

HB 2603 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Joint Committee On Transportation

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Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 3/4, 3/27

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Directs the Department of Transportation to study train delays and report findings.

NOTE - measure has a subsequent referral to the Committee on Ways and Means

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Efforts to boost passenger rail in region
- Length of rail sidings cannot accommodate longest trains in Willamette Valley
- Double track through region would reduce delays
- Public investment versus private investment in rail infrastructure

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Replaces the measure. Directs Department of Transportation to study Amtrak service delays. Specifies the report should include information on passenger service delays caused by trains waiting for main line to clear, slower freight trains, freight trains with excessive siding length, and freight train mechanical failures.

BACKGROUND:

Oregon has 2,344 route miles of railway, which is used for both freight and passenger trains. Approximately half of the rail is operated by Union Pacific Railroad Co and BNSF Railway Co, while the remaining half is operated by regional, local, and switching and terminal railroads. According to the Association of American Railroads, in 2017, Oregon's total rail freight tonnage was 64.8 million tons. Freight carries commodities such as wood and paper products, farm-related products, chemicals, transportation equipment, petroleum, metal products, stone, scrap materials, and varied wholesale and retail shipments. Passenger train service in Oregon is served by Amtrak that runs from Seattle and Los Angeles and from Portland and Chicago. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) contracts with Amtrak to operate two daily round trips between Portland and Eugene. In ODOT's contracts with Amtrak, it states that service will be on-time at least 80% of the time. In 2018, Amtrak service between Portland and Eugene was on-time 70%-80% of trips throughout the year. The Oregon State Rail Plan states that being reliable and on-time is one of the challenges passenger rail faces in increasing ridership. According to the US Department of Transportation, congestion on railroads is occurring as freight bottle necks, areas where freight and passenger trains conflict, and where there is limited space for local pickup and delivery.

House Bill 2603 directs the Department of Transportation to study train delays and to report findings to the interim committees of Legislative Assembly by September 15, 2020.