid upgrades outperform a status quo strategy centered on the traditional projects and priorities of our transportation system. These investments lower the cost of living, expand access to jobs and customers, improve freight movement at key bottlenecks, reduce the economic toll of crashes and pollution, and generally create more jobs per dollar while delivering benefits faster than large megaprojects focused primarily on lane expansion.

The research outlined below offers specific lenses for understanding why a comprehensive transportation system, rich in choices, can reduce costs for Oregon households, businesses, and the state. It also shows how a smarter investment portfolio can put Oregon on a stronger path toward sustained economic growth.

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## 1 - Transportation as Economic Policy

**Top-level takeaway:** *Transportation policy is economic policy, and the strongest economic returns for Oregon come from maintaining the roads we have, expanding transit and active transportation, and investing in electrification, rather than defaulting to broad, general-purpose road expansion. These choices lower household costs, create more jobs per public dollar, and protect the value of past infrastructure investments.*

### 1.1 Why is transportation intrinsically linked to our economy

Transportation policy is not separate from economic policy; it is economic policy. The way Oregon invests in transportation, land use, and infrastructure shapes our economy in the near term and over decades. It affects how much families spend on getting around, how easily workers can reach their jobs, how reliably businesses can move goods, and how much public infrastructure the state must build and maintain.

The research points to a practical conclusion: Oregon can get more economic value and more long-lasting solutions by investing in systems that lower costs and make better use of what we already have. Smarter land-use decisions can reduce both housing and transportation costs. Efficiency and electrification can cut long-term fuel dependence and household energy burdens. Stronger public transportation can increase access to jobs, support local business activity, and help avoid the economic and social costs of disinvestment.

Put simply, transportation investment is a pocketbook issue. The question is not just how Oregon moves people and goods, but whether our investments make daily life more affordable, our economy more productive, and our public dollars go further. [12][18][19]

### 1.2 Maintaining what we have first: The economic value of fix it first

Maintaining what we already have is one of the strongest economic strategies available to Oregon. Repair and preservation projects put people to work quickly because they are more labor-intensive and spend less on land acquisition than new road construction. National analysis finds that road repair generates about 16 percent more jobs per dollar than road expansion.

The economic case is not just about jobs. Poor road conditions raise costs for households, businesses, freight operators, and transit agencies. Drivers incur higher vehicle maintenance and wear costs, while rough pavement can slow freight movement, reduce reliability, and increase operating costs for transit providers. In other words, deferred maintenance shows up as higher costs across the economy. [51][52]

It is also a bad fiscal bargain. Once roads fall out of good condition, the cost to fix them rises sharply. Transportation agencies commonly find that every \$1 spent on timely maintenance can avoid \$5+ in later reconstruction and other costs. A repair-first approach, where money and policy align towards maintaining what we have, therefore creates near-term jobs, protects prior public investments, lowers costs for Oregonians, and helps the state avoid much larger liabilities down the road. [69]

### 1.3 Reducing household cost burden and increasing disposable income with smarter investments



The most immediate economic gain from multimodal and electrification investments often does not show up in a ribbon-cutting photo. It shows up as money left in household budgets. For many Oregon families, transportation is one of the largest monthly expenses after housing. Oregon's transit-and-housing study found that households spend a combined 56 percent of their income on housing and transportation. Nationally, households spent an average of \$13,318 on transportation in 2024, while the average cost to own and operate a new vehicle reached \$11,577 per year in 2025.

Those costs fall hardest on families with the least room to absorb them. In 2022, the lowest-income households spent 30 percent of their after-tax income on transportation, and low-income households with at least one vehicle spent 38 percent. That means transportation costs are not just a mobility issue. They are a wage, affordability, and workforce issue. Investments that help families avoid a second car, drive less, rely on safe, frequent transit, or switch to lower-cost electric transportation act as a recurring cost reduction for workers and employers alike. Climate Solutions' research has found that rapidly decarbonizing transportation through reduced driving, clean fuels for targeted uses, and clean-energy-powered electrification could save individuals up to \$5,000 per year in transportation costs. [1][2][3][4][33]

