



NeighborImpact

Supporting People, Strengthening Communities.

February 28, 2017

Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue
Sen. Mark Haas, Chair
Sen. Brian Boquist, Vice Chair
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: HB 2745B – Transit Funding

Chair Haas, Vice Chair Boquist and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to enter a letter into the record expressing solidarity with the goal of expanding options in Central Oregon to support, sustain and expand public transit in our region. HB2745B would provide important flexibility by establishing a mechanism for potentially stabilizing funding for our still nascent transit system. This legislation creates options for local communities to sustain their transit operations while avoiding the need for pursuing the one-size-fits all approach funding which current law regarding creation of transit districts would impose. We believe that this makes sense in the context of public support for transit in our diverse region, which includes highly urbanized communities like Bend and less urbanized areas such as rural Crook and Jefferson Counties. Simply put, the legislation as proposed would allow communities to engage in local processes regarding the relative value of transit and to contribute funding to a regional transit system as their citizens come to understand the importance and value of this service.

NeighborImpact is the Community Action Agency representing Central Oregon, and our experience is that the maintenance of transit services is vital to the approximately 60,000 residents that we serve annually is vital. Low-income Central Oregonians use the transit service to access employment, education, medical services and for other reasons. I remember seeing not too many years ago when we used to host a regional Project Connect event which offered one-stop services to the homeless people walk the 16 miles from Bend to Redmond or from Prineville to Redmond to access services. They were that desperate for free showers, hot meals and most importantly medical and dental services.

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Since that time, with the advent of well-developed transit, much burden has been alleviated for residents least able to access transportation. I also remember in the late-2000s and early 2010s, when gas prices soared, the challenges that faced many workers in balancing household budgets in the face of soaring gas prices. We could hardly keep enough busses on the roads at that time to meet demand. Gas prices have since come down (although they appear to be on the rise again), but the habit of using transit for work and school, formed during a difficult economic period, endured for many residents. Today, the transit system offers an important means of helping address budget woes of many households constrained by extreme housing costs.

Lastly, no one in Oregon who has an ounce of political awareness cannot be aware of the immediacy of our transportation problems in this state. Central Oregon, like Portland, needs a chunk of the \$8.2 billion transportation package to fix our woes. Whether we get that or not remains to be seen, but anything we can do to avoid worsening the problem by adding even more cars to the roads is a step in the right direction. Supporting the continuation of our local transit system is one of those solutions—and one which, unlike the transportation package, costs the state general fund nothing. Whether the state can help is being debated now, but certainly should not stand in the way of us helping ourselves. HB2745B is a self-help measure.

The loss of transit due to lack of sustainable funding would be catastrophic to Central Oregon's growth. It would damage our efforts to create equity throughout our region. By contrast, the elegant solution offered through HB274B would seem to create new funding options for communities.

We strongly urge you to take appropriate legislative action to preserve and protect the integrity of transit offering throughout Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott R. Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott Cooper
Executive Director
NeighborImpact