

State Representative
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House District 60

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Rep. Bentz Chairs Hearing on County Road Deterioration

SALEM – On Monday, Representative Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) chaired the meeting of the House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development to discuss county road conditions, maintenance, and funding.

The Committee took testimony from elected county officials, the Association of Oregon Counties, and the Oregon Department of Transportation. The hearing drew attention to the eroding condition of county roads across Oregon and the causes of decline, focusing on reduced funding and the increased cost of road maintenance and construction materials.

Harney County Judge Steve Grasty noted the critical importance of maintaining county roads, irreplaceable as a link between communities and health care, education, markets, and services. Judge Grasty and Lake County Commissioner Dan Shoun described the additional challenges faced by rural counties in Eastern Oregon, arising from the sheer size of Harney and Lake Counties with their hundreds of road miles which must be maintained if these counties are to compete and grow. Greater road mileage, coupled with reduced funding and increasing asphalt and oil prices, make it difficult to meet the needs of these vast areas. County officials also pointed out the significant reduction in the size of their county road departments, reduced to accommodate the increasing costs of road materials and maintenance, some of nearly tripling over the past twenty years.

“The purpose of the hearing was to highlight the real, measurable loss of our county road system,” Rep. Bentz stated. “The cost of maintaining our roads far exceeds any available public funding source, including the often referenced but completely inadequate local option road tax.”

“The cost of the construction of our substantial county road system was initially financed, in large part, by timber revenue. The long term failure of federal timber policy which has and could provide a stable source of county infrastructure funding is clear and stark. If the federal government continues to waste our nation’s timber and mineral assets despite obvious opportunity for sustainable and beneficial use, Oregon’s essential economic infrastructure will be lost.”

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