While reducing driving and the need for a car is a deeper affordability tool, electrification is a key affordability tool for Oregonians who need a car, including rural Oregonians, fleet owners, and transit operators. Electric vehicles are 60% to 75% cheaper to operate than their internal combustion engine (ICE) counterparts, and this advantage is even stronger when gas prices spike, as they have in 2026. For example, it costs the equivalent of \$1.32 per gallon to fill an EV, while, as of early May 2026, gas and diesel prices are over \$5-6+ per gallon. While EVs have long been more expensive than their fossil-fuel counterparts, the total cost of ownership (the cost of the vehicle, plus fuel, maintenance, and other expenses) has favored EVs for several years now. Now, with more affordable, high-quality used EVs and purchase prices for many passenger EVs reaching near parity with their ICE counterparts, electrification is a key affordability pathway for Oregon. [36][38][55][56]

#### **1.4 Using every public dollar towards job creation and maximizing return on investment**

The job-creation case points in the same direction. Transportation dollars go further when spent on repair of the current system, transit, active transportation, and charging infrastructure rather than on new road expansion. Smart Growth America's review of stimulus-era transportation spending found that public transportation investments created 31 percent more jobs per dollar than new road and bridge construction, while road and bridge repair created 16 percent more jobs per dollar than new construction. Active transportation performs strongly, too. In *Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure: A National Study of Employment Impacts*, it was estimated that bicycle projects create about 10 jobs per \$1 million spent, multi-use trails about 9.6 jobs, and road-only projects about 7.8 jobs. More recent transit and charging analyses reinforce the same point about job creation. APTA estimates that every \$1 billion invested in public transportation can support 41,400 jobs, \$3.1 billion in worker income, and \$251 million in tax revenue, while generating roughly \$5 billion in long-term economic value. Charging infrastructure also fits within this high-return category. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) estimates that U.S. charging build-out could support nearly 160,000 full-time equivalent jobs by 2032, including more than 78,000 in electrical installation, maintenance, and repair. Other estimates suggest charger deployment can generate roughly 12 jobs per \$1 million invested. [5][6][7][21]

Going deeper, transportation electrification strengthens the long-term jobs growth by shifting spending away from imported gasoline and diesel and toward local utilities, electricians, charger installers, grid workers, and



clean-vehicle supply chains. Installation, grid connection, electrical work, and maintenance all happen in the communities where chargers are built. Those projects can also support upstream investments in energy production and transmission, creating additional economic activity over time. Vehicle rebates, tax credits, and fleet incentives support this growth more indirectly, but they are still essential market-building tools. By increasing demand for electric vehicles, they also increase demand for batteries, parts, charging infrastructure, software, maintenance, and related services. [21][22][37]

The broader clean-energy labor market tells the same story. U.S. clean energy jobs grew 4.2 percent in 2023, more than twice the national average. Clean vehicle jobs grew even faster, increasing 11.4 percent in a single year. This is not a short-term bump. Globally, clean energy added roughly 1.5 million jobs in 2023, compared with about 940,000 in fossil fuels. That reflects a broader structural shift toward energy systems that require workers to build, operate, and maintain energy infrastructure in our local communities, rather than relying primarily on fuel extraction and combustion. States that move early are better positioned to capture that growth. Charging companies, fleet operators, manufacturers, startups, and suppliers are more likely to invest where policy signals are clear, infrastructure is expanding, and customer demand is strong. Put simply, chargers create in-state installation and maintenance work now. Rebates and tax credits grow the long-term market, lower consumer costs, and help sustain a larger clean-mobility economy over time. [22][34][35][37]



## 2 - How Clean and Multimodal Transportation Can Grow Oregon's Economy

**Top-level takeaway:** *The strongest economic returns come from targeted investments in trails, safety, transit, land-use coordination, electrification, and freight reliability, rather than from broad freeway expansion. These investments do double duty: they generate jobs, tourism revenue, labor-market access, and energy resilience, while also avoiding the major costs Oregon currently absorbs through crashes, pollution, sprawl, infrastructure, and spending on imported gasoline and diesel.*

### 2.1 - Trails for safety and for enabling recreation and tourism

Trail funding should be seen as both a tourism strategy and a transportation strategy. Connected trail systems help visitors stay longer, spend more, and reach small businesses without making every trip car-dependent. They also fill practical gaps in the transportation network, especially in places where safe walking and biking connections are needed outside the traditional road right-of-way.

