

Co-Chairs Beyer and McKeown, my name is Doug Allen and I am on the Board of Directors of AORTA, the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocate, speaking today for myself.

I offer the following points in support of HB 2219:

1. This is a minimal step forward toward more efficient use of our transportation infrastructure, potentially relieving I-5 congestion. The Oregon Electric track between Wilsonville and Salem is under-utilized, and could offer an attractive passenger service. Much of the right-of-way is owned by the State of Oregon, and the current freight operator has proven experience operating the existing WES passenger service.
2. This is also an opportunity to more cost-effectively utilize existing WES infrastructure. WES, as you know, operates infrequently, only during weekday rush hours, and as a result is expensive on a per-rider basis, even though it offers a quick trip. Adding service to WES, and extending some trips to Salem, will make the entire operation much more attractive and useful.

During the 1980's, following deregulation of inter-city bus service, I helped form a company that took over a former money-losing Greyhound route, with excellent results. We believed that the public is attracted to frequent, reliable, fast service, between desired destinations. We doubled the service that Greyhound had been providing, and ultimately ended up with four times their ridership. We operated seven days a week, 365 days a year. I think that WES has untapped potential for much higher ridership.

3. The Task Force may be able to look at a variety of operating arrangements. Perhaps ODOT might be best suited to operate the entire WES service between Beaverton and Salem, so long as fares are compatible with TriMet north of Wilsonville.
4. The current connection in Wilsonville between WES trains and the SMART and Cherriots bus service is a disincentive to travel between Salem and Washington County, whereas a continuous train trip could be more reliable and attractive.
5. This is not high-speed rail, nor is it competition for the Amtrak Cascades. WES trains could stop at Donald, Woodburn, and Keizer. Washington County passengers to Salem would avoid a trip to Union Station or Oregon City to catch Amtrak.
6. This bill does not appropriate any funds for consultant work. Extending WES to Salem was studied in 2009 by HDR Engineering, at the time WES was opened. The tracks have also been studied as part of the high speed rail environmental analysis. With support from ODOT, TriMet, and the other affected jurisdictions, which should be within the scope of their normal planning activities, there is likely sufficient information available for this task force to recommend the appropriate next steps.