



Central Oregon Cities Organization

Bend, Culver, La Pine, Madras, Maupin
Metolius, Prineville, Redmond, Sisters

February 28, 2017

House Committee on Transportation Policy
Representative Caddy McKeown, Chair
900 Court Street NE, Room 431
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 2745 – Transit Funding

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

As you well know, Central Oregon has been one of the fastest growing areas in the state for many years. With growth comes challenges. Rents and housing values go up, forcing low wage workers further out from city centers and into neighboring communities. Traffic congestion increases, leading to delays and longer commute times. Workers who live in one city, for instance Madras, might actually find employment in Bend or in LaPine, a good 45-60 minute commute.

All of this is leading the cities, counties, and business organizations in the region to try to think long term and plan for a way to ensure that we maintain mobility for our workforce, students and seniors to medical appointments in the region.

Providing transit services has been a part of this effort. In Central Oregon, the region currently runs an effective, but severely limited, system of transit using small buses that shuttle people around and between the cities in the region. This system is limited because a formal way to design and fund growth in the system in a responsible way does not exist. The Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council, is responsible for this small system.

Over the next 5, 10 or 20 years, our region will continue to grow. The ability to come up with creative commuting options will be good for business, good for workers, and good for reducing congestion in and out of our cities.

We have three choices in the ways to accomplish this:

- 1) Allow each city or county to form a separate system, with a separate administrative bureaucracy, separate buses and maintenance crews and employees, and separate funding mechanisms.

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2) Form a new bureaucracy to create a brand new system or transit district that would create a one size fits all system, and a universal single rate funding mechanism that would fall equally on all cities and all citizens in the region.

3) Utilize an existing organization which already does an intra-city transit service, has an existing board with local city and county elected officials, and give it the ability to offer each community transit in a way that best fits each community's needs, as well as is tailored to the wishes of that particular city.

Choice No. 3 is what we are trying to accomplish with this bill and the forthcoming amendments. It is, in our view, absolutely the only option that makes any sense whatsoever.

At its base, this is a bill about a governance model. The effort is to create a model that protects the rights of individual cities and their individual voters to decide by themselves what size, type and cost of transit model works for them. The effort preserves the real decision making authority with the citizens of each city. No city would be required or compelled to implement transit at any particular time. No voters would have any revenue source forced upon them. No decisions would be made before local cities had public hearings, notices, a full debate and the opportunity for local citizens to weigh in.

As importantly, this approach avoids creation of another, potentially inefficient, costly bureaucracy and new transit district that would have to be started from scratch, and which would duplicate what COIC can already do. This model allows us to economize and take advantage of existing resources to get the job done. That's just plain smart and common sense policy making.

Finally, the bill would allow the region to take our time to plan for a common sense system. It will allow each city to individually have conversations with their voters over a period of years and make decisions on their own timeline.

If we are going to need expanded bus service in our region in the next few years, this is the only - - and the smart - - way to go.

We urge your support for this bill, and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



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