

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 19, 2019

Committee on Economic Development
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Ref: House Bill 2541

Dear Colleagues:

House Bill 2541 (HB 2541) seeks to combine at least three priorities: 1) expansion of economic development throughout rural Oregon; 2) increased carbon reduction through targeted transit services; and 3) improved access to reliable transportation for working families to regional services. Admittedly, this bill looks a lot like a transportation bill: it is about making grants available for the movement of people throughout a community. However, it is the reasons for these movements, the optimization of transit networking that makes HB 2541 distinct.

To begin with, our community believes that there are unique economic opportunities inherent to small “campus communities” located in rural Oregon. This bill would target areas with less than 35,000 in population with a college or university campus involved in a regional partnership established for expanding transportation availability of a larger, regional economic strategy. It would provide these communities, often facing similar challenges, with a tailored instrument for unlocking opportunities that can only be realized through a transformation in transportation access and availability.

Our project partners, stakeholders, and supporters believe development of a regional tourism transit network would transform our economic realities. With our new boutique hotel about to open, the massive growth in our wineries, and the availability of a reliable, responsible, and safe transportation system in place for tourists to utilize, we could make Mid-Willamette Valley a legitimate wine region on par with any – perhaps every – other region within our state. This network would allow greatly improved access to tourists seeking out destination experiences associated with our regional craft beer, spirits, or wines often located in spaces with underdeveloped infrastructure along dirt or gravel roads.

Many of us believe the availability of a tourism transit network would also significantly reduce impacts on our environment and the wear-and-tear of our highways. Our strategy is simple: increase visits to our beautiful vistas and wineries – while simultaneously diminishing the carbon impact of that travel by providing a safe, secure alternative for would-be drivers. The new hotel was built with the intention of supporting tourists; we believe that tourist routes to our regional destination locations would be a natural fit for the business model. At present, there is no grant program offered that connects these dots. It is our hope that HB 2541 will be the bridge between our dreams and a new reality: a new tool for all our small, rural campus communities to utilize in creative, innovative ways.

Our partners also seek to ensure that intercommunity services optimize access and availability for those either lacking transportation or seeking to drive less. Western Oregon University recognizes the value of a system capable of moving students and non-students throughout the community to and from emergent attractions, local businesses, medical appointments and other necessary services. At present, there is no viable means for development of the kind of intracommunity transit services that could yield greater ease, significantly diminished congestion, and improved safety.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate the opportunity to make the case for a new approach to regional economic development for our community. It would help us move people throughout our community even as it would transform access to some of our most valuable tourism locales. This measure promotes multiple policy goals with a relatively minor investment. Please let me know what more information may be helpful for making the case, or if you have questions requiring additional clarification.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul L. Evans", with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Paul L. Evans