
From: Matt Berggren <matt.berggren@cherriots.org>
Sent: Monday, March 30, 2015 6:34 PM
To: WaysandMeans.TransportationEcDevSub@state.or.us
Subject: Cascade Commuters | Amtrak Cascades funding

Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation & Economic Development,

My name is Matt Berggren and I'm a daily commuter on Amtrak Cascades and the POINT bus system, a transportation planner at Salem-Keizer Transit, and a resident of Portland. I also organize a group called Cascade Commuters, which I formed last year to connect current commuters to one another, to inform prospective commuters about alternative forms of transportation, and to advocate for trains, buses, carpools, and vanpools in the Cascade corridor. There are currently more than two dozen Amtrak and POINT riders who ride on a regular basis that I am in regular touch with, and every month I collect feedback from them and forward it on to ODOT's Rail & Public Transit Division.

I'm writing you today to advocate for the continued funding of rail service between Eugene and Portland at the levels requested by ODOT. I attended the first hour of today's public hearing and I heard some of the committee's concerns about reliability, scheduling, and fairbox recovery.

I agree that the rail service on this corridor is not great and there's plenty of room for improvement. On-time performance is poor, the southbound train out of Portland leaves too early, and the fairbox recovery rate is below where it needs to be. However, I think the conversation about the rail service needs to move from cutting it to improving it.

The fairbox recovery rate is low because ridership is low, and ridership is low because the service is unreliable and the schedule doesn't meet the needs of most of the riders. I recommend you continue to fully fund the Amtrak service at today's levels and make the necessary investments in infrastructure and changes in the schedule to make the service more reliable, useful, and efficient in the future. By modifying the schedule, working with Union Pacific to give passenger rail more priority, and by investing in more double-travel railway, service can be significantly improved.

Some may argue that the best solution is to cut the rail service altogether and replace it with buses. Overall, the POINT bus system has better on-time performance. However, the bus is less environmentally friendly, less comfortable, has less capacity, and has to deal with highway traffic. Whenever there is an accident on I-5, the bus will experience a high level of delay. During the entire month of December, the holiday shopping traffic in Portland led to the bus getting into Portland's Amtrak station 45-60 minutes late every day.

As the region grows, traffic will only get worse and we will likely find the bus to be less and less reliable. The cost to fund Amtrak along the Cascade corridor may seem high given its current ridership, but the cost to start up service once it has been stopped will be significantly higher. If we stop service now, once traffic gets bad enough on I-5 I believe we'll come to regret it.

Sincerely,

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