



February 13, 2024

Sen. Gorsek and Rep. McLain
Co-Chairs
Joint Committee on Transportation
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

RE: SB 1572 - Support for Commuter Rail Expansion Study from Transportation and Environmental Advocacy Groups

Dear Co-Chairs McLain and Gorsek, Vice-Chairs Boshart Davis and Boquist,

The signed organizations write to you expressing strong support for SB 1572, which seeks to establish a task force to study the feasibility of extending the Westside Express Service (WES) commuter rail to Salem, incorporating additional local stops. This initiative is crucial to creating a more connected, efficient, and sustainable transportation system in Oregon.

SB 1572 would be necessary for several considerations:

- **Advances Oregon's Vision for a Truly Multimodal Transportation System:** Extending WES represents a significant move toward a multimodal transportation network that decreases reliance on personal vehicles, thus addressing the urgent need for more sustainable and efficient travel options in the Portland Metro Region. Creating

more travel options allows people to connect the rest of their trips with other forms of transit or by walking or biking.

- **Addresses Congestion:** As Oregon continues to grow, the costs of adding additional lanes of freeway on I-5 to accommodate this new growth exclusively through road expansion is simply cost-prohibitive. Investments in rail create options other than driving that will help ease congestion.
- **Increases Safety:** By offering a safer travel alternative to automobiles, expanding commuter rail services can significantly reduce traffic-related accidents, injuries, and fatalities on our roads by encouraging less driving, which is linked with higher levels of safety for all transportation users.
- **Climate Action:** Expanding commuter rail services is essential in our fight against climate change. It offers an effective alternative to car usage, potentially lowering greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality, thereby contributing to a healthier planet and populace. Expanding rail access is critical to meeting our climate goals.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Investing in commuter rail infrastructure is a cost-effective approach to transportation. It presents long-term savings on road maintenance, eases the need for road expansions, and alleviates the economic burdens of traffic congestion. This will also give commuters options if they are nudged by congestion pricing into not driving.
- **Accessibility and Equity:** Improved commuter rail services will offer greater access to jobs, education, and healthcare, especially for individuals without access to a car (one in four of Oregonians can't drive due to age, disability, or cost). This promotes social equity by ensuring that all community members have dependable transportation options.
- **Economic and Land Use Benefits:** The proposed expansion of WES will stimulate economic growth, encourage transit-oriented development, and conserve valuable agricultural and natural lands, fostering a balanced approach to development and land conservation in the Willamette Valley.

We urge the committee to pass SB 1572 and recognize the critical role commuter rail can play in the future of Oregon's transportation infrastructure. As we continue to work towards a major transportation package in 2025, doing the necessary prework to pull together stakeholders and building a new and bold vision for transportation in our state can ensure that we set Oregon on a path to meet its climate, safety, and other goals.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brett Morgan
Transportation Director
1000 Friends of Oregon

Meredith Connolly
Oregon Director
Climate Solutions

Steering Committee
MCAT, Mobilizing Climate Action Together

Chris Smith
No More Freeways

Jacqui Treiger
Campaign Manager: Climate and Transportation
Oregon Environmental Council

Neil Baunsgard
Transportation and Climate Policy Manager
The Environmental Center

Mary Peveto and Nakisha Nathan
Co-Directors
Neighbors for Clean Air