That is exactly the role Oregon's Community Paths Program is designed to play. The program funds multi-use paths that improve walking and biking access and safety, including regional paths that connect communities and provide critical links to schools, jobs, medical services, transit, downtowns, and popular destinations for both residents and visitors.[43][44]

Trails and outdoor recreation are not ornamental investments. They are economic infrastructure. Nationally, outdoor recreation generated \$696.7 billion in GDP in 2024, representing 2.4 percent of the U.S. economy. The Oregon SCORP reports that direct trip and equipment expenditures linked to outdoor recreation were estimated at \$15.7 billion in 2022. A separate Oregon Parks and Recreation economic impact analysis reports that outdoor recreation spending generated \$20.6 billion in economic output, contributed \$12.4 billion to Oregon GDP, and supported 192,000 full- and part-time jobs. Those benefits ripple through local economies. Every dollar spent on outdoor recreation in Oregon generated an additional \$0.31 in secondary economic activity, supporting restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, outfitters, retailers, and rural main streets. Trails are a core part of that economy. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy estimates that active transportation currently generates more than \$34.1 billion annually in economic value and could exceed \$138.5 billion with improved network connectivity. [41][42]

The Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail is a great example. ODOT cited \$447 million in direct visitor spending in the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge region in 2019, supporting more than 5,000 jobs. Bicycle recreation is already part of that economic engine. A 2014 Dean Runyan Associates forecast for communities along the Historic Columbia River Highway estimated roughly 230,000 bicycle recreation trips in 2013, associated with about \$21.1 million in spending, supported about 270 jobs, and produced more than \$900,000 in state and local tax receipts. The value is likely higher today, given the growth of outdoor recreation and the added economic potential of completing connected walking and biking systems. [45][46]

### 2.2 - Safety, public health, and avoiding economic losses

Investing in safer roads is a critical moral and ethical choice. And yet, safety is not just a public health goal; it is a productivity and cost-containment strategy. Oregon already uses benefit-cost and cost-effectiveness methods



to prioritize safety investments, including bicycle and pedestrian safety projects. That makes sense because crashes impose enormous costs on households, employers, insurers, health systems, and the broader economy. Nationally, the economic cost of motor vehicle crashes reached \$340 billion in 2019, and the full societal harm approached \$1.4 trillion when quality-of-life losses were included. Every fatal or serious injury avoided means medical spending avoided, work time preserved, productivity protected, insurance pressure reduced, and freight and commuter delay prevented. Safer multimodal streets are not a “nice to have.” They are one of the strongest economic-return categories available. [31][32]

Pollution tells a similar story. An Oregon DEQ report estimated that diesel fine-particle pollution caused substantial health harm in Oregon under 2005 conditions, including 176 premature deaths and 25,910 work-loss days annually, with avoidable public health impacts exceeding \$1.6 billion annually. These are real costs that Oregonians and our healthcare system bear, and they can be mitigated with strategic investments in electrification, congestion reduction, and ports and rail. [40]

### **2.3 - Land-use: key for affordability, productivity, and main streets**

Productive places matter, and land use is a major factor in their productivity. When people can reach jobs, shops, services, and housing without relying on a car for every trip, places tend to work better for both households and businesses. When businesses are closer, freight shipping becomes easier, and it's easier to link errands with less driving or via transit.

The evidence supports that conclusion. A Brookings Institution study, *Walk this Way*, found that the most walkable places in metropolitan Washington, D.C. performed better economically and with higher home values than less walkable places. A National Institute for Transportation and Communities study found many positive business impacts, including increased sales and employment from investments in walking and biking. This data is important because “bad for business” remains a common objection to walking, biking, and transit investments, even though the evidence for that claim is weak and the data tends to point in the opposite direction. Oregon’s experience shows that reducing or eliminating parking minimums, along with exemptions from development charges, can lower development costs and support more housing near transit and jobs. For downtown areas and main streets, the lesson is straightforward: better access by foot, bike, and transit tends to strengthen land productivity rather than weaken it. [1][8][9][18]

