

Dear Co-Chairs McClain and Gorsek, and committee members:

My name is Judith Fisher and I live in Halfway, Oregon in Baker County. I was unable to present my testimony at the meeting in Ontario yesterday, so I am writing to you today via email to express my desire for the restoration of the Amtrak Pioneer Route and the need for Oregon to do everything in its power to bring back passenger rail and public transit options to eastern Oregon. Restoring the Pioneer Route would provide Oregonians from east to west with sustainable, safe, equitable and low emission transit that is otherwise completely unavailable to us. Since this route is considered a "long-distance route" by the FRA, the costs to operate it would be entirely federally funded, meaning relatively limited costs to Oregonians for a significant public transit resource.

I would like the JCT to emphasize public transit, both inter- and intra- city, in its 2025 transportation package. This would help Oregon move closer to achieving its stated goals of a 45% reduction of GHGs below 1990 levels by 2030. Public transit is proven to be safer for all riders and will reduce total vehicle miles traveled by Oregonians, which would reduce wear and tear on our car infrastructure and prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries. It would create equitable transit options for all Oregonians that would, according to the world bank and many other sources, increase economic activity and reduce traffic congestion. It would also provide reliable, affordable and reasonable access to urban resources, such as healthcare and VA services, for the one third of rural Oregonians that are unable to drive themselves.

I also know that HB4109 directed ODOT to "pursue cooperative efforts with the State of Idaho to apply for assistance from the Federal Railroad Administration to study potential for reestablishing service on the Amtrak Pioneer Line", but am concerned that ODOT is not fully committed to this directive. I would like the JCT to ensure that ODOT is actively reaching out to Idaho to work together to be co-applicants for the federally funded Corridor Identification grant program to study the restoration of the Pioneer Route (outlined as the Seattle-Denver route in the FRA's Long Distance Rail Study). Being awarded this grant would ensure the Pioneer Route a chance at being restored and would cost very little taxpayer money to apply.

Having the Amtrak Pioneer Route again provide service in Baker City would allow me to take the train to comfortably and safely visit my family in northwestern Washington, as I did between 1983, when I moved to Halfway, and 1994, when service stopped. It is a 10-hour drive that is becoming more and more difficult as I age and is more and more iffy as climate change interferes with road safety and access. Visiting family and friends is not my only concern these days though. Trips to Boise, LaGrande and Portland for medical services are more of an issue as I age. And as the medical facilities in Baker City dwindle, the need to get to these other areas is becoming more frequent. I would also like to be able to again access other parts of the country for sight-seeing and exploring, for events, and for shopping. In addition to my personal needs, encouraging tourism to our beautiful rural area could be of great economic benefit as well as a unique experience for travelers.

So, speaking as a rural eastern Oregonian, we need Oregon to invest in inter-city public transit and a state-wide rail network. These investments are essential for meeting the demands of a growing and evolving Oregon, and for ensuring that our transportation system supports small town economies and safe and sustainable travel throughout our state. Thank you for hosting these state-wide listening sessions and gathering public input on these critical issues. I look forward to seeing the results of all this great work in the 2025 transportation package.

Sincerely,

Judith Fisher