

March 12, 2025

Co-Chairs Aaron Woods and David Gomberg
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic
Development
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Statement from The Pew Charitable Trusts in support of Oregon Department of
Transportation Funding for Wildlife Crossings

Dear Co-Chairs Woods and Gomberg:

The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) requests that critical funding be included in the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) budget to strengthen the department's wildlife-vehicle collision program and support the construction of wildlife crossing structures throughout the state.

Pew's U.S. Conservation program seeks to sustain biodiversity and resilient ecosystems by collaborating with Tribes, local communities, businesses, policymakers, and other stakeholders to achieve balanced, commonsense policy solutions at the federal and state level. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors, including through the construction of wildlife crossings, is a key component of our work.

Emerging science and new technologies provide considerable opportunity for states to integrate wildlife conservation into transportation policy. With advances in research technology, such as GPS-enabled collars, we now have detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect wildlife populations, and where infrastructure interventions can have the greatest benefit for both wildlife and people.

According to ODOT, each year there are more than 7,000 wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon, resulting in human injury and fatalities and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates.¹ Nationwide research finds that vehicle damage, medical expenses, and lost hunting value bring the average cost of a deer collision to \$16,967 and

¹ Oregon Department of Transportation. July 2024. Transportation Funding Needs. Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf>.

an elk collision is \$56,782.² The cumulative cost of collisions with those two species alone on Oregon's roads totaled \$91.7 million in 2022.³ Reducing wildlife-vehicle collisions is a win for motorists, wildlife, and local communities, making roads safer for people and allowing animals to safely traverse their migratory habitat. From a financial investment perspective, research shows that in areas with relatively high rates of wildlife-vehicle collisions, the cost of building wildlife crossing structures is far less than the forgone costs of vehicle repair, medical care, and emergency or maintenance expenses.⁴

Providing dedicated funding to construct wildlife crossing structures will help reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and build on the state legislature's previous investments in wildlife crossings in 2022 and 2023. Funds could also be used to serve as a state match to secure federal funding for wildlife-vehicle collision reduction and habitat connectivity, should they become available. A dedicated, continuous revenue source is in the interest of ODOT's project financing plans, allowing for reliable capacity that spans budget cycles given the multi-year nature of most transportation infrastructure projects.

Oregon has a growing number of success stories already, such as several new wildlife crossing underpasses along Highway 97 between Mile Posts 149 and 155 near Lava Butte, which have significantly reduced wildlife-vehicle collisions and increased safe passage. The wildlife crossing on Highway 97 at Gilchrist—a project that benefited from the legislature's previous allocation—is showing similar results. The investments by the legislature in 2022 and 2023 have yielded important outcomes, bringing a crossing project on Highway 97 to completion and advancing projects on Interstate 5 near Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument and Highway 20 on the Burns Paiute Tribe's land in Malheur County. Numerous additional projects are underway, but funding to date has not yet met the demand for these projects.

Despite a higher rate of wildlife-vehicle collisions than other nearby states,⁵ Oregon has fallen behind other western states in the construction of wildlife crossings. As of 2022,

² Huijser, M.P., J.W. Duffield, C. Neher, A.P. Clevenger & T. McGuire. 2022. Cost-benefit analyses of migration measures along highways for large animal species: An update and an expansion of the 2009 model: https://www.mphetc.com/files/ugd/9d46fb_b9852393a44d4148bd92feac37fc034e.pdf

³ ODOT Wildlife Collision Data 2022

⁴ Center for Large Landscape Conservation. 2020. Reducing Wildlife Vehicle Collisions by Building Crossings: General Information, Cost Effectiveness, and Case Studies from the U.S. A research brief commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Available at: <https://largelandscapes.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Reducing-Wildlife-Vehicle-Collisions-by-Building-Crossings.pdf>.

⁵ State Farm. September 2024. How likely are you to have an animal collision? Available at: <https://www.statefarm.com/simple-insights/auto-and-vehicles/how-likely-are-you-to-have-an-animal-collision>.

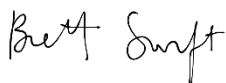
Oregon has five such structures, while Washington state has more than 30, Colorado has 69, Nevada has 23 for large mammals alone, Wyoming has 20, and Utah has 50. Investments by the 2022 and 2023 legislature have yielded important results, yet more remains to be done.

These solutions are gaining attention at the national level and in state departments of transportation across the country. For the first time, dedicated federal funds for a wildlife crossings grant program—\$350 million over five years—were included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act enacted in 2021. And there is broad bipartisan support for wildlife crossings from voters across Oregon. A 2020 Pew-commissioned poll indicated that 86% of Oregonians favor the construction of more wildlife crossings on roads and highways, and 75% of Oregon voters from across the political and geographic spectrum supported increased funding to build more wildlife crossings on roads and highways.⁶

As noted in ODOT's Transportation Funding Needs document, dated July 2024, an annual investment of \$5 million per year would enable the construction of an additional 20 wildlife fencing and structure projects over the next 30 years.⁷

Thank you for your consideration of Pew's support for dedicated funding in ODOT's budget for wildlife crossing structures. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at bswift@pewtrusts.org, or 971-344-5510, should you require additional information.

Sincerely,



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⁶ [The](https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2020/04/16/pew-oregonians-support-protecting-wildlife-migration-routes-new-poll-finds) Pew Charitable Trusts. April 2020. Oregonians Support Protecting Wildlife Migration Routes, New Poll Finds. Available at: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2020/04/16/pew-oregonians-support-protecting-wildlife-migration-routes-new-poll-finds>.

⁷ Oregon Department of Transportation. July 2024. Transportation Funding Needs. Available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/About/Documents/Transportation%20Funding%20Needs.pdf>.

CC:

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

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