

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

My name is Matt Krabacher, I live in Baker City and am the Eastern Oregon Vice President for the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates(AORTA). I am a supporter of all forms of public transit and rail transportation(including freight), and hope to see them emphasized in the 2025 transportation package.

I have two main points I would like to cover in this testimony. The first is why I am concerned that ODOT is not working hard enough to fulfill its obligations outlined in HB4109 SEC.14 and why the JCT should be concerned as well. And the second is about our current funding problems and some of my perspective on how to resolve it.

So first, in regards to the 2024 bill HB4109 which contains legislation that directs ODOT to *pursue collaborative efforts with Idaho to seek federal aid in restoring the Amtrak Pioneer route*, such as applying for the FRA's CID grant program (<https://railroads.dot.gov/corridor-ID-program>) for funds to study this route and create a service development plan.

In a meeting AORTA had with ODOT officials in July, that included Bob Melbo the state rail planner, we learned that only a single conversation between Idaho and ODOT had happened in regard to this application. We were given the impression that ODOT was expecting that Idaho would just apply for the grant on their own. ODOT gave no indication that they were preparing to be co-applicants for this grant and have not responded to follow up inquiries.

I ask that the JCT review the legislation passed in HB4109 SEC.14 and then follow up with ODOT **now** to ensure that they are adhering to the directives outlined therein. Waiting until December will leave very little time for ODOT to be obligated to anything by HB4109 and may result in Oregon not being co-applicants on a CID grant. It is vital that Oregon is a co-sponsor on this application and starts developing the relationships between these states now if we are serious about developing this service.

The work in applying for the CID grant is an extremely low cost way of ensuring that the costs and benefits of creating this passenger rail service are fully understood. At the Ontario event, ODOT Director Strickler expressed a concern that Oregon may

not be able to come up with the matching funds required for the CID grant, as that has been a problem in the past. The CID grant operates in three phases; the first phase delivers \$500,000 to grantees **with no required match what-so-ever** (<https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2022-27559/p-55>); phase two and three's funding amounts are dependent on the information found in phase one and have minimum matches of 10% and 20% respectively. This should be a no-brainer. We need to be co-applicants on this with Idaho and hopefully other states, when phase two comes around, we can determine then whether we want to work with our other co-applicants to come up with a 10% match for more federal money, and again when phase three comes around.

The alternative is to throw away any chance at a safe, equitable, sustainable and resilient form of public transit across the cascades that would provide service to some of Oregon's most impoverished counties and would be federally funded, simply because we were too lazy to apply for the grant for federal dollars to create a public good. Do not let ODOT drag their feet on this or this opportunity will slip away.

Secondly, in regards to Oregon's funding dilemma. I encourage the JCT to deeply scrutinize and resist any proposal to expand and add multi-lane highways which will continue to add a maintenance burden that we are already struggling to manage on future Oregonians in exchange for short term traffic relief. Instead we should seek to find creative and modern funding sources for public transit expansion and current infrastructure maintenance, such as expanding the STIF Transit Program to create a dedicated fund for Statewide Intercity Transit as recommended by the Oregon Transit Association.

We also should ensure that this next funding package is adequately deriving funding from ALL of Oregon's transportation system users in a manner that is equitable and in proportion to their use. By which I mean fees on electric vehicles that do not contribute to the gas tax, fees on heavy duty vehicles (especially when they are off interstate highways), and tying as many of our sources of revenue to inflation as makes sense so as to avoid the potential for rapidly diminishing purchasing power of our funding sources.

We can also look at what other states have tried, such as the rental car tax implemented in Colorado or the retail delivery service fee implemented in Minnesota, to name just two of a broad spectrum of possible new funding sources.

I ask that the JCT be bold and have vision here. There is no path forward where we get out of this cheaply. There are dozens of groups, comprising thousands of citizens around this state who are willing and able to sell tax increases to the public. You just have to come up with a good plan for where that funding goes. This package should start the process of moving Oregon away from a car dominant, inefficient and high maintenance transit system and towards one that has more balanced, inter-modal options for both freight and passengers. Sticks on wasteful, damaging and inefficient uses, and carrots for high capacity, sustainable and equitable ones.

Finally, I would like to say thank you for all of your effort and care that you are putting into designing a 2025 Transportation Package that works for all Oregonians, for holding these hearings and for taking the transportation needs of us eastern Oregonians seriously. It was great to have a chance to speak to the entire committee in Ontario in August, and to meet with other concerned and transportation oriented individuals in my region. I hope that the next time this happens, a stop can be made in Baker City or La Grande to give greater access to folks from those regions. But all the same, thank you for taking the time.

If you have any questions about any of this or would like to get in touch for any reason my contact information is below.

Kind regards,

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