

Utilizing Statewide Transportation Improvement Funds:

The Key to Sustainable Transit Services Along the Northwest Oregon Coast

Testimony for the Joint Committee on Transportation Public Hearing – June 18, 2024

Good evening, Co-Chairs Gorsek and McLain, Co-Vice Chairs Boquist and Boshart Davis, and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Transportation. My name is Brian Vitulli, and I am the General Manager of the Tillamook County Transportation District. I'd like to welcome you to Tillamook County and thank you for making this the 2nd stop on your statewide roadshow to learn of the transportation challenges and opportunities in our area.

As an Oregon special district that was established in 1997, the Tillamook County Transportation District's mission is to "Connect Communities Through Sustainable Transit Services." We accomplish that mission by providing a variety of public transportation services throughout northwest Oregon, including local deviated fixed-route bus services, an intercity/commuter bus route that connects Tillamook to Portland, general public Dial-A-Ride, and non-emergency medical transportation services.

To ensure that 'sustainable' remains a part of our mission statement, it is vital to us that any 2025 legislative transportation package include not only the continuation of Statewide Transportation Improvement Funds (or STIF), but additional investment to the STIF program.

All the key components of providing essential transit services to our customers cost more. New vehicles are needed to replace aging, unreliable ones that have met their useful life, and they are now substantially more expensive and harder to get delivered; wages for employees to operate and maintain those vehicles are increasing; fuel and vehicle and building maintenance services are going up. The advances State transit agencies once saw with the passage of HB 2017 and the additional dollars that came with it are now being absorbed by cost escalation in nearly every facet of our operations. On top of that, throw in a worldwide pandemic in 2020 that added another cost spike, and this has left transit agencies in Oregon and nationwide, reeling from the impacts of employee shortages and vehicle delivery delays brought about by supply-chain issues.

While STIF has been an invaluable lifeline to Oregon's transit providers and has allowed them to somewhat absorb the difficulties of the past few years, increased funding could help advance the types of transportation improvements that Oregonians want and need. Enhancements that were intended with the passage of HB 2017 to improve, expand, and maintain public transportation services throughout Oregon. Innovative projects that can begin to make great strides toward a more equitable, safer, convenient, reliable, and resilient statewide transportation system.

Benefits of STIF Can Be Seen in our Community Today

The TCTD has relied greatly on STIF for the expansion and continued operations of services and for projects and programs that benefit our customers and enhance where we live. TCTD and the community it serves has benefited from the following STIF-sponsored projects:

- Subrecipient operations support for local human service organizations
- Enhanced fixed-route and Dial-A-Ride services
- Reduced fare program
- Short- and long-term transit planning and human service transportation coordination
- Continued operating funds and capital rolling stock purchases.

- Finally, and critically, with the February 2024 closure of the only dialysis center in Tillamook, STIF Contingency funds is allowing TCTD to provide life sustaining transportation for dialysis patients in our area to treatment centers far outside – places like Forest Grove, Astoria, and Lincoln City. STIF has allowed the District to absorb these unexpected costs without impacting our other services.

Using STIF to Plan for a More Impactful Future

The allocation of additional STIF would enable TCTD to:

- Explore innovative service models that could accommodate more customers, more efficiently; and implement those innovations to be more beneficial to vulnerable populations and attractive to choice riders
- Increase frequencies on high-ridership in-county routes
- Implement additional intercity Coastliner service between Tillamook and Portland, with connections to Amtrak at Union Station
- Acquire right-sized rolling stock to support the operation of the abovementioned improvements
- Advance efforts toward transitioning District vehicles to low- or zero-emission technologies.

By providing more convenience and reliability to the existing service and incorporating more of the types of services that our current and future customers want, the Tillamook County Transportation District can expand its reach by continuing to connect people to employment opportunities, medical care, and shopping and social needs. An expanded STIF can make that happen in Tillamook County and throughout Oregon.

Thank you again for visiting Tillamook County and for listening to our stories.

About Tillamook County Transportation District

TCTD provides a range of transportation services to customers throughout Tillamook County, with routes traveling into Clatsop, Lincoln, Washington, and Multnomah counties.

With a county population of approximately 27,400 residents living within 1,100 square miles, a majority of its residents are scattered among seven incorporated cities and 14 unincorporated communities. Around 80% of the County’s residents live along U.S. Route 101. The City of Tillamook serves as the county seat and is the largest population center in the County with just over 5,200 people.

Operating a fleet of approximately 30 vehicles, ridership has responded positively since the pandemic. The past year, TCTD provided 124,000 passenger trips. Despite being challenged with a shortage of available transit drivers, made worse by a shortage of affordable housing, the District continues to provide essential transportation services to a large rural environment.

Reach Out

Please contact Brian Vitulli at 503.842.3115 or bvitulli@tillamookbus.com for more information.