The fiscal case points in the same direction. A partner study by 1000 Friends of Oregon & ECONorthwest, *More Extensive Is More Expensive*, found that infrastructure costs are often overlooked in land use decisions, especially the full lifecycle costs of operation, maintenance, and replacement. Ultimately, the cost of maintaining low-density sprawl is not fully internalized and is burdening our ability to maintain our transportation infrastructure. More compact “quality growth” can reduce public infrastructure costs, including road costs by 12 percent and water and sewer costs by 14 percent compared with sprawl development patterns. In other words, compact, connected communities do not just support local businesses. They also reduce long-term public infrastructure burdens and improve the return on the infrastructure Oregon has already built. [1][18][39]

This is also central to affordability. Transportation is typically the second-largest household expense, so housing and transportation costs should be understood together. The Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Housing + Transportation Index shows that location-efficient neighborhoods, with better access to jobs, transit,



and services, can substantially reduce combined household costs even where housing prices are higher. By contrast, lower-cost housing in auto-dependent areas can come with higher transportation costs that wipe out any housing savings and drive up the total cost of living.

For Oregon, where many households already spend a large share of their income on housing and transportation combined, aligning land use with multimodal access is one of the most effective ways to improve real affordability. The goal should not be cheaper housing on paper, but lower total costs to Oregonians. [48][18]

## **2.4 - Transit is essential for labor-market access and workforce participation**

For employers, transportation is the gateway to workers. However, transit access is still too often treated as a secondary issue, even though roughly 30 percent of Oregonians cannot or do not drive. That is why transit funding can deliver such a strong economic return. It does not just move people from one place to another. It connects workers to jobs, employers to larger labor pools, and more Oregonians to opportunities to build income and wealth through affordable transportation. [54]

A Brookings study found that the typical job is accessible to only about 27 percent of the metropolitan workforce by transit. Stronger transit networks, especially when paired with better land-use planning, can materially improve employers' access to workers. A 2025 review, *Public transport investments as generators of economic and social activity*, concluded that public transport investments can generate broader economic and social benefits by improving accessibility, increasing employment opportunities, and raising incomes through better access to jobs, education, and services. For Oregon, investments in transit frequency, coverage, safe first- and last-mile connections, and transit-supportive land use are not just social policy; they are pro-business tools that can support stronger labor markets, higher workforce participation, and better job matching that can increase incomes. [10][11][12][10]

## **2.5 - Transportation electrification, related grid investments, and resilience**

The State Energy Strategy finds that the lowest-cost path for Oregon depends on high levels of efficiency and electrification. This means that as we electrify our transportation sector, we will also be investing in our grid and energy systems. Energy strategy modeling estimates that the transition from fossil fuels to electrification could add roughly 10,700 to 18,200 jobs in the electricity sector by 2035. It also found that delaying the electrification of medium- and heavy-duty transportation would increase costs by about \$31 billion by 2050 compared to the least cost pathway that leans into MHD electrification, mostly due to higher fuel costs borne by fleets. For households and fleets, the basic economics are just as important. Electric vehicles can reduce fuel and maintenance costs over the life of the vehicle, with federal sources estimating savings of up to roughly \$21,000 in discounted lifetime costs. Electrification is not only a climate strategy, it is a cost-saving, local jobs, and energy-resilience strategy. [19][20][23][24]

At scale, electrification strengthens Oregon's economy by shifting transportation spending away from imported gasoline and diesel and toward domestic industries such as Oregon utilities, electricians, charger installers, grid upgrades, and local electrical maintenance jobs. That matters for resilience as well as affordability. Instead of sending more household and business dollars out of state through fuel purchases, which are quite literally



burned up, Oregon can invest in the infrastructure and workforce needed to power cleaner vehicles with electricity increasingly produced, delivered, and managed through our regional grid. In fact, with smart policies to manage off-peak EV charging demand, **electrification could put downward pressure on electricity rates** by getting more use out of the current system and infrastructure, spreading costs, and minimizing the need for upgrades. This downward pressure applies to both passenger cars charged at home and medium- and heavy-duty zero-emission trucks charged at a depot. With continued development, such as vehicle-to-grid technologies that let you power your home from your EV, and continued utility ratemaking decisions on TE and microgrids, these benefits will likely only grow. [19][21][24][25][26][34][57][70]

