

March 30th, 2015

TO: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Subcommittee On Transportation and Economic Development
Sen. Johnson, Rep. Gomberg co-chairs

FROM: Jon Bartholomew, Government Relations Director, AARP Oregon

RE: AARP Support for Passenger Rail in ODOT budget

AARP Oregon offers our support for the budget for passenger rail for the Oregon Department of Transportation as originally proposed in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB). Reducing the budget allocation from the GRB's proposal could jeopardize the ability for passenger rail to provide service in Oregon.

Passenger rail is one mobility option for midlife and older people who travel both within congested regional corridors and between cities separated by long distances. The 2009 National Household Travel Survey found that adults age 65 and older took almost five million trips on Amtrak nationally. In addition passenger rail provides essential service to many rural communities, and rail can be an important contributor to economic development.

Often as Oregonians age, they decide to stop driving for a variety of reasons. However, this does not mean that they stop living and being independent. Rail provides an option for those who no longer drive to visit friends and family in other parts of Oregon or for other travel reasons. As Oregon cities work to create age-friendly communities, passenger rail is one essential tool to ensure that Oregon is an age-friendly state.

Another compelling reason to support passenger rails is that travel for medical purposes has skyrocketed over the past three decades. This is likely due to an increase in specialization and out-patient care. Travel for medical purposes has outpaced population growth, a trend observed among people of all ages. Rural residents are among those most affected by changes to the delivery of medical care fueling this trend, as they have the greatest distance to travel to access health care.

AARP believes that Oregon should establish a dependable funding mechanism for investment in passenger rail and support passenger rail systems that are integrated and coordinated with the nationwide passenger rail system. At this time, general fund dollars are required to maintain the rail system we have now. We urge the committee to support the original proposal in the Governor's Recommended Budget for passenger rail in Oregon.