

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

My name is Susan Bolgiano and I live in Halfway, Oregon. I am a member of Panhandle 4 Passenger Rail and Passenger Rail in NE Oregon. Though I wish that I could attend this meeting in-person I am unable to since the only events near me are hosted over an hour away from where I live and there are no reasonable public transit options to make the trip possible for me.

I am writing today to express my desire for the restoration of the Amtrak Pioneer Route and to ensure that Oregon is doing everything in its power to reasonably bring back passenger rail and public transit options to eastern Oregon. Restoring the Pioneer Route would provide Oregonians from the west-side to the east-side 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 this route would be entirely federally funded, meaning relatively limited costs to Oregonians for a relatively significant public transit resource.

I want to see the JCT work to emphasize public transit, both inter- and intra- city, in its 2025 transportation package. This will help Oregon move closer to achieving its stated goals of a 45 percent 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 will reduce wear and tear on our car infrastructure and prevent unnecessary deaths and injuries. It will create equitable transit options for all Oregonians that will, according to the world bank and many other sources, increase economic activity and reduce traffic congestion. It will 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 in my community.

More specifically, I 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 I 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 that the Pioneer Route has a chance at being restored and would cost very little taxpayer money to apply for.

The Amtrak Pioneer Route is the least well-served rail corridor in the country. Right now I have to drive 5 hours to Pasco from Halfway to board the train that goes to the east coast in order to see my family and friends. If the train went through Baker City there would only be a one hour drive. We have an aging population that needs access to medical facilities in larger areas, i.e. Boise/Portland. Winter weather conditions can close I-84 while trains can continue through. It would provide access to the rest of the country including universities, museums, festivals and sightseeing. And, of course, the train reduces congestion on our highways.

In conclusion, speaking as a rural eastern Oregonian, we want 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 result of all this great work in the 2025 transportation package.

Sincerely,

Susan Bolgiano  
Halfway, Oregon