Grid and resilience investments, which are needed to support a clean energy future, including transportation electrification, reinforce the same economic case for economic growth. Oregon's resilience and community-energy programs already connect clean electricity investments with local jobs and stronger communities. The broader economic returns are significant: Brattle estimates that each \$1 billion of transmission investment supports about 13,000 FTE-years of employment and \$2.4 billion in economic activity. Paired with transportation electrification, these investments help move Oregon away from volatile fossil fuel markets and toward a cleaner system built on local electricity, local infrastructure, and local workers. [25][26][19][34][35]

## 2.6 - Solutions to freight delays that increase reliability and economic opportunity

While a thorny issue, congestion management is a core transportation and economic issue. Put simply, for commuters and freight, time waiting in traffic is economic inefficiency. The natural response to congestion is often to pursue roadway expansions, on the logic that more lane miles will generate more throughput. Duranton and Turner's seminal "fundamental law of road congestion" found that vehicle travel tends to rise roughly in proportion to major road expansion, and has been subsequently confirmed in multiple studies using real-world data. The OECD has similarly concluded that building new road capacity alone is not an efficient response to peak demand, and the United Kingdom's transport evidence review says induced demand should be properly accounted for when evaluating projects. As the libertarian think tank Cato Institute's *The Political Economy of Congestion Pricing* puts it, congestion pricing is economically sound because traffic is not free; drivers pay either in dollars or in wasted time. In a 2026 comparison of congestion-reduction strategies, the Victoria Transport Policy Institute found that roadway expansions are among the most expensive options available to planners, yet they generally achieve only short-term improvements in travel efficiency. However, conventional planning practices undervalue less costly, longer-lasting strategies such as Transportation Demand Management (TDM) or improvements to space-efficient modes, and instead pursue expansion first when other options would perform better at a lower cost. For Oregon's businesses that rely on trucking and our highway system, the practical takeaway is clear: **we need more cost-effective, durable solutions to congestion, with the goal of a highway and road system that is more dependable, not just bigger.** [13][14][15][16][17][68][49]

If capacity is not a first-line treatment, then what is? While there are real political complications for Oregon, congestion pricing is one of the clearest evidence-backed congestion tools: London, Stockholm, and Singapore all saw meaningful congestion reductions after pricing, with a 20% to 30% decrease in cross-town commute times. Early New York City congestion pricing results point in the same direction, with the MTA reporting that traffic into Manhattan's Congestion Relief Zone fell almost 7% after congestion pricing began and that traffic



speeds across the city improved substantially in the first year. Efficient congestion pricing can also generate revenues to reinvest in other decongestion strategies such as, transit, transportation demand management, multimodal planning, and smart growth development policies, significantly increasing the positive impacts of congestion pricing by using it to create alternatives to driving and incurring the congestion pricing. The backlash story is overstated. A six-month Nature study, *Public attitude, behavior, and social norm changes over six months with the NYC congestion charge*, found that 57.1% of New Yorkers supported congestion pricing before launch, and support did not significantly decline after implementation. Instead, supporters became more committed, opposition peaked during rollout week, and norms against unnecessary driving strengthened inside the toll zone—suggesting the policy can become more politically durable once people live with it.

[65][66][58][59][60][65]

Multimodal transportation and land use reduce congestion by shortening trips, shifting some trips out of cars, and helping the same street network move more people; newer VMT-reduction reviews continue to identify transit service, active transportation, compact/mixed-use land use, and parking/demand management as core strategies, especially when these tools are implemented together rather than as isolated projects. It's also important to note that these investments, when implemented together, provide deeper economic benefits to the state, can be delivered faster, and deliver durable congestion relief. By applying these strategies before pursuing expansion, planners can resolve many of their congestion problems without incurring the high costs of roadway construction and protect state dollars to address any severe or stubborn challenges that remain.

[61][62][63][68]

In practical terms, congestion relief comes from a coordinated package of cost-effective first-line strategies: price the most crowded road space, reinvest revenue in better transit and non-driving options, build safe walking and biking networks for short trips, manage parking and curb demand, and allow more homes, jobs, and services near each other so fewer daily trips require driving. [61][62][64]



### 3 - Additional Benefits and Needs

**Top-level takeaway:** *How we select transportation projects is only half the equation. Oregon's ability to deliver projects with strong in-house expertise and accountability for being on time and on budget determines whether the state gets the full economic value of every transportation dollar. Faster delivery, stronger agency capacity, and clear project scoring are the levers that turn good policy into real outcomes.*

