



August 7, 2024

Joint Committee on Transportation  
Co-Chairs Chris Gorsek and Rep. Susan McLain  
Salem, Oregon

Via email: [JCT.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:JCT.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

Re: Coastal transportation

Dear Members of Joint Transportation,

Oregon Coast Alliance (ORCA) is an Oregon nonprofit corporation with a mission of protecting coastal natural resources and working with residents on enhancing community livability. We write you today concerning coastal transportation issues, as part of the Committee's listening session in Coos Bay.

The coast has a unique transportation system statewide, with one and only through highway that links the entire coast. This road, Highway 101, is famous for its views and infamous for its dangerous curves and serious erosion problems. I was on the advisory committee for the new rulemaking to create a Goal 18 exception process for Highway 101, to allow ODOT to make emergency and necessary repairs and shoreline armoring to protect the highway's integrity.

Mentioning Highway 101 brings ORCA to the question of the coast's transportation future. Highway 101 cannot continue to be the one and only arterial linking the entire coast. There is too much traffic, the volume of which is growing; there are more and more residential entrances onto the highway, which increases the danger to drivers and residents; there is constant friction due to increasing coastal erosion, and necessary repairs. However, there is neither location nor financial resources to build another highway, nor to substantially widen the current highway.

However, the coast has another transportation system already in place: rail. Most, if not all, of the coast is connected by rail, including small communities whose transportation options are currently quite limited. This rail network was built originally principally for timber-

cutting and movement of logs and lumber; the railroad also became an important means of bringing visitors to the coast from the Willamette Valley.

The point we wish to make is that the coast has the tremendous luck to have another transportation system available and already built. One might respond that the tracks and related infrastructure are old and have not been adequately maintained. It is true that the rail infrastructure in many places does need substantial upgrade and modernization. But that it exists, and is still useable, is a tremendous boon to the coast's transportation future.

The beginning of restoring the rails and using this existing network has already been started, by the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad (OCSR). It provides tourist rides, principally between Garibaldi, Rockaway Beach and Wheeler. They hope to expand in future. The point is that a beginning has been made to use this resource, albeit at this time only for brief tourist rides. It is well within Oregon's transportation policy to expand the use of rail – and what better place to start than on the coast, where the rail lines already exist? Restoring rail service along the coast could allow for regular commuter trains between Astoria and Brookings, as well as for shorter commuter hauls, say from Astoria to Tillamook, or Florence to Coos Bay.

Restoring and modernizing the coastal railroad network will have the additional benefit of restoring the town train depots, which have often fallen into disrepair, and lowering traffic volume on Highway 101, as well as providing a workable, safe alternative transportation option for a majority of the population. Even if there are no train connections restored between the coast and the Willamette Valley (due to high maintenance costs in the Coast Range), restoring extensive rail service to coastal residents and visitors, rather than or in addition to, short tourist rides, would be of great benefit for many reasons enumerated above.

We, as many other transportation advocates, urge the Committee to think outside the box and consider transportation alternatives that have hitherto received little attention. Restoring coastal rail, using an existing rail network, would qualify very well for taking a bold step in a direction once well known and frequently used, but now fallen into disrepair and largely forgotten.

Please place this testimony into the record for this matter.

Thank you,

*/s/ Cameron La Follette*

Cameron La Follette  
Executive Director

