

Good Evening Co-Chair McKeown, Co-Chair Beyer, Senators and Representatives.

My name is Cora Potter, I was born and raised in House District 9, and currently reside in House District 46. I'm the Grants and Outreach Manager for Ride Connection, a private non-profit that provides community based and door to door transportation service options and travel training on public transit throughout the three counties that make up the Portland Metropolitan region. We coordinate closely with TriMet and Metro, but regionally, the services we provide are unique to our specialized network of transportation partners.

I'm here today to applaud your efforts to provide a stable, state-wide source of funding for improving public transit services. To put it mildly, Portland is suffering growing pains and the pains are most deeply felt in areas where the people with lower incomes, people who are transit dependent, older adults and people with disabilities are living. The growth in population means the current levels of "coverage service" that are available are now inadequate, and expansion of networked, frequent service is what is required to spatially match the level of transit service to the density of population. An affordable, accessible, high-frequency network of transit is needed outside of our central city core. In addition, the ability to provide more support to make fare prices affordable to people with low and fixed incomes is needed to ensure these investments in service are used to their full potential.

At the same time, we are concerned that without being explicit in the language of HB2017, the mechanism of the payroll tax will not provide direction to make funding available for service types that fall outside of current models. We understand that amendments are being worked on and we look forward to seeing how these develop. In 2015, 16% of Oregonians were over the age of 65. By 2050, this will increase to 23% and this increase will be even more pronounced in urban areas. In addition, as the number of people with health insurance increases, demand for our service increases even more. In many cases, older adults and people with disabilities can use public transit for most of their trips, but a door-to-door trip is needed to access services on larger medical campuses where the curb next to the bus stop is actually a long walk away.

In the 12 years I've worked at Ride Connection, we've nearly doubled the amount of trips we are able to provide by making a concerted effort to increase the efficiency of our service delivery and coordinating to ensure we have minimized any duplication of service. At the same time, the amount of State funding available to do this has remained flat. We've had to rely on inconsistent and impermanent allocations from the general fund or discretionary grant cycles to do essentially what our public transit providers need to do – enhance and expand services in areas where the number of our customers is increasing. We're at a point where we can't continue to grow to meet need without additional resources. Last year, we provided over 550,000 trips but still had to turn down over 35,000 requests. As of April 30th this year, we've already reached that same number of turn downs. Coupled with population growth, the unmet need of the folks who haven't even called because service in their area is sparse, and decreasing resources in the Special Transportation Fund and Federal funding – there is no clear path forward for us to meet growing demand for service.

So, I'm here to ask that something be done either to specifically and significantly increase the amount of funding available through the Special Transportation Fund, or to provide a way for a portion of any new revenue for Public Transit is made available community-based and door-to-door services. To draw a connection to a payroll tax based benefit, please consider that without these services, many wage earners will have to use unpaid leave to drive their friends and family members to appointments if they are not available through community based providers.

Thank you so much for your time and attention as a committee to finding a way to invest in our transportation system. I came to this career over a decade ago because I wanted to honor my Grandfather, who as a civil engineer for the BLM helped create and invest in the transportation system we're trying to build on today. At the end of his life, while struggling with Parkinson's disease, he often would have to call an ambulance just to go to routine doctor's appointments. We're ready for a transportation system that will ensure that these situations become the exception not the norm and ensure that we're building on, transforming and improving the strong foundation that Oregonians like my grandfather left in our stewardship.