

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Transportation,

I live in downtown McMinnville, and according to recent studies, around one third of McMinnville's labor force commutes in from elsewhere and another third commutes out to somewhere else. Without more reliable intercity transit connections to support our labor force, and especially our service workforce which disproportionately employs people without reliable access to a car, our local businesses will continue to have hiring and growth issues. Our current YamCo Transit bus which runs every 45 minutes on commuter scheduling only is not reliable enough to compete with car travel, and is at best a service used out of desperation by low-wage workers, the elderly, and the disabled. A more frequent transit service would not only better support local growth and workforce commuters, but greatly improve traffic by taking car congestion off of 99W - one of the worst stretches of traffic in the state with no practical alternatives for travel. I myself have attempted to use the bus system here out of stubbornness, but found it nearly impossible to use for practical purposes.

Putting our commuter travel issues aside, there is also currently no non-car alternative for leisure/tourist travelers in the Yamhill Valley, as again buses here are unreliable, infrequent, and do not run on weekends or in the evenings. As such, our area can only handle visitors who travel by car, putting a strain on our existing transportation networks. It would be a huge improvement to have more reliable through-connections on transit between Portland/Salem and the Coast to more reliably integrate the markets of towns all throughout the Yamhill Valley. There are cities and towns all along Highways 99w, 18, 47, and 22 which need better connections. While bus services exist, they are fragmented between different County jurisdictions, and it is currently not possible to travel through to the Coast from either Portland or Salem without transfers that commonly more than double the transit time by car, where they exist at all. Disjointed inter-system transfers, even when possible, further discourage use by all but the most desperate. This further says nothing of the fact that there is next to zero chance tourists would use the currently existing system. Because of these low-hanging fruit inefficiencies, even small improvements in the inter-city transit connections in the Yamhill Valley area have the potential to produce outsized statewide transit network improvements from Portland and Salem all the way through to the Coast.

As an aspiration, I would also point out that the rail corridor running between McMinnville and Tigard through to Milwaukie is mostly neglected and unused by freight. It would be relatively straightforward and spur both growth and demand to directly develop or subsidize the development of this rail corridor for regional passenger uses far above and beyond what current vehicle and bus routes would allow for, either as a WES extension or a separate standalone regional rail service. This corridor also lacks a high-capacity freeway, meaning that such a regional rail service would not have to be particularly fast to outcompete car travel on 99w - average speeds of 45 mph or less may be sufficient. Technically speaking, there also already exists a rail corridor as far as Grand Ronde, which could potentially be upgraded and developed if the right political conditions and funding existed to improve the right of way for both freight and passenger. If the long-term vision existed, it is not outside the realm of possibility that a passenger line could be constructed for Coast-bound traffic akin to the Astoria-Portland corridor that used to exist, and could follow historic pathways of the Red Electric system that historically used to run through the area (I myself live blocks away from the old McMinnville station, which still exists and serves as offices for PNWR). Such a line would not only connect Portlanders to the coast, but benefit every community in its path that already relies on agri-tourism and commuters to support their local economies, in addition to supporting growing manufacturing interests along this corridor that would greatly benefit from upgraded freight and labor connections.

I urge the Joint Committee on Transportation to consider the Yamhill Valley and our potential for growth and connections when considering future statewide transit priorities. Every link in the system has the potential to make the whole network better.

All the best,

*Drew Millegan*