



2005 Market Street, Suite 2800 215.575.9050 Phone
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7077 215.575.4939 Fax

901 E Street NW, 10th Floor 202.552.2000 Phone
Washington, DC 20004 202.552.2299 Fax
www.pewtrusts.org

December 7, 2021

Oregon Transportation Commission
Oregon Department of Transportation
355 Capitol Street, NE, MS11
Salem, OR 97301-3871
Submitted electronically via [ODOT's website](#)

RE: Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act

Dear Oregon Transportation Commissioners, ODOT Director Strickler, and staff:

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts' U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation program, I'm writing in response to the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT) request for public input on how the \$1.2 billion allocated to Oregon, as part of the recently enacted Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), should be allocated.

Pew's public lands and rivers initiative seeks to conserve ecologically and culturally significant public landscapes by collaborating with local communities, businesses, elected officials, and other stakeholders to achieve balanced, commonsense policy at the federal and state level. The identification and protection of wildlife migration corridors 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 are learning very detailed information on how and where these animals travel between summer and winter habitats, and how barriers such as highways and development can negatively affect migratory corridors and big game survival.

We recommend that ODOT provide at least \$10 million dollars of the \$1.2 billion IIJA allocation—representing less than 1% of the total amount—to address wildlife-vehicle collision hot spots in the state. In 2019, the ODOT recorded over 6,100 wildlife-vehicle collisions, resulting in damage, injury, and fatalities to motorists and significantly impacting migrating populations of ungulates. Researchers believe that the actual number of wildlife-vehicle collisions in Oregon are at least two times the number reported. The average cost of a vehicle collision with a mule deer—the most common collision type—costs \$9,086 and collisions with elk cost \$24,006 (in November 2021 dollars).¹

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. Proven solutions are gaining attention in departments of transportation across the country and gaining attention at the federal level. For the first time, dedicated wildlife crossing funding was included in the federal infrastructure bill.

There is broad bipartisan support for wildlife crossings from voters across Oregon. In a 2020 Pew-commissioned poll conducted by the firm GBAO, 86% of Oregonians favor constructing more wildlife crossings on roads and highways; 75% of voters from across the political and geographic spectrum

¹ These cost estimates are limited to property damage, injury or fatality related costs, and the value of a lost hunting license. The actual and full costs are significantly higher.

support increased funding to build more wildlife crossings on roads and highways.²

Oregon has a growing number of success stories, such as a wildlife crossing underpass that was constructed along highway 97 near Lava Butte. Here, as in other places where new science can pinpoint the location of needed interventions, collisions have been reduced by more than 80%. The recently completed wildlife crossing at Gilchrist—also on highway 97, and a project that Pew helped finance—is expected to result in similar success.

A \$10 million investment would help fund these mitigation measures and would specifically help with the following hotspots: the completion of directional fencing at Gilchrist on highway 97, implementation of wildlife safe passage solutions on highway 20 between Juntura and Harper, construction of directional fencing near Dayville, and wildlife crossings along I-5 between Ashland and the Oregon-California border.

We further recommend that ODOT apply for additional funds from the Wildlife Crossing Pilot competitive grant program, once it is up and running. Given the recent successes with leveraging private dollars and Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund resources for the Gilchrist crossing, and the ongoing efforts by the state legislature to seek dedicated funding for wildlife crossings, there are ample and growing opportunities to secure matching dollars and Oregon is in a strong position to compete for these federal grants.

Thank you for your consideration and please don't hesitate to reach out to me at lwilliams3@pewtrusts.org or 503-765-1141 should I be able to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Laurel Williams
Officer, U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts (Portland, OR Office)
111 SW Columbia Street, Suite 200
Portland, OR 97201

² [Pew: Oregonians Support Protecting Wildlife Migration Routes, New Poll Finds](#)