#### 3.1 - Delivering projects on time with more benefits

Timing is an economic variable, and the ability to deliver projects on time or even ahead of schedule matters immensely. Smart Growth America found that repair and maintenance projects spend money faster and create jobs more quickly than new-capacity projects. In practice, that means bus-priority treatments, sidewalks, crossings, bike-network completion, safe-routes investments, and targeted road improvements and repair can begin producing business and household benefits years before a large-scale project opens. This is because these projects generally cost less, have less material cost uncertainty, don't generally require acquisition of right of way or land, and can be designed and completed with more internal agency capacity, which reduces risk, consulting costs. [5][13]

#### 3.2 - Futureproofing our workforce, agency capacity, and reducing reliance on consulting

Finally, transportation project selection is only half the issue. The ability to deliver projects is the other half. Even the right investment strategy will fall short if the state lacks the staff, expertise, authority, and governance needed to deliver projects well. Oregon's own performance reporting underscores the challenge. In Oregon fiscal year 2024, 60 percent of construction projects were delivered on time, and 89 percent were delivered on budget. Brookings' procurement research found that almost 90 percent of surveyed state DOT procurement officials said their agencies were moderately or severely understaffed, and respondents linked overreliance on consultants to higher costs. A 2025 state-capacity paper reached a similar conclusion, finding that higher-quality engineers were associated with lower project costs and that the loss of in-house expertise can cost agencies far more than they save in salaries. Recent research on state transportation capacity finds that staffing matters for infrastructure delivery: one additional state DOT employee per 1,000 residents is correlated with 26% lower project-level costs for resurfacing projects, suggesting that in-house public-sector expertise can help agencies manage contracts, reduce costly change orders, and deliver projects more efficiently. [27][28][29][30][67]

If Oregon wants abundance — more useful projects delivered faster and at lower cost — then we must invest in ODOT's internal capacity from finance, planners, engineers, operations staff, repair crews, and more. It is a core economic investment that delivers real savings for the state, all while employing local Oregonians, keeping dollars closer to our economy. This is validated by Eno's project-delivery work, including international comparisons, which points to the same practical lesson: strong agencies need clear authority, competent staff, and sound governance.[29]



### **3.3 - Why accountability, transparency, and outcomes matter for transportation and our economy**

In the 2026 legislative session, Move Oregon Forward moved two accountability policy bills. While they did not pass, their content is critical to improving accountability and transparency in our transportation system.

SB 1542 (specifically the -2 amendment) would have required the state to plan ahead through a 10-year transportation investment plan and to score and rank projects before they are funded, with that process backed by statute. It would also have required clearer reporting on road conditions and greater public transparency about which projects are selected, how they are evaluated, and why they move forward. SB 1543 would have strengthened oversight by the Oregon Transportation Commission and required the state to have a clear plan before taking on debt for major projects. Together, the bills were designed to make sure transportation dollars are spent on projects that actually deliver results. [50][51]

Peer states show why this matters. Virginia's SMART SCALE program scores and ranks projects using clear criteria, including safety, congestion, accessibility, land use, environmental quality, and economic development, then makes those scores public so funding decisions are more transparent and defensible. Minnesota takes a similar performance-oriented approach through MnSHIP, with a strong focus on system condition, asset management, and "fix-it-first" investments. National guidance points to the same lesson: when states set clear goals, rank projects against those goals, and track results, they are better positioned to get stronger outcomes from limited dollars. [52][53]

For Oregon, this is ultimately about making smarter choices. A system that scores projects before funding them, requires stronger oversight, and reports results publicly can help avoid wasting money on projects that do not deliver. It also makes it easier to answer the question every taxpayer should be able to ask: are we getting what we paid for? [50][52][53]

### **Conclusion**

We need to prioritize safety, transit, walking, and biking, transportation electrification, and grid resilience all while adopting stronger public accountability and transparency policies. It is critical we reserve highway dollars for preservation, safety, and truly targeted freight bottlenecks rather than broad general-purpose lane expansion. This focus enables a future that is a more competitive, more affordable, more resilient, and more economically productive path for Oregon businesses and households. This matters greatly as Oregon continues to chart a new course for an economy focused on growth and affordability.



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The Move Oregon Forward Steering Committee,  
And many others, thank you!