

September 12, 2008

To: Members of the Lane County Delegation to the Oregon Legislature

From: George Kloeppe, Executive Director

Subject: LCOG Board of Directors, Legislative Dialogue, September 25

In my letter of invitation last month, I promised a follow-up communication highlighting some of the primary legislative and public policy interests of the LCOG organization and its member governments. This note is intended to provide that background information in advance of the session with the LCOG Board of Directors on September 25.

But first, let me reiterate the invitation. Our Board, comprised of elected officials from 27 units of government in Lane County, asked that I invite all members of the Lane County delegation to our September meeting, primarily to provide an opportunity for you to share your priorities and expectations for the 2009 Session. That meeting will be held on the 25th, beginning at 7:00 p.m., at Willamalane's Adult Activity Center, 215 West "C" Street in Springfield. I would expect that the first hour of the two hour meeting will be consumed in agency business items, with the Legislative Dialogue beginning about 8:00. But I would certainly encourage you to come at 7:00. We really look forward to hearing from you and, also, to engaging in a dialogue regarding the interests of local government. When your portion of the meeting begins, we will have all attending legislators seated as a panel with each of you afforded the opportunity to speak. Then, I would expect questions and answers—a genuine dialogue.

To give you a sense of the broad interests of this agency and our member governments, let me offer "bullets" that speak not to specific legislation as much as to public policy in the broad sense. You will undoubtedly hear the more explicit requests of individual local governments as the Session approaches. But at this point, it may be best to focus upon our general interests.

In the area of human services and based upon the assessment of two citizen advisory councils and our Board of Directors, LCOG will be asking for legislative support in three areas:

- Increase consumer involvement and improve access to health care benefits
- Increase funding for services that prevent or postpone the need for Medicaid
- Improve access to Medicaid services through equitable reimbursement and workload-based staffing

In the area of transportation, LCOG and our local governments will want your help in three areas:

- Provide increased funding for state and local transportation systems, particularly in support of operations and maintenance; consider a vehicle registration fee
- Refrain from preemptions of local governments' ability to generate local revenue for transportation purposes
- Enhance transit funding—specifically to expand EmX service, to plug the gap in paratransit service funding, and to allow LTD to increase its revenues

In the area of planning, we will anxiously await the report of the Big Look Task Force and urge the Legislature to:

- Consider the importance and value of regional planning and coordination

In the area of education, we urge the Legislature to assess the long-term social and economic value of education in our society and, specifically, to:

- Provide appropriate financial support to higher education, community colleges and K-12 districts that will allow Oregon to regain a world class reputation for excellence

In the area of general government, we will urge your consideration of:

- Revisions to the Ethics Law that will protect the public interest, discourage favoritism or decisions driven by self-interest, but still avoid burdensome reporting requirements and unnecessary intrusions into the private lives of volunteer public officials and their families

- Revisions to the initiative and referendum laws that will preserve the vital role of citizens in proposing public policy change while facilitating a more thorough vetting of the implications of citizen proposals
- Revisions to the State's revenue system that will enhance the fairness, predictability and stability in the flow of resources in support of public programs; consider a business tax increase

These bulleted items may provide a useful backdrop for the Legislative Dialogue on the 25th. The list is by no means exhaustive, nor is any priority order intended within the issues identified. By and large, local governments want to work in a genuine partnership with the State. It is recognized that there will be situations in which the superior level of government must preempt the actions of government at the local level; but such preemptions should be implemented with great care and with an emphasis on inflicting minimum damage on local jurisdictions and their citizens. Similarly, mandates from the State, when needed in support of the public interest, should carry with them the funding needed at the local level to carry them out. Local officials share your desire for government at all levels to “Do the right thing and to do it right.” We value transparency and responsiveness in the conduct of the public's business, and we believe that there is ample room for improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery. Local governments in Lane County and this council of governments welcome the opportunity to work with the State in pursuit of those objectives.

I hope that you will be able to join us on September 25. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (541) 682-4395 or by email at gkloeppe@lcog.org.