

# Investment in transportation vital for Oregon

By RANDALL PAPÉ

Oregon has long depended on the ability to trade its goods to provide an economic base for our citizens. To grow this base and maintain a competitive edge on the world stage, our state's citizens must be able to count on a safe and efficient transportation system.

Unfortunately, one of our state's most valuable assets, our transportation infrastructure, is deteriorating rapidly due to increased use and lack of investment. Oregon invests less per capita than any other Western state on transportation funding. In addition, inflation will continue to reduce the purchasing power of the existing fuel surcharges by 40 percent to 50 percent over the next 25 years.

As a result, Oregon businesses and citizens are being affected by underinvestment in the transportation system.

Recently, a broad consortium of business organizations and transportation groups from around the state released a study: the Cost of Highway Limitations and Travel Delay to Oregon's Economy. The findings indicate that, without additional investment in the state's critical transportation infrastructure, Oregon's economy could lose \$1.7 billion annually and 16,000 jobs by 2025.

The study, conducted by Boston-based Economic Development Research Group, found that Oregon's economy and job base are more transportation dependent than most other states.

Oregon is the ninth most trade dependent economy in the country with more than 400,000 jobs (one in five) either transportation-reliant or transportation-dependent, according to the analysis.

From high technology and forest products to food processing and sports apparel, Oregon's major industries depend on a strong transportation network to move customers, employees, goods and supplies. Currently, some businesses are being forced to move operations out of the state due to a lack of efficient, reliable and timely roadway connections. Our companies wrestle with the challenge of reaching customers in a timely manner because of inefficiencies in the transportation system.

From medical transportation and public transit to recreational pursuits and commuting to work or school, Oregon's citizens also depend on a strong transportation network to enjoy their unique quality of life.

A healthy transportation system can attract business and improve the quality of life for our residents. We must invest in our transportation system if we are to continue to reap its benefits.

Oregon civic, community and business leaders from across the state have come together to advocate for additional transportation investment in city, county and state roads and highways this legislative session. Additional investments of \$350 million called for in the Oregon Business Plan's proposal will begin to address the growing gap between available funds and the

most critical unmet transportation system needs identified in the Oregon Transportation Plan. We must call upon our state government to fill this growing gap in this session.

Now is the time to invest in all forms of transportation. All Oregonians depend on our transportation system. Unless the state's lawmakers, business community and citizens come together to address our transportation challenges, Oregon roads will continue to deteriorate and congestion will increase. This will increase travel costs for people, services and goods, and will decrease our quality of life as well as our state's business competitiveness. A clear course of action and set of shared priorities will ensure Oregon's ability to compete in an increasingly competitive global economy. The Oregon Legislature should act this session with a substantial transportation-funding package.

Call your senator and representative and let them know that immediate, stable and long-term transportation investment now is a necessary step to keep Oregon competitive.

*Randall Papé, a member of the Oregon Transportation Commission, is president and chief executive officer of The Papé Group Inc., based in Eugene. Information about the Cost of Highway Limitations and Travel Delay to Oregon's Economy study can be obtained by contacting Jeremy Rogers at Oregon Business Council: (503) 595-7608 or jrogers@orbusinesscouncil.org.*