

August 28, 2024

Members of the Legislature,

Thank you for visiting this part of Oregon and beginning the discussion about how to move long-distance and regional passenger rail forward in this part of the United States. I appreciate the section in House Bill 4109 directing Oregon Department of Transportation to work collaboratively with the State of Idaho on applying for federal assistance to reestablish the Amtrak Pioneer passenger rail line. I am Elaine Clegg; after serving for two decades on the City Council for the City of Boise, I accepted the job of Chief Executive Officer of Valley Regional Transit the regional transit authority for the Boise metro area. I have also been nominated by President Biden to serve on the Amtrak Board of Directors and am currently in the confirmation process.

I have been working for the past three years to advocate for restoration of long-distance and regional rail service in the greater northwest, including specifically the Pioneer Route from Seattle/Portland through Boise to Salt Lake City and beyond. As CEO of VRT I have been actively working to develop plans to provide short distance service within our metro area on the existing heavy rail shortline track. I partnered with the Mayor of Boise as she organized over 20 cities in Idaho to join in an effort to support a Corridor Identification (CID) Program application in partnership with the state of Idaho, cities within Utah and the state of Utah for a state supported passenger rail service between Boise and Salt Lake City.

I am here today to share specifics of the work we are doing and hope to explore the possibility of partnering with you to move forward on our joint goal of reestablishing passenger rail service between our two states.

VRT is partnering with our regional MPO, the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, on a Planning and Environmental Linkages study of the shortline rail corridor in our region and comparing it to other alternatives for use as high-capacity transit. That study is in stage two and is developing the objectives and measurements we will use to determine the best alternative in preparation of a NEPA approval to use that corridor for high-capacity transit. I am also in contact with representatives from Union Pacific and our shortline rail operator to work toward a feasible plan and process for use of the corridor for passengers.

The State of Idaho applied to the CID program on behalf of the cities of Idaho, the Idaho Transportation Department, cities in Utah and the Utah Department of Transportation. That grant was not successful and the partners are working toward applying again as soon as the application process reopens. In the meantime, the City of Boise has engaged a consultant to complete some of the work toward the application had it been successful. They are planning to use that work and the information gathered to apply again in the next round of CID.



Finally on the long-distance advocacy I participated in the Federal Rail Administration (FRA) Long Distance Study during all four rounds of their outreach over the last 18 months. The FRA process concluded that the Pioneer route should be included in a future long-distance passenger rail network for the United States and will include it in their recommendation to Congress. While we are excited about that outcome, we are less excited about the conclusion that routes named will still need to go through the CID program and that our route, the Pioneer, is rated as a low priority nationally. I look forward to further conversation about both the process to bring long-distance corridors to fruition and advancing the priority of this area of the US where there is currently no long-distance service.

Thank you, I am happy to stand for any questions.



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