

Esteemed Committee Members;

I'm writing to share a glimpse of public transit and public transit funding in Columbia County. My hope is to motivate your support for a reimagination of HB 2017 that redirects taxpayer dollars to the taxpayers' home communities, rather than diverting the funds to support transit systems in larger urban communities with larger employment bases. Columbia County is reported to be the most harshly impacted by the current HB 2017 tax distribution methodology, but this is a state-wide concern with many similar situations.

Columbia County Rider ("CC Rider") provides public transit services in Columbia County with limited connecting services to Cowlitz County to our north and Multnomah County to our southwest. We participate in the Northwest Oregon Transit Alliance ("NWOTA") with our partners in Clatsop, Tillamook, Lincoln, and Benton Counties. CC Rider operates as a department of the Columbia County Government. It receives no general fund support from the County, although small periodic contributions have been received from the County Economic Development Fund. Our FY25 operating budget (personnel plus materials & services) has just been approved at \$1,618,800. CC Rider has no independent source of local funding, so virtually all of this budget is funded with 5310 and 5311 funding from the FTA and with STF/STIF funding from ODOT.

Beginning in 2017, CC Rider's operating expenses began to exceed its available resources and a series of service reductions were implemented. On an almost annual basis, these successively eliminated service we once provided to Clatskanie, to Rainier, to Vernonia, to PCC Rock Creek, and to PCC Willow Creek. A St Helens/Scappoose circulator route was also eliminated and our commuter service into downtown Portland now offers just two trips per day, down from ten trips per day in 2017. A third attempt was made during this period to establish a local funding base for CC Rider, but for the third time Columbia County residents voted to make it clear: no taxes for public transit.

And then came HB 2017. For many public transit providers, the potential funding has represented a transformative opportunity to expand and improve services. For CC Rider, it has been far less impactful. To be fair, the funding has provided CC Rider with matching funds for its federal grants and enabled the establishment of a small operating reserve, but because CC Rider receives only a small portion of the taxes paid by Columbia County residents, the STIF program has been comparatively underwhelming, except to say that we are still operating.

Estimates vary widely, but suggest that between 50% and 75% of Columbia County's working residents work outside Columbia County, primarily in Multnomah County. This means that 50% to 75% of the taxes paid by Columbia County residents actually benefit transit providers operating outside Columbia County. These providers offer no service within Columbia County, so Columbia County commuters incur the full cost of commuting in their own vehicles, while paying transit taxes for service they aren't likely to use. CC Rider, meanwhile, struggles to survive as a shell of its former self.

Please change this legislation. It pits Oregonians against each other, it is anti-equity, it is taxation without representation.

Thank You,

John H. Dreeszen  
Transit Director

CC Rider